



Ms Natasha Exel  
Inquiry Secretary  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Hobart TAS 7000

Email: [two@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:two@parliament.tas.gov.au)

Dear Ms Exel

#### **TFGA Submission – Inquiry into Blueberry Rust**

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector.

Agriculture is one of the key pillars of the economy and, with the current level of support from government, are well positioned to further capitalise on the stature of Tasmania agriculture.

The TFGA is grateful for the opportunity to make comment to the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee 'B' regarding the inquiry into Blueberry Rust.

The TFGA has become increasingly concerned since the middle of 2016 about the perception of the biosecurity system in Tasmania and a view that Biosecurity Tasmania are failing to meet their objectives as demonstrated by the Blueberry Rust incursion. We have consistently reiterated our position that biosecurity is the number one challenge and risk for the agricultural sector in Tasmania. Our view was and remains that any incursion should be in the first instance prevented, if prevention fails then eradication should be the next step and finally if this also fails then management should be an act of last resort and is sadly an admission that the biosecurity system has failed in its primary purpose.

Our involvement was further enhanced when Ronald and Heinz Schwind, blueberry growers from the Barrington area, came to us seeking help. These farmers are one of two growers who underwent an eradication program after the first incursion in 2014. Our involvement with these members, and many others within the blueberry industry, has demonstrated that the blueberry growers of Tasmania and the industry more broadly have been treated poorly and with little respect by Biosecurity Tasmania processes and procedures, and seemingly a failure by Biosecurity Tasmania to follow standard biosecurity protocols.

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The following points provide an overview of TFGAs involvement:

- The Schwind's have had several meetings with TFGA staff providing information on the 2014 incursion at their and their neighbours properties. The more notable points from these discussions are as follows:
  - There was no evidence of a formal laboratory report confirming the outbreak of Blueberry Rust on the Schwind's property. TFGA sought from the Minister a copy of the formal laboratory report which was responded to by directing questions to Tim Baker, the Deputy Secretary of DPIPW. TFGA requested the formal laboratory report from Mr. Baker on three separate occasions. After initial correspondence the TFGA received minimal collated data from the alleged incursion in an email. A laboratory report was then provided to the TFGA on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2017 (report attached). This laboratory report proved to be disappointing for the following reasons:
    - It contained the same collated data as was initially given and no other results.
    - A formal laboratory report confirming the outbreak of blueberry rust should include the selection criteria of examining and defining an incursion in the field, proof of isolation and identification testing on artificial media, DNA sequence analysis, photo evidence by dissection and compound microscope.
    - All testing aforementioned was used in the DPIPW Survey of Blueberry Diseases in Tasmania 2009 written by the same Senior Plant Pathologist who wrote this laboratory report and who seemingly failed to reproduce the survey testing when examining the 2014 outbreak at Barrington. Dissection and compound microscope analysis was performed but no evidence of this is present in the report.
  - The TFGA sent a letter to Minister Rockliff on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017 on behalf of the Schwind's outlining several issues including but not limited to police attendance, alleged threats involving the use of firearms; proposed action to be taken against the local nursery and mainland suppliers of the plants purchased by the Schwind's; and a request for a copy of the formal laboratory report confirming the outbreak of Blueberry Rust on the Schwind's property. The TFGA received a reply on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017 which made comment in response to questions surrounding police attendance and the alleged threats, however made no comment on proposed actions and directed further questions to Mr Baker. Please find this correspondence attached.
  - The way the alleged incursion on the Schwind's property was handled resulted in great physical and emotional distress, resulting in Heinz Schwind being taken to Sheffield Medical Centre for high blood pressure.
- Minister Rockliff wrote an article that was published in The Mercury on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2017. In this article he outlined the importance of a strong and durable biosecurity system in Tasmania, one that has "capability to identify and respond if an incursion occurs." This article is cause for serious concern as the Minister has espoused a significant shift in the biosecurity culture. The Minister claims that eradication is not an acceptable option as there is the possibility that there could be future outbreaks of the disease. This position is in direct contravention of what would be considered a reasonable approach in dealing with any biosecurity incursion. If this position was taken to its logical conclusion, in effect, the Minister is suggesting that an outbreak of foot and mouth disease would be managed as opposed to being eradicated. The reasoning would be that foot and mouth disease could reoccur. The risk of reoccurrence or otherwise is not and should not be a fundamental tenet of a sound biosecurity system and response to an incursion.

- The Minister states in this article that he “really feels for the growers who have been directly impacted since 2014” and his “focus is on supporting them.” However, this is inconsistent with the reality that growers and their properties that were affected by the 2014 incursion experienced.
  - The Minister states that “the department’s regulated containment strategy is based on science and managing industry impact.” There is contradictory evidence to suggest that the disease can be eradicated. Significant proof of eradication methods being successful can be found when examining the Victorian Blueberry Rust outbreak recently. The biosecurity strategy was to eradicate Blueberry Rust, which was successful and Victoria is one again declared as a Blueberry Rust free state.
  - The Minister states that “the impact of attempting eradication can have major disruptive impacts on industry with information and advice indicating that the opportunity for success is extremely limited.” If this is the case, then why was the contra approach taken in the 2014 incursion.
  - The Minister states that the approach of eradication in 2014 “unfortunately had a significant impact on the two growers involved as their plants were removed.” Aside from an ex-gratia payment of \$30,000 the growers received, no compensation for the loss of annual revenue, loss of plants (estimated at \$150,000 per ha to re-establish as stated by the Macquarie Franklin report) and irrevocable damages to equipment and structures on their property has been forthcoming.
- The incursion in 2014 showed a clear failure by Biosecurity Tasmania to have a full and comprehensive understanding of the blueberry industry in Tasmania. This has been further compounded by the Macquarie Franklin report commissioned by Biosecurity Tasmania last year which demonstrates a similar failure to understand the extent and complexity of the sector. It is still clear today, some three years from the original incursion, that the Department and Biosecurity Tasmania struggle to have a full and comprehensive understanding of the industry.
  - The TFGA has sought the Blueberry Rust Economic and Social Impact Study written by an anonymous author from Macquarie Franklin and commissioned by Biosecurity Tasmania, for the best part of twelve months. We only received the document a few days before the inquiry submissions were due and only then was it obtained under a Freedom of Information request. This again reiterates the point that there has been a massive lack of transparency and clarity due to bureaucratic failings and arguably intentional attempts to limit information. In reading the report and while agreeing with a number of points, we note that many of the basic tenets that the report is based on are incorrect including but not limited to:
    - The report states that around three quarters of Tasmania’s blueberry production comes from Costa. However, we now know that they represent approximately 35-40% of the industry, not 75%
    - The report states that all remaining production comes from 42 smaller growers. However, we know that there are more than 80 growers in the State.
    - The report states that 11 of those producers are organic. However, we know that there are more than 20 organic producers across the state. Many who have very profitable businesses supported by high dollar value production, the key to this is their organic status and product that sells at a premium.
    - When reading the Benefit Cost Analysis of eradication versus no eradication it is clear that eradication is enforced by removal and disposal of blueberry plants. However, there is evidence

to suggest that Blueberry Rust can be eradicated by changes in management practices and not complete removal of plants.

- The cost of removing plants is said to be between \$150-\$200 per plant. This would not have been the case in 2014 when plants were removed by a small excavator at a substantially less cost per plant.
- Over the past 12 months the TFGA has reluctantly reached the conclusion that there are cultural issues within Biosecurity Tasmania that need addressing. There is a clear lack of respect and understanding of the agricultural sector by some within Biosecurity Tasmania. In one recent meeting a senior staff member referred to the original incursions in 2014 as affecting “hobby farmers”. In reality, both affected farmers obtained their primary source of income from their blueberry plantations. Indeed, the Macquarie Franklin report argues that to re-establish eradicated plants would equate to \$150,000 per hectare. By any measure that makes both those operations commercial in nature. Therefore, the offensive labelling by some senior Biosecurity Tasmania staff once again calls into question their understanding of the industry and those within it. To be clear not all staff in Biosecurity Tasmania, in our experience, demonstrate this lack of empathy or understanding, there are good quality staff whose primary focus is on a secure and strong biosecurity regime. However, several senior people have demonstrated a significant and disappointing lack of understanding.
- Documents that have been provided to industry in recent months appear to lack veracity, for example a failure to use letterheads and in the case of so called scientific reports, lack of references and often written anonymously. The Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) advice provided to growers and industry representatives is a point in case, it was provided on an A4 sheet of paper without letterhead, without acknowledgements, without scientific references and appears to have been produced by an anonymous author.

The TFGA believes there has been a failure of transparency, consistency and rigour throughout the incursions dating back to 2014. Any biosecurity system should rely on these three tenets to ensure its strength and reputation. The fact that the incursions have demonstrated a failure on all three points gives us cause for concern about what this means for the broader biosecurity capabilities of this State. As stated in the Tasmanian Agri-Food ScoreCard 2015-16, agriculture currently represents \$1.48 billion and approximately 7% of gross state product, the sector is one of the economic pillars on which the Tasmanian economy rests. Any threat to the sector is not only a threat to agriculture but the broader Tasmanian community. Biosecurity is paramount, not only in terms of its threat matrix but in terms of how we respond. The failure of processes and procedures in this case causes all within the agricultural sector to have a significant degree of anxiety about our current biosecurity system.

The TFGA takes this opportunity to commend the Legislative Council in undertaking this inquiry. As members would be aware the State Government is seeking to introduce a new Biosecurity Bill. We have worked constructively with Biosecurity Tasmania to improve the veracity and effectiveness of the draft Bill. That process is currently continuing and it is our view that that process should not be completed until the finalisation of the committee’s report into this inquiry. Any recommendations from the committee should, as a matter of course, be used to inform the final draft of the Biosecurity Bill.

The TFGA has viewed multiple representations in relation to this incursion. We believe that this incursion should be and can be eradicated from the State, failure to do so will have a detrimental effect upon our biosecurity reputation. It is imperative that Tasmania has the best possible biosecurity system and



reputation based on the best possible biosecurity regime and any Government of the day needs to commit to resourcing Biosecurity Tasmania on a needs basis to ensure the above is achieved.

Please find attached to this submission copies of our media releases and documents surrounding this issue.

Please contact the TFGA if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'P' followed by a series of loops and a horizontal line extending to the left.

**Peter Skillern**  
Chief Executive Officer  
13<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education and Training  
Minister for Primary Industries and Water  
Minister for Racing

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15 AUG 2017

Mr Peter Skillern  
Chief Executive Officer  
Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association  
TFGA House

Email: [ellen.davis@tfga.com.au](mailto:ellen.davis@tfga.com.au)

Dear Mr Skillern

Thank you for your letter on behalf of Ronald and Heinz Schwind regarding blueberry rust and the removal of blueberry plants from their property in the summer of 2014. I apologise for the delay in providing a response.

The issues you describe in your letter have been raised with me previously by Ronald and Heinz. I have met with them in 2015 and they have attended my Devonport office a number of times. I am very aware of, and indeed expressed my sincere sympathy for, the hardship their family experienced. In 2016 the Government made a one-off ex-gratia payment to them and the other property owner impacted by the 2014 incursion.

The actions taken in 2014 at their property were not taken lightly. I have responded to the Schwind's concerns formally. Importantly, Mr Mark Sayer, Deputy Secretary from the Department has also twice met with them at their farm to discuss their concerns in detail. I have also sought to assure Ronald and Heinz that the Government has learnt from the 2014 response and Biosecurity Tasmania is using that experience to improve how biosecurity responses are conducted with other growers in the future. As I have expressed to the Schwinds, whilst I appreciate they may consider it inadequate, through these actions the Government has provided a comprehensive response to their concerns.

You specifically raise the issues of police and threats of firearms which I feel needs to be addressed. I am advised that at the time, and fully appreciating the difficult emotional situation, Biosecurity Tasmania staff were justified in seeking Police assistance when attending the property. I understand the situation was quickly defused and Biosecurity staff were able to conduct their work without incident.

I have asked the Department to assist you further with your questions relating to action taken with the plant suppliers and testing of materials at the time. Mr Tim Baker, Deputy Secretary, will contact you to assist; alternatively he can be contacted by email at [tim.baker@dpipwe.tas.gov.au](mailto:tim.baker@dpipwe.tas.gov.au) or by phone on 03 6165 3054.

Thank you for raising raising this matter with me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Rockliff'.

Jeremy Rockliff MP

Deputy Premier

Minister for Primary Industries and Water

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**PLANT DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES**

**LABORATORY TEST REPORT**

Laboratory Reference Numbers: 241-14, 243-14, 250-14, 251-14

Sample submitted: Blueberry leaves

Tested by: Ziqing Yuan

Dates received: 4 Dec. 2014 – 12 Dec. 2014

Date tests commenced: 4 Dec. 2014 – 12 Dec. 2014

Date tests completed: 4 Dec. 2014 – 12 Dec. 2014

NB: Sample tested as received

During a Biosecurity Tasmania state-wide survey for blueberry rust disease conducted in 2014, a total of 29 blueberry leaf samples were collected by Biosecurity Operations Branch staff from Mountain Fruit Berry Farm at 10 Devils Gate Road, Barrington. The leaf samples were submitted to DPIWE's plant pathology laboratories at New Town, Hobart for diagnosis of suspect blueberry rust caused by the fungal pathogen *Thekopsora minima*.

As can be seen from Table 1, 26 out of 29 samples were found to be positive for blueberry rust by morphological examination of rust spores using both dissection and compound microscopes.

**Table 1: Laboratory Diagnostic Results on Blueberry Leaf samples ex Mountain Fruit, Barrington**

Date of Sample Submission and Examination	BOB Form No.	Plant Pathology Laboratory Ref No.	No. of Samples from Each Submission	Diagnostic Results on Blueberry Rust
4/12/14	9451	241-14	1 sample	1/1 samples positive
6/12/14	99452-99463	243-14 (1 – 12)	12 samples	9/12 samples positive
10/12/14	9465-9475	250-14 (1 – 11)	11 samples	11/11 samples positive
12/12/14	9476-9480	251-14 (1 – 5)	5 samples	5/5 samples positive

The causal agent of blueberry rust in Australia was always recorded as *Pucciniastrum vaccinii* (syn. *Naohidemyces vaccinium*) until 2013 when it was determined by a molecular and morphological analysis as *Thekopsora minima* (McTaggart *et al.*). Since this time, *T. minima* is the only species recognised widely to cause rust disease of blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) in Australia and worldwide.

Although *T. minima* can produce five different spore stages on two different host plants (with urediniospores and teliospores/basidiospores on one and spermatia and aeciospores on the other), urediniospores of *T. minima* are the only spores found on blueberry in Australia. The above diagnostic results, therefore, were based on morphological examination of the urediniospores of *T. minima*.

Please contact the Laboratory if you wish to discuss this report. DPIWE has used due care and diligence in undertaking all relevant tests but is not responsible for any error that has occurred during sample collection. In a continued effort to improve our service to customers and clients the Plant Pathology Laboratory welcomes your feedback. Please email us your comments or enquires to [ziquing.yuan@dpiuwe.tas.gov.au](mailto:ziquing.yuan@dpiuwe.tas.gov.au) or call 03 6165 3238.



## Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water & Environment

BIOSECURITY TASMANIA

New Town Laboratories 13 St John's Avenue New Town, Tasmania, 7008

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### PLANT DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

present on the surfaces of infected leaves, e.g. size, shape, number of germination pores and characteristic surface ornamentals on the spores.

Please find attached documents relevant to this diagnosis including the McTaggart journal article and diagnostic images.

Should you have any further queries in relation to the diagnosis, please do not hesitate to contact me on 03 6165 3238 or 0417 104 747.

Yours sincerely

Dr Ziqing Yuan  
Senor Plant Pathologist



## TASMANIAN FARMERS & GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION

The Hon. Jeremy Rockliff  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Primary Industries and Water  
Minister for Education and Training  
Minister for Racing  
Level 10, 15 Murray Street  
HOBART TAS 7000

Email: [jeremy.rockliff@parliament.tas.gov.au](mailto:jeremy.rockliff@parliament.tas.gov.au)

Dear Minister,

We are writing on behalf of our members Ronald and Heinz Schwind in relation to issues surrounding Blueberry Rust on their property in 2014. We understand after speaking with the Schwinds that there are matters surrounding the manner in which they were dealt with by your office and Biosecurity Tasmania. These issues include but are not limited to police attendance and alleged threats involving the use of firearms.

We also understand they have put a number of questions to your office and currently are still awaiting a response. Given the very emotive nature of this matter and the significant consequences that have emanated from it, an early and comprehensive reply would be helpful. We note that there has been a number of inconsistencies in this matter and believe that this has not assisted in a resolution. We are seeking an assurance that their concerns and questions will be addressed in a spirit of empathy, with focus on finding an appropriate resolution.

We would appreciate an indication of the proposed action to be taken against the local nursery and mainland suppliers.

We are also seeking a copy of the formal laboratory report confirming the outbreak of Blueberry Rust on the Schwinds property.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

**Peter Skillern**  
Chief Executive Officer  
29<sup>th</sup> May 2017

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## **TFGA Matters Column – By Wayne Johnston.**

**Appeared in the Tasmanian Country Newspaper 13 January 2017**

In the hectic time leading up to Christmas the State government quietly announced that the blueberry rust incursion that was discovered in August last year will not be eradicated. Instead it will be 'managed'. That is to say, the infected property will be obliged to undertake a spray management program along with an on-farm management plan. The TFGA believes that this is a poor outcome, not only for every other blueberry grower in the State, but for Tasmania's biosecurity system as a whole and the reputation that this State has enjoyed in this area for so long.

Two years ago, when there was a previous outbreak, all the plants in question were destroyed. In the process two farmers had their livelihoods severely impacted. They did not receive any compensation - a situation the TFGA believes is unacceptable. But the result was that the outbreak was not only contained, in due course the State was declared free of the rust. Equally, the Tasmanian reputation for being second to none in relation to our biosecurity standards was enhanced.

This outbreak was on the property of a large, national publicly listed company located in the State's north west. The exact number of plants infected has not been released by the Government. However, on this occasion we believe that a considerable amount of lobbying has seen a different outcome to the previous incursion. Obviously everyone has the right to put their viewpoint, however in coming up with a solution on how to deal with this incursion or any incursion, science not the politics should win the day. In our view on this occasion this is not how this issue has been assessed.

Sadly, what we are now left with is a situation where Tasmanian growers can export to the mainland if they are rust free without having to undertake any protocols, the company in question will however need to undertake a specific regime in order to do so. The problem with this approach is that when the rust spreads, as we have been advised it will, then all growers will be impacted. They will then need to undertake spraying programs and other control methods to ensure they can continue to access markets. This will result in higher overheads for these growers. For those that are low input or organic it most likely means the end of their businesses.

This situation is unacceptable and the TFGA will continue to seek restitution for growers as they are impacted. Furthermore, this decision has already impacted on the State's previously stellar reputation for biosecurity. Other producers look to Tasmania because of our strident and robust reputation in this area and this, seemingly short sighted, decision has put that at risk. While the current government has continued to promote Agrivision 2050 and the aspirational target of growing the industry to \$10 billion by 2050, the TFGA believes that these poor decisions like this do nothing to ensure that outcome.

## Biosecurity Tasmania confirms two more properties affected by blueberry rust

Johanna Baker-Dowdell (/profile/499/johanna-baker-dowdell)

@JohannaBD (https://www.twitter.com/@JohannaBD)

31 May 2017, 5:47 p.m.

(<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4700585/blueberry-rust-found-at-two-nw-properties/>)

(<http://twitter.com/share?url=http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4700585/blueberry-rust-found-at-two-nw-properties/&text=Blueberry%20rust%20found%20at%20two%20NW%20properties&via=ExaminerOnline>)

(mailto:?subject=Blueberry rust found at two NW properties&body=Hi,I found this article - Blueberry rust found at two NW properties, and thought you might like it <http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4700585/blueberry-rust-found-at-two-nw-properties/>)



ONGOING THREAT: Ronald and Heinz Schwind watch biosecurity personnel remove blueberry plants at their Barrington farm in 2015. Picture: Grant Wells

Two new cases of blueberry rust have been detected in North-West Tasmania, leaving the state's blueberry growers concerned about the disease's impact on their fruit.

Biosecurity Tasmania's website said the disease was detected at the North-West properties in March 2017, but an update on the blueberry rust threat was only posted week.

A Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment department spokesman said the new cases of the disease were "near the first site".

Quarantine measures are continuing at these sites.



"In line with the approach taken with the detection last year, the infected properties are subject to quarantine control with conditions in place on the movement of host materials off the property to reduce the risk of movement of the disease," the spokesman said.

Department staff worked with interstate authorities and blueberry growers to ensure growers were still able to access mainland markets after the 2016 outbreak, and will continue to do the same after this latest detection, the spokesman said.



+2

Blueberry rust

Turners Marsh organic blueberry farmer Kent Mainwaring is concerned that Biosecurity Tasmania's efforts to control the disease in Tasmania would impact his ability to sell fruit to the organic market.

"We are certified organic and 99 per cent of our fruit is sent directly to the mainland, so that market is important to us," Mr Mainwaring said.

"What's concerning to us is that if we have to treat our fruit it is no longer organic. I would always be able to sell [my blueberries] as conventional fruit, but it's not as lucrative," he said.

Fruit Growers Tasmania business development manager Phil Pyke said the industry was concerned about the lack of Biosecurity Tasmania updates on blueberry rust containment.

"We want an update on where this is at for our growers and those in plant propagation," Mr Pyke said.

"It's affecting access to markets and we have very strong concerns about that," he said.

Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance chairwoman Dixie Emmerton said the alliance had raised concerns about this latest blueberry rust infection with Biosecurity Tasmania and Primary Industries minister Jeremy Rockliff.

"At this time we are waiting for further details from Minister Rockliff and the department in relation to what process was undertaken during the latest detection," Ms Emmerton said.

The Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment department has been working with Fruit Growers Tasmania to develop a farm hygiene program for berry growers.

This program will be rolled out to blueberry growers first and funding for it was included in the \$5.6 million boost for biosecurity measures announced in the Tasmanian budget last week.

"The aim is to assist small growers, in particular, to adapt their operations and protect their farms from a range of potential pests and diseases, to support them to manage for market access and/or any market certification schemes, and generally support their farm management practices," the spokesman said.

The August 2016 blueberry rust infection was traced to a [Costa commercial blueberry farm at Suphur Creek](http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4092028/costa-confirms-blueberry-rust-detection/) (<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4092028/costa-confirms-blueberry-rust-detection/>), however Costa corporate affairs manager Michael Toby said the company was not aware of this new detection.

"We don't know anything about it. We had [blueberry rust] on our farm in August 2016 and we've had ongoing dealings with Biosecurity Tasmania, but are not aware of it," Mr Toby said.

Around 40 Tasmanian properties had berry plants removed in December 2014 and January 2015 after a blueberry rust infestation was traced to Victoria.

#### RELATED STORIES:

- [Blueberry rust concerns aired at meeting](http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4105808/blueberry-rust-concerns-ai-red/) (<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4105808/blueberry-rust-concerns-ai-red/>)
- [Farmers compensated after blueberry rust find](http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4360742/farmers-compensated-after-blueberry-rust-find/?cs=12) (<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4360742/farmers-compensated-after-blueberry-rust-find/?cs=12>)
- [Blueberry rust heartache rocks family](http://www.examiner.com.au/story/2817889/blueberry-rust-heartache-rocks-family/) (<http://www.examiner.com.au/story/2817889/blueberry-rust-heartache-rocks-family/>)

# TFGA - Media Release - Blueberry Rust - 010617

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Media release from the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

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## New blueberry rust outbreak "disappointing"

Tasmania's peak farming organisation has expressed its disappointment that yet another outbreak of blueberry rust has been uncovered in the State.

"The TFGA predicted this in December last year when we expressed serious concerns about the Government's decision to "manage" the outbreak, as opposed to eradicate," Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association CEO Peter Skillern said.

"Sadly, our concerns for blueberry growers, particularly those with organic regimes, have come to fruition, and our frustration with the way that the situation has been handled continues unabated.

"The government's inappropriate response to the 2016 incursion has now led to Tasmanian berry farmers being encumbered even further with excessive on-farm biosecurity regimes. This highlights our concerns in relation to the new draft Biosecurity Bill and its potential impacts on the farming community.

"These incursions cannot continue to occur. The TFGA will pursue this matter with both Biosecurity Tasmania and the Government"

**CONTACT:** TFGA Communications Manager

Kirsten Woolley

0438 678 392



ROGER HANSON

🕒 June 9, 2017 12:00am

## Blueberry rust: Berry disease blue grows

BLUEBERRY growers are frustrated over the management of a serious fungal disease that has spread to more farms in Tasmania's North-West.

Blueberry rust was discovered in August last year on a large grower's farm near Sulphur Creek and has now spread to two smaller farms. The state's valuable disease-free status has been suspended following the new outbreak.

Biosecurity Tasmania said the incursion was of a much larger scale than a previous one eradicated in 2014. It said a strategy of containment and ongoing management was chosen in the past season.

However, the decision to manage rather than eradicate the disease has raised fears among Tasmania's 58 blueberry growers that were aired at a meeting on Wednesday.

Certified organic blueberry grower Trish Macfarlane, who has an orchard near Launceston, said the meeting got a good turnout and provided positive information.

"I think managing the pest issue could have been done better. I am totally disappointed the government has not seen the bigger picture," Ms Macfarlane said.

Australia's largest blueberry propagator, Karen Brock from Brocklands Nursery at Winkleigh, said she had lost contracts because of the disease.

"There has been a focus on one business and not us all, it's disappointing. I have concerns it has been a politically based decision and not science-based," Mrs Brock said.

She said her property was free from blueberry rust but this was not recognised by interstate governments.

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association said it was disappointed blueberry rust has been found on more farms. Chief executive Peter Skillern said the TFGA predicted this

when the State Government decided to “manage” the outbreak.

“Our concerns for blueberry growers, particularly those with organic regimes, have come to fruition, and our frustration with the way that the situation has been handled continues unabated,” he said.

Mr Skillern said the “inappropriate” response had led to Tasmanian farmers being hit with excessive on-farm biosecurity regimes and this highlighted the TFGA’s concerns about the proposed biosecurity legislation and its potential impact on farming.

Biosecurity Tasmania said the focus was reducing the risk of the disease spreading further and working with industry for interstate market access.

In a letter to growers, dated June 1, it said the aim is to assist small growers in particular to adapt their operations.

Fruit Growers Tasmania business development manager Phil Pyke said the situation was hard for the whole industry. “We have strong concerns for market access and not for just next season for fruit, but also access for plant material,” Mr Pyke said.

Small producer group Sprout Tasmania said the outbreak could threaten Tasmania’s brand.

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## Blueberry industry calls for public inquiry

Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance (PIBAA), the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, the Australian Blueberry Growers Association  
20.07.17 1:22 pm

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Key representatives of the blueberry growing industry in Tasmania have called for a public inquiry into the handling of the blueberry rust incursions in the State.

The Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance (PIBAA), the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, the Australian Blueberry Growers Association, and individual blueberry grower representative Tony O'Connell have called upon the Minister for Agriculture Jeremy Rockliff to immediately instruct DPIWE and Biosecurity Tasmania to commence the eradication of the blueberry rust that has been discovered on three north-west properties.

The incursion of this disease poses a significant threat to the on-going viability and expansion of the Tasmanian blueberry industry due to the impact on yields and market access restrictions. Growers believe that the Minister and the department have been deficient in their response to these incursions and that the industry is far too important for this type of poor approach.

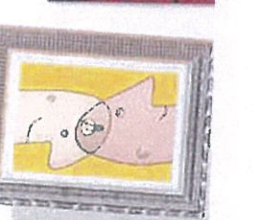
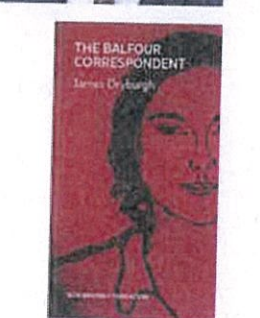
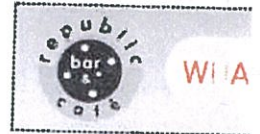
The agriculture sector more generally is closely monitoring how the Minister and Biosecurity Tasmania are dealing with this issue. Any failure to maintain the highest biosecurity standards for this State will be met with broad condemnation from the wider agricultural sector.

In recent Estimates Committee questioning it became clear that key questions regarding these incursions, and a previous incursion in 2014, remain unanswered. The failure to adequately respond to questions from Legislative Council members, coupled with the poor response to the current incursion, has led the blueberry industry and their representatives to demand a public and transparent inquiry into the handling of these events by the Minister, the department and by Biosecurity Tasmania.

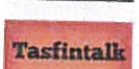
As it currently stands the sector has little faith in Tasmania's biosecurity system, or those who are charged with overseeing it. In order for both the blueberry sector, and the broader agricultural community, to regain faith in this critical element of our State's branding and agricultural integrity a light needs to be shed on the whole saga – highlighting the decision-making process, and the influences that led to the apparent contradictory outcomes between the 2014 and 2016 incursions.

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## Tasmanian blueberry rust leaves industry 'in crisis', growers call for inquiry

By Damian McIntyre and Elise Fantin

Posted Thu 20 Jul 2017, 4:42pm

**Tasmania's blueberry industry is in crisis because the State Government has botched the response to a disease outbreak, growers have said.**

They want a public inquiry into the state's handling of blueberry rust incursions.

The fungus, which causes extensive defoliation and can kill the plant, was discovered on north-west Tasmanian properties in 2014, while further outbreaks were detected in 2016 and earlier this year.

The Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) and Australian Blueberry Growers Association say they are not satisfied with the State Government's response to the outbreaks.

The push is for Biosecurity Tasmania to revert to its original eradication strategy rather than its current containment management plan.

Peter Skillern from the TFGA said he was concerned about the future of the state's blueberry industry.

"When we have anything that erodes the Tasmania brand then obviously that causes concern for the whole agricultural sector," he said.

"It could effectively ensure that the blueberry industry is no longer economically viable in Tasmania.

"The plan should be about eradication, it shouldn't be about managing."



**PHOTO:** Blueberry rust needs to be eradicated, not just contained, say Tasmanian growers. (Department of Primary Industries Victoria)

**RELATED STORY:** Blueberry cull to stop rust disease spread in Tasmania

**RELATED STORY:** Blueberry rust confirmed for second time in Tasmania

**RELATED STORY:** Growers want no effort spared to eradicate blueberry rust

**MAP:** Hobart 7000



**PHOTO:** Tasmanian blueberry industry representatives demand action on rust disease. (ABC News: Elise Fantin)

The biosecurity response has been inconsistent and the growers want to know what information has been relied upon, said Dixie Emmerton, chair of Biosecurity Action Alliance.

"We are concerned there isn't enough being done. We need to act immediately, we need to act in the best interests of all of the blueberry growers within the state, and there are questions in relation to that that need to be answered," Ms Emmerton said.

"We consider it is a crisis. We have a very short period of opportunity to actually be able to effectively manage the current incursions."

The disease will make it harder to export both interstate and overseas, said Greg McCulloch from the Australian Blueberry Growers Association.

"Because we have rust, Victoria will require certain conditions to be met before we can export into Victoria, South Australia the same, Western Australia the same," he said.

Biosecurity Tasmania said it chose to focus on containment after considering factors including likelihood of success and probability of re-infection.

It said strict quarantine measures are in place and discussions are underway to identify requirements for market access next season.

**Topics:** agribusiness, pest-management, quarantine, fruit, hobart-7000, launceston-7250





## Interactive timeline of blueberry rust incursions in Tasmania

Johanna Baker-Dowdell (/profile/499/johanna-baker-dowdell)

@JohannaBD (https://www.twitter.com/@JohannaBD)

27 Jul 2017, 1 p.m.

(<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4816427/how-blueberry-rust-has-affected-tasmania/>)

(<http://twitter.com/share?url=http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4816427/how-blueberry-rust-has-affected-tasmania/&text=How%20blueberry%20rust%20has%20affected%20Tasmania&via=ExaminerOnline>)

(mailto:?subject=How blueberry rust has affected Tasmania&body=Hi.I found this article - How blueberry rust has affected Tasmania, and thought you might like it <http://www.examiner.com.au/story/4816427/how-blueberry-rust-has-affected-tasmania/>)



Blueberries at Sulphur Creek before blueberry rust incursions.

Last week key stakeholders from Tasmania's blueberry industry [called for a public inquiry \(/story/4802368/stakeholders-call-for-blueberry-rust-inquiry/\)](#) into the state's blueberry rust incursions in the past year.

Stating the industry had reached a crisis point, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance, Australian Blueberry Growers Association and blueberry growers have thrown support behind a public inquiry.

The group also called on Primary Industries minister Jeremy Rockliff to immediately order eradication procedures for blueberry rust.

Tasmania's almost 80 blueberry growers are concerned three blueberry rust incursions in the North-West – [one in August 2016 \(/story/4092028/costa-confirms-blueberry-rust-detection/\)](#) and [two in March this year \(/story/4700585/blueberry-rust-found-at-two-nw-properties/\)](#) – will cost them in quarantine management and market access.

Here is an interactive timeline that shows the impact and development of Tasmania's blueberry rust incursions.





 Certified organic blueberry grower Trish Macfarlane, who has an orchard near Launceston, says Tasmanian growers are not happy.

Food and Wine

# Tassie anger grows over response to threat posed by blueberry rust

ROGER HANSON, Mercury  
July 27, 2017 1:43pm

TASMANIA's blueberry growers say the state's \$30 million industry could be wiped out if the State Government does not move to fully eradicate a serious fungal disease.

Blueberry rust was again recently discovered on three North-West properties after earlier breakouts around the state in 2014 and again in 2016.

Biosecurity Tasmania has a policy of containment but growers want the government to eradicate blueberry rust.



Certified organic blueberry grower Trish Macfarlane, who has an orchard near Launceston, said growers were not happy.

"Time is ticking to solve the problem as spring is fast approaching," she said.

"As an organic grower, I don't have any options for treatment should we end up with rust at our property.

"It's a simple decision, cut off the plants with blueberry rust to the ground. The healthy plants will grow back. All we ask is for Biosecurity Tasmania to look at the science and act immediately to eradicate [the disease]."



📷 Tony O'Connell, a blueberry grower at Grove, from left, Greg McCulloch, president of Australian Blueberry Growers Association, Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance chairwoman Dixie Emmerton, and Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association chief executive Peter Skillern. Picture: RICHARD JUPE

Ms Macfarlane said with blueberry rust present, three inspections of farms would be required every season.

"It's ridiculous when there is a fix to the problem."

Grower Tony O'Connell said blueberry rust could easily be spread by people, vehicles, animals and even strong winds.

"It has to be eradicated," he said.

Mr O'Connell, who grows blueberries on 6ha at Grove in the Huon Valley, said the issue could wipe out the industry.

"The disease, with it only surviving eight weeks off live leaf tissue, we have a natural eradication with our deciduous varieties here in Tassie, so it's only the evergreens that need to be dealt with through winter," Mr O'Connell said.

Blueberry rust was discovered last August on a farm near Sulphur Creek and has spread to two smaller farms. It poses no threat to human health but reduces crop yields.

Lloyd Klumpp, general manager for biosecurity at the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, said the containment response enabled continued national market access for growers last season.

"We are ensuring all measures are in place to contain the disease," Mr Klumpp said.

**Read more rural stories in *Tasmanian Country*, out every Friday.**



ROGER HANSON

🕒 July 28, 2017 12:00am

## Blueberry rust: Disease blue brewing in Tasmania

TASMANIA'S 80 blueberry growers fear their industry could be wiped out if the fungal disease blueberry rust is not eradicated.

The disease has been found on three North-West properties and growers are calling on Biosecurity Tasmania to immediately start eradication.

The state adopted a policy of eradication when a first incursion hit smaller farms in 2014 but the current policy aims to contain the outbreak.

Certified organic grower Trish Macfarlane, who has an orchard near Launceston, said growers were not happy.

"Time is ticking to solve the problem as spring is fast approaching."

She said organic growers had no options for treatment.

"If we have to spray, the organic market goes out the window," Ms Macfarlane said.

She urged affected plants to be cut to the ground.

She said that with blueberry rust present three inspections would be required every season and queried who was going to end up paying for them.



Blueberry grower Tony O'Connell. Picture: Richard Jupe

Grower Tony O'Connell said blueberry rust was spread by people, animals and winds.

"It has to be eradicated," he said.

Mr O'Connell, who grows blueberries on 6ha in the Huon Valley, said the disease could wipe out the industry.

Blueberry rust was found last August on a large farm near Sulphur Creek and has spread to two smaller farms. It poses no threat to human health but reduces crop yields.

The state's disease-free status for blueberry exports has been suspended.

The Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association and the Australian Blueberry Growers Association are calling for Primary Industry Minister Jeremy Rockliff to instruct his department and Biosecurity Tasmania to start eradication.

PIBAA chairwoman Dixie Emmerton said the issue was a crisis for the fruitgrowing industry and Tasmania's brand.

She is also calling for a public inquiry into the handling of the blueberry rust incursions.

"We've had serious concerns in consistency of approach. The minister needs to act for all blueberry growers and protect Tasmania's brand," Ms Emmerton said.

The state's biosecurity general manager Lloyd Klumpp said the containment response enabled continued national market access last season.

"We are ensuring all measures are in place to contain the disease," Mr Klumpp said.

TFGA chief executive Peter Skillern said the sector had little faith in the state's biosecurity system or those overseeing it.

He called for light to be shed on the response to blueberry rust and said an inquiry needed to probe the decision-making process and the influences that led to "the apparent contradictory outcomes" in the 2014 and 2016 incursions.

He said a failure to respond to questions during an Upper House hearing and the "poor response" had prompted the call for an inquiry.

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# TFGA - Media Release - Blueberry Rust - 110817

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Media release from the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

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## Rust containment plans "extremely disappointing"

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is extremely disappointed to hear the news that the State Government has chosen to manage blueberry rust in Tasmania by regulated containment methods.

The decision comes on the back of calls from the TFGA, blueberry growers and industry stakeholders for the Government to ensure that the disease would be eradicated from the State.

TFGA CEO Peter Skillern said that it was now abundantly clear that the advice surrounding blueberry rust in 2016 was not appropriate as it has continued to cause ongoing issues for the industry.

"Having taken this decision, the Government will now have to accept responsibility for future outbreaks of blueberry rust and any decline of the industry in Tasmania, most notably the lucrative organic sector, which represents over 25 per cent," Mr Skillern said.

"Blueberry growers now look forward to an inquiry where they will be able to express their views and present their own evidence in relation to eradication of the rust.

"In a broader context, the TFGA continues to believe that this issue has highlighted serious questions around our biosecurity readiness for other significant incursions in the State."

### CONTACT:

TFGA Communications Manager



ROGER HANSON

🕒 September 29, 2017 12:00am

# Blueberry rust: Growers win probe into berry disease

TASMANIA'S blueberry growers welcome a Legislative Council inquiry into blueberry rust.

The Upper House inquiry will look at the handling of the fungal disease in outbreaks since 2014.

Growers had been pushing for an inquiry since the state's strategy changed from the initial policy of eradication to one of containment after the disease hit a farm of a major producer last year.

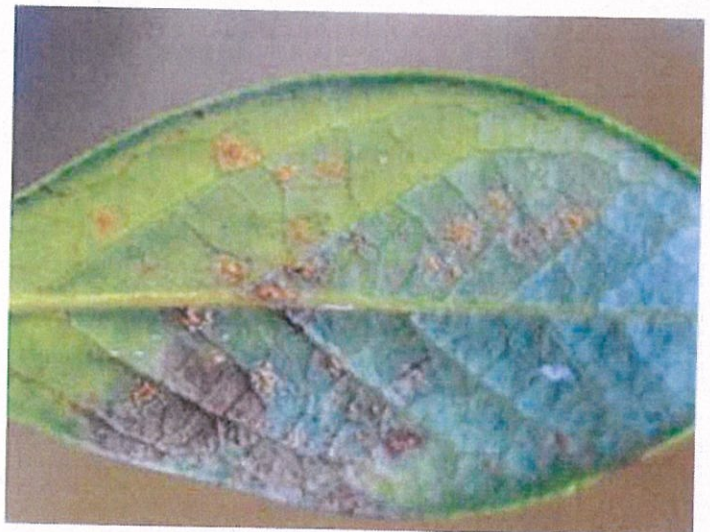
The state's disease-free status for blueberry exports has been suspended because of the outbreaks.

Inquiry chairman, Upper House Member for Windermere Ivan Dean, said he instigated the probe after concerns were raised by growers and the state's peak farmer body.

"We hope to find out a number of issues and table to Parliament a full committee report with findings and recommendations," he said.

"We are anxious to finish this before the end of the year."

Submissions to the inquiry close on October 13.



📷 Blueberry rust. Picture: DPIPW

The probe will look at the capacity of Biosecurity Tasmania to manage rust outbreaks and other risks as well as the future of Tasmania's blueberry industry, including the impact of the disease.

Peak farming body Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association joined in July the Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance and the Australian Blueberry Growers Association in calling for Bio-security Tasmania to start eradicating the disease and for a public inquiry into the handling of the incursions.

Certified organic blueberry grower Trish Macfarlane, who has an orchard near Launceston, said many growers were gravely concerned about the management of blueberry rust, which has been found on three North-West properties.

"Pressure from the Tasmanian blueberry industry and possibly other industries has led to the inquiry," she said.

"Growers didn't want to have go through this because it takes us off our farms.

"However, we are extremely pleased that we are finally being listened to.

"Now with the inquiry the hard work will start."

Ms Macfarlane said information had already been provided to the Legislative Council inquiry committee and urged other growers to do so.

Primary Industry Minister Jeremy Rockliff said the Government would be making a comprehensive submission.

"DPIPWE's regulated containment strategy for blueberry rust is based on science and managing industry impact and that strategy has also been further supported by independent experts in the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture and NSW DPI [Department of Primary Industries]," he said.

"When it comes to biosecurity responses it is important that decisions are based on sound biosecurity principles, evidence and science without political interference and at arm's length from the minister."

TFGA chief executive Peter Skillern welcomed the inquiry into all matters around the blueberry-rust incursions and said the organisation would participate in it.

A grower meeting on Tuesday at Ross Town Hall will discuss the inquiry and access to interstate markets from 11am.

For more details go to [www.parliament.tas.gov.au](http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au).

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# JOINT MEDIA - Call For Public Inquiry Into Blueberry Rust - 20717

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## Blueberry industry calls for public inquiry

Key representatives of the blueberry growing industry in Tasmania have called for a public inquiry into the handling of the blueberry rust incursions in the State.

The Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance (PIBAA), the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, the Australian Blueberry Growers Association, and individual blueberry grower representative Tony O'Connell have called upon the Minister for Agriculture Jeremy Rockliff to immediately instruct DPIPWE and Biosecurity Tasmania to commence the eradication of the blueberry rust that has been discovered on three north-west properties.

The incursion of this disease poses a significant threat to the on-going viability and expansion of the Tasmanian blueberry industry due to the impact on yields and market access restrictions. Growers believe that the Minister and the department have been deficient in their response to these incursions and that the industry is far too important for this type of poor approach.

The agriculture sector more generally is closely monitoring how the Minister and Biosecurity Tasmania are dealing with this issue. Any failure to maintain the highest biosecurity standards for this State will be met with broad condemnation from the wider agricultural sector.

In recent Estimates Committee questioning it became clear that key questions regarding these incursions, and a previous incursion in 2014, remain unanswered. The failure to adequately respond to questions from Legislative Council members, coupled with the poor response to the current incursion, has

Council members, coupled with the poor response to the current incursion, has led the blueberry industry and their representatives to demand a public and transparent inquiry into the handling of these events by the Minister, the department and by Biosecurity Tasmania.

As it currently stands the sector has little faith in Tasmania's biosecurity system, or those who are charged with overseeing it. In order for both the blueberry sector, and the broader agricultural community, to regain faith in this critical element of our State's branding and agricultural integrity a light needs to be shed on the whole saga – highlighting the decision-making process, and the influences that led to the apparent contradictory outcomes between the 2014 and 2016 incursions.

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# TFGA Media Article - No Backing Down On Our Biosecurity

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Media article from the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

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## No backing down on our biosecurity

Tasmania is a unique and wonderful place but we are constantly challenged by the wide range of animal and plant species that wish to invade our island.

While we all enjoy the benefits that improved communication and transport have brought to the state, this progress has also increased the threat of incursion. And, as we look to the future and recognise how climate change is impacting on our environment, changing in our macro and micro climates, we have come to understand that these changes will further increase the likelihood of previously unseen exotic species making their way into our natural environment.

These challenges continue to place undue pressure on those dedicated officers who protect Tasmania's biosecurity. As we move into state election mode the TFGA will be seeking significant increases in resourcing to this critical element of protection for our state.

We can no longer afford to remain complacent about these threats to Tasmania and the corresponding threat to the agricultural sector and the broader economy.

One of the many roles of government is to ensure the protection of the population and industry. Too often people assume that biosecurity only relates to agriculture, but it also incorporates things that affect the well-being and health of the broader community.

An outbreak of anthrax, for example, would not only pose a threat to the agricultural sector, but potentially have negative consequences for public health.

Not only is the TFGA committed to a strong biosecurity regime within Tasmania, we

Not only is the TFGA committed to a strong biosecurity regime within Tasmania, we also go to great lengths in lobbying governments to ensure that our biosecurity system is not undermined by other circumstances. The recent moves by some within the community to import a range of exotic species is a valuable case in point.

There is little point in having a strong and sustainable biosecurity regime if it can be undermined by importing exotic species, any numbers of which if released or escaped would have devastating results both on agriculture and environment.

We will continue to advocate that the importation of exotic species, no matter for what purpose, should be resisted in the strongest possible terms. Any government that allows it will wear the legacy of introduced species gone awry.

The TFGA will not back down from the near-constant push to allow exotic species into the state. No future generation would commend us if we did.

**Wayne Johnston**  
**TFGA President**  
**Contact: 0417 316 208**

**This article first appeared in the Tasmanian Country newspaper on 31 March, 2017.**

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# TFGA - Media Article - Biosecurity Really Is Everyone's Responsibility

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Media article from the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

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## Biosecurity really is everyone's responsibility

Over many months now I have spoken about biosecurity in various ways in this space. The TFGA has focused not only on blueberry rust, but also what we believe has been a failure of process in relation to the biosecurity system.

I have already outlined the three significant threats at our borders and now the latest news is that we have a fourth pending in the grape vine pinot gris virus. This has recently been found in NSW and SA.

The TFGA will continue to demand the highest standards of biosecurity in Tasmania. We need a system that is robust, transparent, consistent and science-based. Anything less is unacceptable.

However, not all biosecurity threats are external. Sadly, over many decades Tasmanian has had successive incursions by a range of pests, weeds and diseases. Many of these have become part of the landscape.

While it is not feasible economically or even in a technological sense, to eradicate these we should be looking to manage them. This is an indictment on our history but it is one that we need to deal adding further incursions such as blueberry rust to this already long list is not something we will tolerate.

We need to look at those pest, weeds and diseases that have established themselves in Tasmania, and on an individual farm basis we need to be aware of the mechanisms by which they may gain a foothold.

While gorse, for example, is widespread with significant incursions on Crown land farmers need to ensure we need to ensure that weeds such as this do not infest our

own land. All farmers need to understand the characteristics of exotic diseases, what weed species look like, and be vigilant for animals that are not native to Tasmania.

But incursions on farms can occur in a variety of ways, not all of which are in the control of the farmer. We have several government businesses that regularly come on farm, which appear to have no respect for, or understanding of, biosecurity.

Whether it be reading water meters, electricity meters or undertaking valuations, they appear to be oblivious to the fact that, as they move from farm to farm they can, and do on occasions, become the vector for the spread of disease and pests.

The TFGA calls for these organisations and employees to not only undergo biosecurity training, but to adhere to biosecurity regimes. If this requires footbaths and vehicle wash downs, or other biosecurity measures then so be it.

It will only be a matter of time before one of these organisations has to address the legal ramifications when it is proven that they have infected a farm.

**Wayne Johnston**

**TFGA President**

**Contact: 0417 316 208**

**This article first appeared in the Tasmanian Country newspaper on Friday, 1 September, 2017.**



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