

PUBLIC

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION B COMMITTEE
MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON MONDAY 13
NOVEMBER 2017**

BLUEBERRY RUST IN TASMANIA

Ms ROSEMARY JONES, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR - This is a public hearing and we are taking evidence on oath. I also need to identify that today's session is being broadcast live so members and visitors are aware of that. While you are here parliamentary privilege applies in that you have the protection of the parliament in any evidence you provide, but once you leave here it does not apply, so you need to be aware of that. You have been provided with a witnesses documentation. Have you read that information for witnesses?

Ms JONES - I have.

CHAIR - The evidence you are going to give will be recorded on *Hansard* today and be made publicly available.

We will address questions to you, but in the first instance I will leave it open to you to make any statement you might want to make. You may want to add to your submission you provided to us or you may want to clarify a few points or whatever in that submission. I will leave that open to you. We have limited time and we have to stick to that.

Rosemary, I will leave it to you and you might start by telling us who you are with in way of business and where blueberries fit within your area.

Ms JONES - My name is Rosemary Jones and I'm 62 years of age. After many years in the IT industry I became a senior manager at the university in 1991, first as manager of student administration and then I was seconded from there to assist with a major project to introduce the GST across the university's activities, which although very complex the project was very successful. The university then asked me to set up a major projects office so they wouldn't have to bring in highly costly consultants such as Deloitte or Pricewaterhouse or any of those. They asked me to develop a project management methodology and set up a major projects office, which I became manager of, and at any one time I would be managing up to 20 projects ranging in budgets from \$30 000 to \$10 million.

In the early 1990s, while working at the university full-time and having three children, I purchased a property at Deep Bay near Cygnet. It's of high elevation and surrounded by state forest, which is virtually untouched. I researched crops suited to the property's environment, soil types, rainfall, et cetera, which would be fairly easy to grow organically under the 'certified organic' banner, because I am committed to clean, green, Brand Tasmania-type activities.

I decided on blueberries as they didn't require a lot of pesticides and so on, although it is a lot more work to be certified organic and a little more expensive. I set myself a project plan and embarked on establishing my blueberry farm and became fully certified organic in 2003. I stuck

PUBLIC

to my project plan and now I'm dedicated to growing and supplying the highest-quality fruit to the market. I am absolutely committed to high quality control on the farm. I'm not in the business of growing hundreds of tonnes of blueberries which as soon as they turn blue are ripped off and sent away. I ensure they are to size and to the correct sugar content, and I pride myself on the number of wholesale organic outlets in Victoria and New South Wales that request my fruit.

My fruit is of such quality, and I am so dedicated to keeping it that way, that my fruit for this coming season is all pre-sold. That is the result of my efforts over the years to develop my clean, green practices and manage the farm in a very sustainable and healthy way. I have been in it for a long time. I've been involved with the original people who set up the first blueberry farm in Tasmania, Les [??? 12:43:22] and the next owner of that property, so I was aware of a lot of things about blueberries before I became heavily involved myself.

I've been involved for a very long time, and I was the first person in Tasmania to successfully propagate blueberry bushes on a commercial scale way back then. They're not easy to propagate with a high success rate. You can propagate with a 10 per cent success rate, but I was getting about 90 per cent. That is how I established my farm. I did the hard yards myself, bearing in mind I had three children at the time that I was looking after as well.

Along with being a project manager, I had a project plan to follow and a risk strategy. I identified the risks that may pop up, I identified the likeliness of each risk popping up and then any mitigation strategies I would employ to manage that risk.

I identified as a risk the possible failure of Biosecurity Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government to not successfully maintain the status of Tasmania's clean, green image, cleanliness and purity of fruit - the reputation we have. I had that as a risk strategy and, lo and behold, although in the early days I had it in my likeliness-to-occur table as low, it has now popped up and we now have serious issues with the incursion of blueberry rust into Tasmania. I identified it as low risk. I did write down what I would do about it, but here we are.

We should not be sitting here today. In my view, there has been serious incompetence within Biosecurity Tasmania, albeit not aimed at anyone personally. I don't believe they're resourced to undertake what they're charged with. I don't believe they have the expertise. I don't believe they adopt the correct project management processes to manage issues that come up. Issues that have arisen during this recent incursion just demonstrate to me that they don't have the ability to be trusted to undertake and manage what they're charged to do for us clean, green growers in Tasmania.

CHAIR - Rosemary, you're saying in your submission that the position Biosecurity took in relation to the incursion that occurred in the north of the state in 2014 was probably the right approach.

Ms JONES - I did say it was the right approach. I would say they adopted the correct decision to eradicate, not contain. I don't believe the eradication process was 100 per cent perfectly executed but it was the correct decision and they did the very best they could with what they knew at the time.

CHAIR - I have asked these questions because quite obviously to an organic grower, blueberry rust is going to be an absolute tragedy if that was to occur. What happened, in your view, between the 2014 incursion and that which occurred in 2016 at Costa for Biosecurity

PUBLIC

Tasmania to take an absolutely totally different position and view in relation to the management of that outbreak?

Ms JONES - From the information I have, I believe the only difference was the size of the property which had the outbreak in 2016 at Costa and the possible influence and clout that Costa had because of their perceived size. I note 'perceived', because in certain information I have seen, they claim to have produced 80 per cent of the blueberry fruit in Tasmania, which is not correct. I know for a fact that Biosecurity Tasmania is still not aware of all blueberry growers in Tasmania. I know that for a fact. I can name 14 they don't know about and so have never been inspected. They're not backyard growers; they are a significant size. In my own case, they had no idea how many plants I had and how many tonnes I produced, so they had no way of knowing whether Costa was 80 per cent or 50 per cent.

I believe that if Biosecurity Tasmania do what they have failed to do so far, and that is actually put the feelers out there and identify all growers, how many plants they've got and what their production is, Costa will come back somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent, and that is now, not including significant plantations that are going in now that are not mature yet. I do not know why Biosecurity did not pursue Costa with the same vigour as they did the growers affected in 2014. I can only assume it was the size and the fact that in a lot of press coverage in early days when Costa arrived in the state, there was a lot of mentioning in the press of how many people this would employ and so on so that would be of great benefit to the state.

I believe that Costa may have received financial assistance from a grant - I don't know that for a fact but that's what I've been told - and so there was some interaction already, if that is the case, between Costa and the government in that application for grant process in which they should have put together a full comprehensive, accurate and reliable business case for what they wanted to do in Tasmania. They would have already had access to some government departments and interaction at that level, which growers like me don't get, who have been in the industry for many, many years and have achieved at a higher level. I go through unheralded and am not a member of any organisation.

CHAIR - Rosemary, have you or any growers around you been successful in getting grants? Have you tried to get grants?

Ms JONES - The only grant I have had is the recent one offered of \$1000 towards taking measures to protect my property from disease. I applied for that grant because I have 10 gates into my blueberry sections. They are now all securely locked with \$750 worth of locks, restricted key cutting and so on if I have to give one to a backpacker, and also the introduction of signs on the property, but that is all I could do. I have to take other measures now.

Ms RATTRAY - In your submission you told is that Biosecurity Tasmania had refused to release information on the more recent decision of not eradicating the Costa plants. Have you tried to access that information or is that just what you've been told?

Ms JONES - No, I have emailed them for information on at least five occasions and I know for a fact that information was only gained through the freedom of information process and then I was able to access that information. Before that I couldn't find any information to see on what basis Biosecurity Tasmania had made their decision to contain and not eradicate. It was not released and we couldn't find out who the other properties were, who was involved, or how far away they were. We couldn't find out whether Costa had imported plants into Tasmania under the

PUBLIC

radar of Biosecurity Tasmania which hadn't been inspected properly. We couldn't find out anything and I got no response to my emails - none of them.

Ms RATTRAY - Did you identify yourself as a blueberry grower during that approach for information?

Ms JONES - Definitely. I said who I was, how long I had been in the industry, how many plants I had and what my concerns were, and asked if I could be provided with certain information so that I could monitor what was going on, but I couldn't get anywhere. Then I started making enquiries of other large growers and discovered the extent to which they had to go, only to not receive information until the FOI process was followed through.

I then read the Macquarie Franklin report and, quite frankly, it is not comprehensive, contains seriously incorrect figures and information, and they do not have a complete list of growers. If on any one of my projects during my long project management career anyone had brought me reports as I saw that became available under that FOI process, I would have thrown every one of them in the bin, without exception. I would have asked the author whether they could go away and explain exactly what I required and the extent and the support evidence and so on, and if I didn't think they were capable I would match their skills to another role on the project team and bring in someone who could. They were not worth anything. I would not have accepted one of them. They were incomplete, with no evidence supporting their recommendations and so on.

I was absolutely astounded that a recommendation, a change in attitude from eradication to containment, could be made on that information. It was just quite astounding and unprofessional of them to act on that evidence and not seek out more information. They should have been able to see holes through it themselves.

Ms RATTRAY - Thank you for that answer.

Mr WILLIE - A couple of weeks ago we had another incursion in IP4, I think, in the Kentish area. Is it too late to adopt an eradication policy?

Ms JONES - Definitely not.

Mr WILLIE - Definitely not?

Ms JONES - If you don't mind I will just go through some quick notes I jotted down this morning. It is definitely not too late. I don't think there is anyone that I speak to who doesn't have the opinion that the decision to contain and not eradicate was incorrect. It may have been made at a time when BT were under-resourced, didn't have enough information and therefore came to the wrong conclusion, but there is enough information now and to say that because they made that judgement and call it is now too late and we'll all just have to suffer the consequence of it is complete rubbish. Who has done an inquiry into what methods there are to now eradicate it? No-one. There is no project plan, there has been no study done and no attempt to do one.

Mr WILLIE - Would you like to see some trials with defoliation and that sort of thing?

Ms JONES - There are plenty of elimination strategies that could be adopted. I would be happy to supply some more information at a later date on what those options are, given that we are limited for time.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Just on that, if you saw fit to provide further information by way of documentation, please do so. It is up to the committee as to whether we would receive it but I would suspect that we would. I cannot talk for the committee, the committee makes that decision, but I suspect that they would if you were able to add to any of the issues we have raised today with you.

Ms JONES - I'd be very happy to do that given our limited time frame because I know from all f the meetings I have been to in my time just how little you can say and get across in 30 minutes.

It is possible to eliminate it without totally destroying the plant. There are other ways. You can cut the plant off at the base; you can destroy everything at the top and it will grow back. In fact, I know people who adopt a strategy during their pruning for the health of their orchard and to keep the production rates up and consistent, that have a policy where they go down their row of plants and totally cut off every sixth plant. When you cut it off at the ground it comes back at the next fruiting, because they put their next year's growth on at the same time, with big new shoots which don't fruit the next year but are absolutely full of the largest fruit you will ever get off a blueberry bush the following year, and fully healthy. All of your best blueberry fruit - best quality, best size, best taste - comes on the new wood. I know people who adopt that strategy and they will cut off the sixth one or one that is not looking quite well.

That is just one thing. People are also defoliating and I am sure I can list other things and other options where people are almost doing it to keep the health of their orchard anyway. I'm not talking about people who are in this industry to just mass-produce fruit, throw it out in the market as soon as it is blue, grab the money and run. I'm talking about us people who care about the quality of what we're producing and supplying to the market. There's not much I don't know now about a blueberry plant, how to manage it for the best health of the plant, the quality of fruit and into the ongoing seasons as well. I've been in the industry a long time.

It's not too late and the very worst thing we can do now, is say, 'Oh well, the strategy was adopted, we'll have to stick to it. We've had a slight spread to something else, which I understand was very limited. Now let's just suffer and say we've all got the disease and it's endemic to Tasmania.' It is not the case, and the Government and Biosecurity Tasmania have to do something to give us all confidence that they can actually manage this situation properly. They need to seriously rethink what they're doing for the agricultural industry as a whole. Let's not forget that all of this relating to blueberries, the incompetence that we see within Biosecurity, can apply to anything else that comes up in any other agricultural industry.

CHAIR - Rosemary, because of how we are going with time, can I ask if you can give us some quick answers because there are a lot of questions we would like to ask you.

Mr WILLIE - The committee has received a whole lot of submissions. Some are relying on other host plants like rhododendrons, hemlock, that sort of thing. What do you make of that evidence - if you adopted an eradication strategy, they are saying that these other plants can host the rust?

Ms JONES - I have only become aware of rhododendrons and azaleas recently from a contact, someone who knows what is going on. What do I make of it? Show me the evidence.

Mr WILLIE - You would like to see some contaminated plants before you -

PUBLIC

Ms JONES - I don't want to see any contaminated plants but I want evidence put before me that I can rely upon that is true. I no longer have trust in Biosecurity Tasmania or the Tasmanian Government to provide me with comprehensive, accurate information which tells the truth of the situation.

I keep to myself. I am not a member of any organisation. I very rarely come out and speak to anyone these days. I do my own thing in the seclusion of my beautiful, peaceful, high-level, high-altitude farm. I'm enjoying my retirement. I planned and started setting this up a long time ago for my retirement so I could do this into my retirement.

CHAIR - Thank you, Rosemary.

Mr FINCH - So many questions, Rosie, and you seem to have the answers. You are pretty critical through your submission of Biosecurity Tasmania, as you have been here this morning. I am wondering and am curious about how they were caught out with their lack of knowledge or experience in respect of the blueberry industry, before it expanded with maybe Costa's or Driscolls' introduction into the state?

Ms JONES - I can't really answer that question. I haven't been heavily involved with Biosecurity, although I am now at the receiving end of some of results of some of their decisions. Obviously, the Tasmanian Government does not have a biosecurity agency in place which is large enough, professional enough and capable enough to understand all the issues in the agricultural industry in Tasmania and to have plans in place, a thorough examination of each of those industries, what biosecurity risks may be about may pop up, and then strategies.

First they need to comprehensively assess all the risks, identify the likeliness of the risk occurring and then have mitigation strategies to manage it if it does pop up. Clearly, the Tasmanian Government does not have an agency capable of properly managing the biosecurity issues of our agriculture industry in Tasmania. Whether it is Biosecurity Tasmania or it may change to another name, it is not adequately staffed and does not have the correct composition of the correctly skilled people.

When Biosecurity made their decision to contain and not eradicate, I asked if they had made an assessment of the impact on them of their position. How are they going to staff, for example, the six-weekly inspections? I had the inspection team at my place late last week, and the ability of Biosecurity Tasmania to even efficiently organise an inspection on my property has to be of concern. In the past when inspections have been done all the people present - up to nine of them going through my property - were all skilled, knew what they were doing and were experienced people. There used to be nine before this outbreak, and this time I had a team of four young people, three of whom knew very little. They were very pleasant people, I might say, but knew very little about blueberry plants or anything to do with them. I think they have had to expand their workforce so quickly that they have given them a crash course in 'this is what it might look like'.

My property is in two parts - this is quite important - and there is a road that goes between, so they consider it as separate blocks. They came onto this block at 8.30 a.m. and at 11.00 a.m. they were unsuiting and cleaning their gear with metho and I said 'Okay, I'll unlock it on the other side of the road' because it's the same size, but they said, 'No, we're not going to do the other side today'. I said, 'Why not? Do you have to go somewhere else?', and they said, 'No we're going

PUBLIC

back to base. We've been instructed we can't do the other plot so we'll come back tomorrow'. I tried to ask why and they said because it was not considered to be exactly the same size, to which I said, 'Sorry, you're not making any sense to me'. So they drove back to Hobart - an hour and a half - and came back at 8.30 a.m. the next morning and did the other side of the road, which took a similar amount of time, so they were gone by lunch time. What a waste of resources and I question their actual ability.

Mr FINCH - You say it is not too late for an eradication program. Which growers would that affect if there was an eradication program taken out?

Ms JONES - An immediate eradication program should start with the properties that have the rust. We don't have to eradicate from properties like me.

Mr FINCH - Do you have any knowledge of how many there are with rust?

Ms JONES - There is Costa's and three others; the latest one was the fourth that I was informed of last week.

Mr FINCH - Of the smaller growers, are there any you know that have the blueberry rust?

Ms JONES - I haven't been able to find out due to Biosecurity Tasmania's secrecy. That knowledge is becoming available now. Costa's is obviously the largest and I don't believe the others are really within that size.

Ms ARMITAGE - Most of the questions have been answered but I have one regarding your pickers. I think you mentioned backpackers. Whereabouts do you take them from, any from New South Wales? Are you specific about where your backpackers come from?

Ms JONES - I will be now.

Ms ARMITAGE - So you have not been up until now? Some people we had last time with our hearings said they have not taken any from New South Wales in particular. You have taken them from New South Wales?

Ms JONES - Two years ago I took two New South Wales brothers, so they weren't backpackers as such in that they weren't from overseas.

Ms ARMITAGE - They had been picking in New South Wales previously?

Ms JONES - No. This season I will be ensuring that every backpacker who works on my property signs a statutory declaration that they have not been picking blueberries on any other farm anywhere. I don't care whether it is New South Wales or an unaffected property in Tasmania, or so-called unaffected, because I don't trust BT's methods anymore. I'm sorry but I have no faith in them.

Ms ARMITAGE - So they're mainly backpackers that you get? You don't have a local workforce in your area?

Ms JONES - I do have a small local workforce, but at the peak times I have up to 14 backpackers.

PUBLIC

Ms ARMITAGE - Thank you.

CHAIR - Rosemary, in conclusion, what advice would you give this committee for moving forward with the inquiry insofar as things that need to happen to get this on the right trajectory?

Ms JONES - This committee?

CHAIR - No, with the blueberry industry and disease protection. What would you say that needs to happen?

Ms JONES - The Tasmanian Government, through the relevant minister pushing it, should take an immediate look at how they are trying to manage the all-important clean, green image Brand Tasmania, et cetera, and have a good look at Biosecurity Tasmania and see if they have performed what they are charged with, what their responsibility is. They should be doing that now. There is enough evidence now. As to this committee, I don't know how long it will take to come to a conclusion, but this can be started by the Government before your findings are given, surely. This is becoming urgent.

CHAIR - Rosemary, we find with these committees that as we move through them things that come up, the Government looks at them and they do make changes moving forward.

Ms JONES - Moving forward, the Tasmanian Government has to get a full understanding of who is in this industry. Costa definitely does not comprise 80 per cent of the industry. They need to understand that and they need to understand the types of growers, what their issues are, certified organic, where their markets are, and so on, and then have a good look at their own agencies.

CHAIR - Rosemary, thank you very much for being here today and for answering our questions. If you wanted to put some further information to the committee, you can do that through our secretary and the committee will then receive that information. We wish you well with your blueberry pickings this year. It looks like it is going to very good.

Ms JONES - I need a good season; that would be good. Thank you for taking the time. If at any time you would like me to provide any more information, I am very happy to come back.

CHAIR - Excellent, thank you. The committee can always ask witnesses to come back so we may well contact you further.

Ms JONES - They really need a better handle on what is going on and who is out there. They don't know about all of us and what we're doing. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.

PUBLIC

Mr PETER JOHN SKILLERN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AND **Ms ELLEN DAVIS**, POLICY OFFICER, TASMANIAN FARMERS & GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Today's proceedings are being broadcast live. It is a public session being recorded by Hansard. Parliamentary privilege applies whilst you are here but once you move out of this place there is no longer privilege applying, so you stand alone. Here you have that parliamentary protection support. You have provided a submission, so what I would do is offer at this stage an opportunity for both of you to make a statement to us. If you want to add to it or identify with certain parts of it, please feel free to do so, and then we will go to questions and answers after that.

Mr SKILLERN - Thank you, Chair. I thank the committee for the opportunity to present today. It is important to say upfront that there are some very good quality and committed people within Biosecurity Tasmania, notwithstanding this issue. They reside throughout the various levels and we have a good working relationship with many of them.

The TFGA has been actively involved in this particular issue for 18 months and during this period we have become increasingly concerned about the methodologies and the overall biosecurity effectiveness. Our primary concern is the apparent failure of the biosecurity system in relation to this incursion and what it indicates about future incursions on the state's agricultural system. Biosecurity systems should be rigorous, equitable and transparent, and we strongly believe that these fundamental tenets have been lacking in this particular case. The fundamentals of a biosecurity system operation are seen in the generalised invasion curve, which you can see on DPIPWE's own website and produced by that department. We contend that the department too readily moved from eradication to containment and the justifications for doing so lacked scientific, economic and environmental merit.

There appears to have been a fundamental shift in the way we deal with biosecurity incursions in this state. The minister for Primary Industries did a recent opinion piece in the *Mercury* and also TIAR has made similar comments in relation to this. I have to say that that opinion piece has eroded confidence and suggests a fundamental change, as I said, to the biosecurity tenets. That is to say that within the piece the minister suggests that if an incursion has the risk of a future incursion, which by definition all incursions do, then the methodology now will be to move to containment.

If we explore that contention a little further to its logical conclusion, in effect this would mean that an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease would not be eradicated but rather contained, as a further incursion would be possible. We believe that this apparent significant change in long-established biosecurity regimes is unsustainable and poses a major risk element to the agricultural sector. Tasmania's agriculture is fundamentally based on a strong biosecurity system. It is our key competitive advantage and any change or failure puts at risk livelihoods and regional economies.

One element of this whole saga has been a total lack of cohesive and coherent communication. I note that the previous speaker made some comments when I came into the room along those lines. There has been a significant deficit of transparency, coupled with a lack of and a flawed understanding of Tasmanian agriculture and the enterprises maintained therein. I am pleased to say that one positive element that emerged from this is a new project that the TFGA will be working with with Biosecurity Tasmania to rectify this deficit of knowledge. Blueberry

PUBLIC

rust has been in New South Wales for many years and we should have been well prepared for this incursion. It has long been a threat on our border. Biosecurity Tasmania and the department have told us that they are well prepared for future incursions of other diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease. However this blueberry rust incursion has raised doubts about our capacity and the processes in place in dealing with incursions.

To put this in perspective, there are four potential risks at our border now. They are the tomato-potato psyllid sitting in WA, phylloxera sitting in Victoria, bluetongue sitting in Victoria and the varroa mite in New Zealand. Any one of these, if established in Tasmania, would have a serious impact on agriculture in this state. For example, the varroa mite could decimate the honeybee and native bee populations and have a significant impact on our capacity to pollinate. Equally, the tomato-potato psyllid, if established here, would put at risk a \$400 million industry, so these are not small incursions by any measure.

One of our ongoing concerns is that there seems to be a failure to learn from mistakes made and by that, I mean during this whole process. Biosecurity Tasmania set about establishing field days for berry growers, one in the north and one in the south, to be held on blueberry farms. Unfortunately, there was an invitation sent out to individuals on other blueberry farms, including infected farms. This subsequently was changed but only after the TFGA made representations as to the protocols that would be in place for people coming onto these blueberry farms.

At the end of the day, the question no doubt will be, 'What does the TFGA want as an outcome?', and our response would be that it is not what the TFGA wants, it is what the agriculture sector needs. That is a rigorous, equitable and transparent biosecurity system that the government of the day funds biosecurity in this state on a needs basis.

Ellen also has a few words to say. I don't want to steal her thunder but one of the things that has been very significant in this has been the emotive impact that this has had on quite a large number of people. Ellen, I might hand over to you.

Ms DAVIS - Following on from Peter, I would like to highlight the emotive nature of all of this, both the inquiry and all events that have followed since the first incursion, for many people, including but not limited to our members.

I personally have been in touch with numerous people, both through infected and non-infected properties, who have found the circumstances they and the industry are now in very distressing, as I am sure you are aware. That is not to say that this inquiry is not welcomed, because it is.

CHAIR - My first question is how did the rust get here in the first place? Is our border security strong enough? As I understand it, the plants that came here were supposedly certified free of disease and so on. I think they came in from Victoria if we are talking about the 2014 rust incursion. Do you see any issues there that we need to be looking at and changes we need to make in relation to that?

Mr SKILLERN - We are talking about border protection. We're not in a position to comment on the exact infector and the way these came in but it does raise those questions. However, I can talk about something like phylloxera, for example, which impacts on vines. We know we have tourists who go to Melbourne on a cruise ship, go out to the Yarra Valley and walk around these vineyards, some of which are infected. It is endemic in the Yarra Valley. Within 24

PUBLIC

hours that same boat is here in Hobart, they are coming off that boat, hopping on a bus and going out to Tea Tree or wherever it might be. We have to ask what we are doing to ensure that that type of incursion doesn't come into the state. Again, I know this inquiry is about blueberry rust but I think it is indicative -

CHAIR - We have a term of reference there that picks this up.

Mr SKILLERN - Yes, and therefore if phylloxera establishes in this state, you will have a significant negative impact on the wine industry and vineyards in this state. The question remains: are we doing everything we should to ensure that incursions, no matter what they are, do not enter this state? The number of blueberry rust episodes now has indicated that our processes and procedures do need strengthening and there are serious questions about them.

CHAIR - Following on from that, do we need to look at the borders first to ensure that we have everything right there? The next step from that is if we get it or one of these diseases, eradication is the only way to go, and from there, if that fails, we then come into management. Can you be satisfied on the information and evidence that you have that that is occurring within the state at the present time in relation to blueberry rust?

Mr SKILLERN - The short answer to that is no, we don't believe that has been the case. We are now looking at three and a half years or thereabouts that this issue has been going on. As I said, the field days were only a number of months ago, so three and a half years in we still do not seem to be getting it right.

One of our major concerns which we believe has fed into the angst El talked about before is this gross lack of transparency. In the 2016 incursion, we were made aware that the department had, in actual fact, commissioned a report by Macquarie Franklin. Despite numerous inquiries and requests from the TFGA, that document did not surface until a blueberry grower obtained it under FOI. If we are serious about biosecurity in this state and the agricultural industry being a stakeholder and a partner in biosecurity, because that is the way biosecurity should work, then hiding reports or not making them available to the very industry they impact makes no logical sense. When we actually read the report we had a fairly good understanding of why it was not released.

Ms RATTRAY - In regard to that Macquarie Franklin report, how surprised or disturbed were you to find that it did not even reflect the actual number of growers and equally, the economic value of those other growers, to the blueberry industry in Tasmania?

Mr SKILLERN - This goes back to my point about not only Macquarie Franklin, but that Biosecurity Tasmania and the department more broadly do not have a full grasp of the agricultural sector in Tasmania. Macquarie Franklin was charged with developing a socioeconomic report. You would have hoped they would have established their bona fides or the bonafides of the industry before they put the report together. For example, we note - and this was rhetoric at the time - that significant grower in the north of the state represented 75 per cent of the industry. We know that is not and never was correct. They probably represent something like 35 to 40 per cent of the industry. Whether decisions were made on that alleged 75 per cent, that is a question for others who will follow us today, but you have to question the veracity of a report that seems to have got some of the fundamental tenets wrong.

PUBLIC

Ms RATTRAY - If you knew that, why didn't Biosecurity Tasmania know that, in this case Costa, didn't necessarily produce 75 per cent of the fruit in Tasmania?

Mr SKILLERN - To be fair to Biosecurity Tasmania, we were not aware of the facts until later on, but we are not and were not in a position to gain that information until much later on.

I must say, notwithstanding the fact that some of the fundamental assumptions in that report are flawed, some of the suggestions on what would happen have turned out to be absolutely 100 per cent correct. The one I am referring to is the impact this would have on the organic industry. It is inconceivable that the livelihoods of organic growers, who are getting \$80 a tray for their premium organic product, which is about a kilo and a half of blueberries, are being put at risk because the government of the day or the department have chosen not to eradicate this but to manage it.

The longer this management goes on, inevitably this rust will spread and the organic blueberry industry will cease to exist in a period of time. I can't say what that period is, whether it be two years, five years or 10, but it will cease to exist because they have no option in treating this disease other than to use sprays, et cetera, which would then immediately ensure they are no longer organic, and that is where they get their premium.

CHAIR - Are you of the view that there is too much emphasis now on what is happening in New South Wales with the way they are managing it? I think they have completely forgotten about eradication and are trying to manage through other ways. They are trying to implement that similar position back here in Tasmania when the climate is not even similar.

Mr SKILLERN - It is always dangerous to take processes and procedures from other jurisdictions and apply them to this jurisdiction. Tasmania is unique in many respects and its agriculture is definitely unique, its climate is unique, and to suggest that the outcomes in New South Wales should automatically be applied to Tasmania beggars belief, frankly.

Mr FINCH - A couple of concerns are coming through to me from what you have said today and your reports, Peter. One is about transparency, and that is of grave concern to us all because it should be a team effort, we should be open and have our radar up as to what the industry is actually saying. What we are hearing is that Biosecurity Tasmania has not really got a handle on the blueberry industry, witnessed by the flummery figures that were released in that report. I am already making a statement myself but I recognise your concern about transparency and it is a big issue.

I am also appreciative of the fact that whilst you are critical, you are still prepared to work with Biosecurity Tasmania for our future, so you might just expand on your assistance that will go to help restructure Biosecurity Tasmania or make suggestions as to where they might be better resourced. Can you tell us about what your suggestions for our future?

Mr SKILLERN - To reiterate to what I said in the opening statement, there are some very good and committed people in Biosecurity Tasmania and notwithstanding what has happened with this blueberry rust we shouldn't tar everybody with the same brush. That is the first point I would make.

PUBLIC

The second point I would make is that you've hit the nail on the head in many respects. Biosecurity is not just the responsibility of Biosecurity Tasmania. It is the responsibility of the Tasmanian community and we are in it as a partnership, we are all stakeholders in it.

I often use fire ants as a perfect example. Most people would think if fire ants establish in Tasmania it will be a major agricultural pest. In reality it will not be a major agricultural pest but I wouldn't want to be having a barbecue where they have established, because it will be a major pest for the broader community.

We do have a challenge in front of us in communicating to the broader community that in Tasmania everybody has a role in biosecurity. The person coming off a plane who has accidentally put some fruit in their pocket or whatever it might be has a responsibility. We in the agriculture sector have a responsibility, and clearly the government and the department of the day also have a responsibility. We cannot all be at the border but the reality is that is Biosecurity Tasmania and the department need to be at the border and they need to be proactive and rigorous in their application. If they are going to continue to obfuscate in the way it has happened through this process, then you lose credibility and do not gain that relationship and partnership we should all have in dealing with biosecurity. I hope that answers the question.

Mr FINCH - In respect of containment or eradication, we have heard critical comments about containment and that eradication should be strongly considered as a way forward. Who would be affected by that eradication program and should the Government be supportive of those in the industry who might need financial help because of the thrust of an eradication program?

Mr SKILLERN - We have to go back to 2014 when the department took what can only be called an aggressive stance on this issue when we had the first outbreak with the Schwinds and the Mays. They went in there and pulled out all the affected plants. It was a fairly aggressive and effective way of doing it, yet a little less than 18 months later we have had a 180 degree turnaround where suddenly now it is now no longer feasible to do that.

Going back to the transparency point, the TFGA had representations to its board and through other mechanisms and we were told that there were tens of thousands of plants affected. Yet before the Legislative Council Estimates, the head of Biosecurity and the head of the department claimed it was only 15 000 plants. There is a significant difference between 15 000 plants and tens of thousands of plants. We were also told that it would cost millions of dollars to rip them out. It is clear in retrospect that these facts were flawed. I don't think you cannot dress it up any other way.

I am getting to your point. The point is that there was a time along this process where eradication was not only feasible but economically feasible. There would not have been the need to start looking at more government funds being handed out to eradicate. If we quickly go back to that curve, preventing an incursion is the cheapest and easiest thing to do. If it gets in, eradicating is the next most economic thing to do. When you get to containment, as the graph keeps going up, it gets more expensive, and by the time you get to where we are today, the impact on your economy, and we have seen this, is significant.

Can we eradicate it today? I am not a scientific expert on that. What I do know is that we had an opportunity to eradicate it and we did not take that opportunity. We were misled. There was a lack of transparency, which at that time would have clearly shown, going back to the Macquarie Franklin report, that it was possible to do it. Is it worthwhile attempting to do it now?

PUBLIC

Unquestionably. Should we throw our hands up and go, 'No, it's all too hard'? I don't think we should.

We also have to remember that Tasmanian agriculture is fundamentally based on a strong biosecurity system. Not only that, but it is also based on a reputation of a strong biosecurity system and that reputation has taken a big bit. We sit here in an inquiry today where very good questions are being asked and processes are being called into question. How do we think that reflects in other markets? One of the biggest casualties of this whole sorry, sad saga has been the impact on our reputation of having strong, resilient biosecurity. There are companies that were looking to come to Tasmania based on the fact that we had an excellent reputation of a biosecurity system and they were keen to be part of that. I hope that answers the question.

Mr FINCH - Thank you, Peter.

Ms RATTRAY - I am interested to understand the relationship the TFGA has with your growers and Fruit Growers Tasmania. We have heard some interesting accounts of Fruit Growers Tasmania not necessarily supporting all their members at different times. They have been one way and then another way. I am interested in what your relationship is and how you work together to protect the biosecurity.

Mr SKILLERN - Sorry, for clarification, you are asking how we work with Fruit Growers Tasmania?

Ms RATTRAY - Is there any relationship?

Mr SKILLERN - In relation to your previous comments, I don't think it's appropriate for TFGA to be commenting on another organisation. What I can say is that we now have a significant number of blueberry growers, some of whom I know are sitting behind me. We work very cooperatively and closely with them in trying to support them through this particularly difficult time.

We have been involved in this for 18 months. It is a poor choice of words, but our initial incursion into this was on the base of protecting our biosecurity system. It was not specifically about blueberry rust, it was about what we started to see happening in terms of a failure of processes. As a result of that, many blueberry growers were keen to stand with us and many of them joined us to do so. In relation to our relationship with Fruit Growers Tasmania, I don't think it would be unreasonable to say that this issue has made it a little bit more difficult than I would prefer it to be.

Ms RATTRAY - To follow on from that, with your knowledge and understanding and concern around biosecurity issues more broadly for Tasmania, have you seen a reduction in staffing and resourcing in the department to address some of the issues that have been brought forward more broadly?

Mr SKILLERN - There are a number of observations we have had. The training of staff seems to have been not as thorough as we would like. It has been very clear to us that at certain levels within Biosecurity Tasmania there is a massive disconnect between those individuals and how they view the farmers on the ground.

PUBLIC

I will regale the committee with a particular comment that was made about the original two blueberry growers. Yes, they were small growers but growing blueberries was their livelihood, and in a particular meeting with Biosecurity Tasmania, they were referred to in a disparaging way as 'hobby farmers'. That, I think, underscores an approach and culture that shows a disconnect with the various levels of agriculture in this state. Yes, there are many large farms in this state but equally there are many medium to small farms and they all have their role and place. It is inappropriate for a member of Biosecurity Tasmania to be classifying them as hobby farmers when this is their entire livelihood which has just been written off.

I might add, we understand under the act there was no right of compensation, yet subsequently after the Costa outbreak an ex gratia payment was made, which I am sure the committee is aware of, but in no way, shape, or form did it go anywhere near the sorts of losses that those two farmers had incurred.

CHAIR - Peter, I want to go to the letter you wrote on 29 May 2017 on behalf of the Schwinds to the minister in relation to a number of issues that occurred on that property. You raised a number of issues in that, including a request for a copy of the formal advisory report confirming the outbreak. You do not receive an answer to that report until, I think, 15 August 2017 from the minister's office, so there is a three-month period of nothing happening and I am not quite sure how you would see that in the circumstances. I also refer to the response that you received from the minister. It is interesting here, and I quote:

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.

What do you say about their approach in answering what was obviously a fairly important letter from the TFGA in relation to a member and the minister's response that they have learned from that incursion outbreak? Have they learned from it? What have they learned from it that you are aware of that they have told you about?

Mr SKILLERN - Not being in the minister's mind, I am not 100 per cent sure of what he is referring to there, whether he is referring to the manner in which the original investigation was undertaken or whether he is referring more broadly. If he is referring more broadly I would suggest, as I said before, that the learnings have been very short in being demonstrated. If he is referring to the manner in which they have gone about these things, there has been some improvement in that, but you would want there to be, given the manner in which the Schwinds and the Mays were dealt with.

In relation to the laboratory report, that is a very good point, Chair; you are right. Again, it is a bit like the Macquarie Franklin report. We kept asking for this laboratory report and eventually we did receive it. I might hand over to El, who has a particular view on this laboratory report and there are some interesting elements that again just do not stack up.

Ms DAVIS - As you probably read in our submission, the laboratory report was never provided to the Schwinds and, leading on from that, I highlighted the importance of having one after hearing what the Schwinds said last week to you - how were they supposed to even know that it was actually blueberry rust that was identified on their property? As Ronald said, there are other diseases that look similar to it visually. The lab report that was given to us was initially in the form of an email, it was just that table. I am not sure, do you have the laboratory report?

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Yes, we have the laboratory report. You have provided a copy of that to us.

Ms DAVIS - Initially it came to us as just that table which, personally, I don't see as enough evidence showing that blueberry rust occurred on their property. It is really just showing samples that were taken and how many samples of those were proven to be blueberry rust, but no visual evidence, confirmation, identification testing or isolation on artificial media, DNA sequence analysis or photographic evidence. They said that was performed but again provided no evidence of it. Interestingly, that report was provided by a senior plant pathologist who also wrote the 2009 Survey of Blueberry Diseases in Tasmania and identifies blueberry rust through those different selection criteria and proof of identification. It just seems contradictory.

Mr SKILLERN - Albeit he was the same author of the report in that 2009 document El refers to, it appears that he didn't follow his own methodology, which raises serious questions.

The other question that has not been answered is the chain of custody. We have no documentary proof in relation to, 'Yes, these leaves were taken from these plants on such and such a date and have been held accordingly and now they've been tested'. There is no chain of custody one way or the other and that is one of the processes that will need to be reviewed. Certainly we are not aware of any chain of custody.

CHAIR - The other question I had was about the reports, Peter. The minister refers to this and I will read it -

I have asked the department to assist you further regarding questions relating to action taken with the plant supplies and testing materials at the time. Mr Tim Baker, Deputy Secretary, will contact you to assist ...' et cetera.

Was that contact made and what happened as a result of that? Can you recall that at all?

Mr SKILLERN - Yes, we have had contact with the deputy secretary over blueberry rust and a number of other biosecurity issues, and that report we just referred to was one of the things we were looking for to come out of that.

CHAIR - How much involvement is there between the department and the TFGA, which is the principal and one of the strongest organisations in this state when it comes to agriculture? How much consultation and discussion occurs between you and the department in relation to issues like this?

Mr SKILLERN - In this particular issue, I can say there has been significant engagement and it has not been pleasant on many occasions, Chair, I can assure you, because we have taken a very strong stance on this. We have been constantly stonewalled over trying to obtain some of these valuable documents such as the Macquarie Franklin report, the laboratory report and some others. This has not engendered our relationship at all when what we had been asking for was a simple courtesy. If you are going to engage with us as a stakeholder, it needs to be a full, frank and transparent engagement, and unfortunately it hasn't gone that way.

I must say, as an organisation, it is quite sad to see that sort of thing happen. This blueberry rust incursion has damaged relationships to some extent, and that damage has been more about this lack of transparency and what we have come to feel has been an attempt to hide documents or information which would assist us all to move forward.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - We talk about the Tasmanian Brand and how important it is to what we do here and our produce, et cetera. You are right that it is absolutely critical that we retain the highest standards that can be met with production of produce. I am not asking you to comment on any farm or business but is there enough emphasis placed by growers and producers on the clean green image that Tasmania absolutely requires and must have? Is there enough emphasis on that and where it stands and what it means to this state?

Mr SKILLERN - A very good question, Chair. The simple answer is it depends on the farm; it is case by case. If you are growing a commodity crop, for example, and that goes into a large Australia-wide pool, the differentiation of it being grown in Tasmania has no impact whatsoever. If you are growing what we refer to as niche products such as cherries, for example, obviously having that Tasmanian brand is a major benefit for your product. Many farmers recognise the importance of having that Tasmanian brand, but even though those that are growing commodities recognise the importance of the brand, unfortunately they do not necessarily reap the rewards. One of the ongoing challenges is finding how we can do that with commodity crops. For example, in dairy there needs to be downstream processing in Tasmania so we can then use that downstream product and that will carry the Tasmanian brand.

Ms ARMITAGE - You mentioned before it was \$80 a tray for organic blueberries. What would a non-organic farmer receive for a tray? What is the difference?

Mr SKILLERN - My understanding is it is a significant premium. I don't have those figures off the top of my head but it is a premium I am aware some growers are getting. There are two parts to that premium. First of all it is a Tasmanian blueberry, which is considered a better product, and then on top of that it is grown using an organic regime, which gets a further premium. It comes back to the Chair's point about the Tasmanian brand and those products going into places like Sydney. We need to explore this a little further. If we end up in a situation where blueberry rust becomes endemic to Tasmania, then our product going into, for example, the Sydney market where we know New South Wales already has blueberry rust, has no differentiation. How are Tasmanian blueberry growers meant to compete?

Ms ARMITAGE - The lady before you told us she has already sold all her blueberries to Victoria and New South Wales because they're organic and Tasmanian.

Mr SKILLERN - Correct - so we would no longer have that differentiation. Ultimately not only will the organic growers succumb to the rust but the industry more broadly has the potential to succumb to the fact that it does not become economical to ship your blueberries out of the state. They are just another grower in another large market with much larger growers in interstate markets with no differentiation to get that premium or to sell your product. This is the sort of thing that should have been thought through before we decided to go management, not eradication.

CHAIR - It would seem on the information and evidence we have been given that the department, BT and the Government are really not aware of the significance of blueberry production in this state and the levels it can reach moving forward. Do you have a view that that probably is right or could be right? We have an industry that is building and has been here for quite some time but blueberries in this state is really taking off, but they are not really conscious of where it will go and what can happen.

PUBLIC

Mr SKILLERN - It would be fair to say, Chair, that from 2014 through to 2016 that description was very accurate. I would hope, and evidence would suggest, that now the department and Biosecurity Tasmania have a much better handle on the industry, but it goes to the point I made before: we are doing this after the event. We are hopeful that the project we have now entered into with Biosecurity Tasmania will address this issue, not only for blueberries but for other emerging and established sectors.

CHAIR - In your submission you say there is little respect by Biosecurity Tasmania for processes and procedures and seemingly a failure by Biosecurity Tasmania to follow standard biosecurity protocols. What do you mean by that?

Mr SKILLERN - It comes back to some of the comments I made previously about the economics versus the curve - it is better to stop it coming in here and that style of thing - and basically making decisions on scientific evidence and moving forward based on those. By all means, look at the socioeconomic issues, but the only socioeconomic reference was indeed the Macquarie Franklin report that we have already seen had some flaws in it anyway. They should be the fundamentals on which decisions are made.

I come back to the point about communication and transparency. At the end of the day, the decision may have been the same. Yes, there would have been some people who would not have been happy, but if the communication and the transparency had been there, there would have been a lot less angst and emotion that El referred to before than there has ended up being. That is the key. The management of communications and transparency has been, frankly, AWOL.

Mr FINCH - One of my concerns through the discussions we have had before the inquiry has been called and now what I am hearing from the inquiry, is this huge disconnect between the big people and the littlies in the industry. Is there a TFGA solution or are there some suggestions that might in fact have them drawn together a bit closer for the good of the industry, or is the schism too great?

Mr SKILLERN - The best way of answering that question is to go back to my original point about how a biosecurity system needs to be rigorous and equitable. Equity means that it does not matter whether you are a small or large producer, the system applies across the board. Size absolutely should not determine the outcome of biosecurity decisions. On the face of it, some people have the view that that has been the case. I will leave others to answer those questions but you ask a very valid questions and the bottom line is that is the way it should operate.

If it had operated this way in this particular instance, we would not have the schism you refer to. It would be fair to say there is a significant view within the not so large growers - and bear in mind that size is all very relevant - that it is this group versus one large producer. That is not helpful across a number of areas.

Mr FINCH - It was not spotted early by Biosecurity Tasmania or the Government to the point that the smaller growers were overlooked - witness in the report that they were not aware of how many smaller growers there were in the industry.

Mr SKILLERN - Indeed. If you aggregate the smaller growers as a group, they are much larger. If we are going to compare size, the smaller growers as an aggregate were a larger size anyway.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - One would hope that through this inquiry there are some clear guidelines and signals that might come from this to help develop the future of the industry. I am wondering about the support government might need to offer to the industry that might be lacking at the moment. The bigger ones might be getting support and the smaller ones overlooked.

Mr SKILLERN - Are you specifically talking about blueberry growers?

Mr FINCH - Yes.

Mr SKILLERN - The Government has a role to play, as does Biosecurity Tasmania, in making a determination that eradication is the way forward. If we are going to go down that track it goes to a point you asked me previously about what assistance would be required. If assistance is required, that is what we should be doing to protect the Tasmanian brand and our biosecurity system. At the end of the day, a dollar spent doing that will have a multiple economic effect in enhancing our brand to show that as a state we are serious about biosecurity, and if we do have an incursion then we rally around as a state to support the producers that have been affected. This idea that we cut them loose and they are on their own is just not sustainable in the long term for agriculture.

I know I do not have to reiterate this to the committee but given this is a public record, I will. Agriculture in Tasmania produces just over 7 per cent of state growth product. We are the state where agriculture is the most significant economic driver. Surely any government or department should be putting biosecurity to protect such a key economic pillar as one of their number one things to be doing in funding and dealing with. Unfortunately this whole sorry saga has left us with the view that perhaps that is not the case. I do not know if that answers your question adequately.

Mr FINCH - Thanks, Peter.

CHAIR - Peter, I go once again to your submission. You talked about the recent blueberry rust outbreak in Victoria and how they moved forward. It says:

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 was once again declared as a blueberry rust-free state.

Then the minister goes on to make another statement in the submission you provided to us on page 3:

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 a contrary approach taken in the 2014 incursion?

Do you wish to make a comment on that, Peter?

Mr SKILLERN - It is a matter of perspective as to whether the capacity to eliminate it is smaller or otherwise, but I come back to the fundamental point about protecting the Tasmanian

PUBLIC

brand and establishing an A-grade biosecurity system. Surely we would try. I know there are arguments that it can be and arguments that it cannot be eradicated, but in some respects that is somewhat irrelevant. We should try to eradicate it, and if we don't try and just put our hands up, which appears to have been what we've done now, and say, 'It's all too hard, we're just going to manage it now', then you have to call into question how serious we are about having a strong biosecurity system, how serious we are about having the Tasmanian brand and how serious we are about maintaining and protecting what up to now has been an unenviable reputation for a strong biosecurity system. If at the end of the day we attempt to eradicate it and it fails, what is the worst that can be said? That we tried to eradicate it and we found it was not successful, but if we say we're not even going to try to eradicate it and throw our hands up, that is not a position we would support.

CHAIR - Peter and Ellen, thank you very much for your submission and the attachments to that as well. They are very helpful to the committee. Thank you very much for the way in which you have answered the questions today, we appreciate that very much. The TFGA is a main player in this so it could well be that we would want you back at some future time. We are wanting to report as soon as we can but that obviously is not going to occur until early next year, I would suggest, and then it depends on elections and so on, but this is a significant and very important inquiry and we are wanting to put forward the best position we can to support blueberries growing in the state. We appreciate very much what you have done so thank you.

Mr SKILLERN - Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the upper House for having this committee. It is critically important, as I have said all through today, to have nothing but the best biosecurity system we possibly can, so thank you to you as well.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

PUBLIC

Mr MICHAEL TOBY, CORPORATE AFFAIRS MANAGER, AND **Mr DAVID BARDON**, HORTICULTURAL MANAGER, COSTA, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - This is a Legislative Council hearing in relation to blueberry rust. We are taking sworn evidence and because of that we have asked you take the statutory declarations in front of you both. This is public broadcast today as is being broadcast live. While you are in this place you have parliamentary privilege. Once you leave here it no longer applies, you stand alone. The information for witnesses was provided to you. Have you read that?

Messrs TOBY and BARDON - Yes.

CHAIR - You have, thank you. The evidence is being recorded by Hansard.

Thank you for your submission and the attachments relating to the submission, we appreciate that. What I will do is give you an opportunity to address us on any matter you want to, leading into questioning by us. You may want to provide some new information or reiterate information in your submission. I will leave that open to you, as long as you leave us sufficient time for questions.

Mr TOBY - I will start with an opening statement. On behalf of Costa, I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today. As the committee is aware, Costa is one of four growers that are currently identified as having blueberry rust in Tasmania.

Costa discovered the existence of blueberry rust at our Nine Mile Sulphur Creek farm in August 2016, at which time we self-reported this discovery to Biosecurity Tasmania. This was only a short time after Tasmania had been declared blueberry rust free and approximately 18 months after an incidence of blueberry rust had been discovered on another grower's farm.

It is an established fact that blueberry rust was detected in the Melbourne metropolitan area toward the end of 2014. Blueberry rust was also detected in Tasmania toward the end of 2014, with all infected plants apparently destroyed under Tasmania's biosecurity protocols. It is believed that this incidence was as a result of infected nursery stock that was imported from Victoria originally via Queensland. This stock would have been purchased by commercial growers and recreational gardeners alike, so it is reasonable to assume that the incidence was not simply confined to one commercial grower.

Costa does not know whether all the stock was eradicated and if it was, if the eradication was undertaken before it had any chance to spread elsewhere, or whether all instances of rust were correctly identified. Indeed, on the positive sample Costa detected in 2016, Biosecurity Tasmania's initial test came back as negative.

If eradication does in fact work, then Costa should not have found rust in 2016 after plants were removed and destroyed from the rust affected grower's farm in 2014, and presumably any other sites where the affected nursery stock may have been found. The re-emergence of rust less than two years later would strongly indicate that eradication, as a form of dealing with the problem, did not work and was unsuccessful. In short, eradication may lead to perverse consequences and create more problems than it seeks to solve.

PUBLIC

From Costa's experience of dealing with rust at our farm in New South Wales for the last 15 years, blueberry rust is more than likely already endemic in Tasmania, at least as a result of the 2014 outbreak, which also could have caused other plant hosts to have contracted rust and vice versa.

If an eradication policy were to be adopted and every reported incidence of rust, or any other disease that blueberry plants may be affected by, resulted in removing and/or destroying plants, the logical conclusion would be that at the end of such an eradication process no blueberry plants, as well as other plants that are hosts, would be left in the state of Tasmania as this would be the only sure way of eradicating rusts.

In our submission, Costa referenced other plant hosts for blueberry rust that exist in Tasmania. An eradication policy would also necessitate a preparedness to eradicate all other plants that are actual and potential blueberry rust hosts, to remove any doubt that rust could reoccur or occur from other plants.

In addition, I would suggest that all tourists and commercial traffic that enters the state either by plane or ship would also require the application of strict hygiene protocols, in particular any vehicles boarding and seeking passage on the TT-Line. This action would be both impractical and uneconomical for growers, Biosecurity Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government, and that is why Costa believes containment is the only practical way to address blueberry rust. I thank the committee for their time.

CHAIR - Thank you, Michael. David, did you want to make a statement?

Mr BARDON - No.

Ms ARMITAGE - You mentioned the infected stock in Melbourne. Would they have been evergreen plants?

Mr BARDON - I have no idea.

Ms ARMITAGE - Some of the stock you buy at Costa are evergreen, is that right?

Mr BARDON - Some of it is.

Ms ARMITAGE - Is it true they are more prevalent for blueberry rust?

Mr BARDON - No, not necessarily.

Ms ARMITAGE - You do not agree with that?

Mr TOBY - No, we buy them certified rust-free.

Ms ARMITAGE - Even the evergreens?

CHAIR - The committee has been given evidence in relation to the evergreen variety, that it is more likely and more susceptible to rust than the other varieties, and is more difficult to eradicate or control in evergreen plants than it is in the deciduous.

PUBLIC

Ms ARMITAGE - They do not drop their leaves.

Mr BARDON - I guess there is that general understanding that some varieties are more susceptible than others to rust. I cannot say that that variety is more susceptible than others.

Ms ARMITAGE - You have farms right across Australia. The backpackers and the pickers you have travel from your farms, for example, in New South Wales, down to Tasmania?

Mr TOBY - Yes, some of them.

Ms ARMITAGE - You do not see that as a problem, considering the amount of blueberry rust in New South Wales? You would not prevent those pickers from coming down to your farms?

Mr TOBY - As I said in my introductory statement, it is no bigger problem than someone coming over on the TT-Line in a car that may have driven through New South Wales where blueberry rust is.

Ms ARMITAGE - That is 'may have', and these are people who have been working on blueberry farms.

Mr TOBY - People coming on the TT-Line in a car may have been on a blueberry farm.

Ms ARMITAGE - You are not prepared to prevent that with some of your workers? When they sign up with Costa, they sign up to work right across all your farms?

Mr TOBY - No, they do not. It is their choice whether they wish to follow the season down to Tasmania.

Ms ARMITAGE - You are happy for them to come, if they do, from New South Wales? You have no problem with that at all?

Mr TOBY - Yes, if they are a good worker, yes.

Mr BARDON - Pickers could come from another farm, we have no control over that.

Ms ARMITAGE - We were given evidence, and it was quite open evidence, that one of the restrictions many farmers are doing is to not to take people from New South Wales where they know that it is prevalent. So, Costa does not have an issue with that. Thank you.

Mr FINCH - In your opening, Michael, you said, 'one of four growers in Tasmania'. In your letter that came through to us, you said, 'one of three growers', all currently identified.

Mr TOBY - Since that submission there has been another one identified.

Mr FINCH - Who was that?

Mr TOBY - I do not know who it is.

PUBLIC

A member - In the Kentish municipality.

Mr FINCH - In the Kentish municipality. Somebody told me that if you wanted to work for Costa's in Tasmania, coming from New South Wales, or when you are taken on there, that you had to agree to work in Tasmania. That is not the case?

Mr TOBY - No, not at all.

Mr FINCH - What protocols would you now have in place if you had workers coming from New South Wales into Tasmania? Do you take your own steps to make sure they are not bearers of blueberry rust or that infection?

Mr TOBY - What sort of steps are you suggesting?

Mr FINCH - Making sure that the clothing has not been used in New South Wales to make sure that that disease is not being brought into the state.

Mr TOBY - I come back to my point that if you're going to apply that sort of test then you should apply it to everybody that comes into the state.

Mr FINCH - We might need to do that, mightn't we, to protect -

Mr TOBY - In answer to your question, no we don't.

Mr FINCH - You would be aware, the same as anybody, of the issue we have in Tasmania with protecting our clean, green image. In respect of product from Costa, do you market that as being from Tasmania or is it just Costa from Australia, grown in Australia?

Mr TOBY - It is marketed under the Driscolls brand.

Mr FINCH - Is that with any reference to Tasmania?

Mr TOBY - Not that I am aware of.

Mr FINCH - So your product is 'blueberries'.

Mr TOBY - As I said, it is marketed under the Driscolls brand.

Mr FINCH - Our organic growers, people who are looking for a premium price, are desirous of safeguarding that image they have of being from Tassie and the clean, green state.

Mr TOBY - Are they? Yes. Is that a question?

Mr FINCH - Yes. Tell us how Costa views Tasmania in the scheme of things, in the way the blueberry industry is developing in Australia and in Tasmania.

Mr TOBY - We view Tasmania as being a very important state for us. We have a large production footprint here. It is the only state where we grow blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and blackberries so, yes, it is an important state for us. We have invested a lot of money in developing not only blueberries but those other three berry types.

PUBLIC

Mr BARDON - Nearly \$40 million in the last few years plus significant capital and call-in facility to support the grower base, so it is certainly a big state for us in terms of our footprint.

Mr FINCH - What about the future of Costa in Tasmania? Do you see that \$40 million investment being increased and developed in Tasmania even more so than it is now?

Mr BARDON - Right now we are underway for another what we call growth plan, so there will be more money spent in developing more nursery material and production. There will be more production in the next few years.

Mr FINCH - We talked earlier about the schism that exists between the big producers like Costa and I think Crowthers and the smaller growers in Tasmania. Is that something that Costa might see as a big corporate partner in this development of the industry in Tasmania? Are you concerned about that schism and do you think might -

Mr TOBY - What schism?

Mr FINCH - Well, the way people talk about Costa. I will answer your question -

Interjections.

CHAIR - Sorry, Hansard will not be able to record what is happening, so please do not speak over the top of one another. Also, I must say that we ask the questions, you answer them.

Mr TOBY - Sure.

Mr FINCH - We are here to try to get the facts of the matter and some information from Costa and trying to develop an understanding of the industry. We are not here to contest with you. We just want some understanding of how you view the industry. As to the schism I am talking about, and other members of the committee would understand that people have come to us talk about the fact that they feel intimidated by the big player in the industry and they always reference Costa. I am wondering whether you are concerned about that and whether in developing this operation in Tasmania and this industry that there might be some view to looking to developing a better relationship.

Mr TOBY - Can you give me examples of intimidation?

Mr FINCH - Oh, far out! We're not going to make too much progress here.

Interjections.

CHAIR - Order, I need to get some control here. I am not sure whether the people from Costa have read the evidence that was given to us at our first hearing on this, which was last week -

Mr TOBY - No.

CHAIR - but there was evidence given of concern of a number of smaller growers as to the position Costa has in this state and where they are seen in this state. That evidence is there. As I

PUBLIC

said, Michael, please simply answer the question as it is asked to the best of your ability rather than ask the members here to confirm their questions to you.

Mr TOBY - Sure. In response to your question, I don't think we're intimidating anybody by our behaviour.

Mr FINCH - That was easy, wasn't it? All we're asking is for you to give us your view.

Ms RATTRAY - I want to take you to page 2 of your submission, Michael and David, where you talk about up to 90 per cent of Australia's blueberry crop being grown in New South Wales and rust has not affected the ability of growers in that state to export their product to other states and overseas. Am I to take from that that you don't have any organic growers in New South Wales? You might not be able to answer that.

Mr TOBY - I don't know whether there are any organic growers in New South Wales, or if there were any before rust was discovered.

Ms RATTRAY - Which you indicated was about 15 years ago.

Mr TOBY - Yes, in about 2001.

Mr BARDON - We did look into this a while back, but I am not sure. We are actually interested in organics ourselves, but as to others, I am not sure.

Ms RATTRAY - Because effectively, if Tasmania loses its organic status, we could have no organic status anywhere in Australia, reasonably, if this happens. In what area were you hoping to get into organics?

Mr BARDON - It is something we need to have a look at further because you need to take in regional climate issues as much as anything. It is only just a discussion at this stage.

Ms RATTRAY - As to the management of blueberry rust, you have given us a paper where Melinda Simpson from Woolenbore Primary Industries, New South Wales, states: 'I do not recommend eradication of infected plants as a viable method of control'. Can you flesh that out a little more for me? We have actually heard the opposite as well. I am interested in your view on that.

Mr BARDON - That has come from Dr Bernadine Strik and was supplied by Melinda.

Ms RATTRAY - It comes under Melinda Simpson's evidence and it does not point to anyone else, but I will take that on board.

Mr BARDON - For many years, many places, including Oregon, as well as states of Australia, have been managing rust and it is seen as a low importance disease. There are more, I guess, pressing issues for us as a company. For us, eradication can be controlled through an interstate certification process similar to what is in New South Wales and that is the process we have been following the past year to ensure trade agreement.

PUBLIC

Ms RATTRAY - So if it is not eradication, and you leave your plants in the ground and they are evergreen so they don't drop their leaves, is chemical spraying the only way? Are there any organic sprays that can be used?

Mr BARDON - At this stage under that trade agreement we only use chemical sprays, which is a pre- and post-harvest process. We have all heard different discussions but at this stage we think that is the best viable method. It is one which has worked for us for the last 15 years out of New South Wales, and we have never had an issue with trade in that time.

Ms RATTRAY - Thank you.

Mr WILLIE - In your opening remarks you said eradication has not worked and an example of that is on your farm at Sulphur Creek. Could that eradication have worked and it is another source that has breached the biosecurity border? Your opening comments suggested a link there but perhaps there could have been two sources.

Mr TOBY - The point being made is that if eradication works and that was the source how did we end up with it 18 months later?

Mr WILLIE - It could have been a breach of the biosecurity border again, which I would imagine Costa would have a healthy interest in. You grow other plants and other berries and I am sure they are exposed to risk. How would you see that improve, that border security?

Mr BARDON - Good question. Any thoughts there?

Mr TOBY - It is disappointing the stock came in, in 2014. I do not know whether it was certified as being blueberry rust free. It came via Queensland. I do not know what the situation is in Victoria. I know they claim to be rust-free. You could assume some of that stock was also sold in Victoria commercially and that it may well be planted in Victoria. There may be rust there that has not been identified.

Mr WILLIE - We have also heard a number of submissions saying that defoliation is an option to eradicate. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr BARDON - We have heard that one. We have a combination of varieties for cross-pollination so it is very important for us - we use bees as pollinators - to have flowering at a certain time to ensure good fruit production and good fruit quality. It would concern me to defoliate plants, whether that be by hand or chemically. For me, I would be very concerned. I do not know if it has been proven, but it is not something I would want to jump into. I think it would have big ramifications for our business.

Mr WILLIE - What sort of economic impact are we talking for defoliation, not complete eradication?

Mr BARDON - I am talking more about our financial position. It would certainly have an effect on productivity, fruit size, quality and possibly reputation; not delivering product to the markets and to our retail customers. I am talking about productivity.

Mr WILLIE - Do you know an economic figure for sitting out a season?

PUBLIC

Mr BARDON - That is millions. I can get that information for you, but it is significant.

CHAIR - If you are able to get that information then you can take that on notice and come back to us. That is acceptable.

Mr TOBY - That would be commercial-in-confidence information.

CHAIR - If it is commercial-in-confidence, identify that on the document you provide to us and the committee will accept it in that way.

Mr WILLIE - There has been some conjecture around your market share in Tasmania. We have heard figures of 35 to 40 per cent and in the Macquarie Franklin report, there is up to 75 per cent. What do you estimate that figure to be, as a percentage?

Mr TOBY - It is hard to say.

Mr BARDON - I would say it is maybe 50 per cent or so, but I would have to have a look at that. Our production is varied over the seasons. Like everyone else, production varies, but it is significant.

Mr WILLIE - Could you also give us a figure for complete eradication, in commercial-in-confidence?

Mr BARDON - A financial figure?

Mr WILLIE - Yes.

Mr BARDON - With complete eradication, we are talking hundreds of dollars a plant to remove, and I think we have 200 000 plants. It is a significant quantity. Depending on the eradication method, but if we are talking pure eradication from just our farm, we are talking significant money. We spoke about \$150 to \$200 a plant and that is to remove soil, mulch, leaf, everything. Then there are probably ongoing issues with that. How do we fumigate, the cost of the land, it is significant.

Mr WILLIE - Are you able to provide a figure to the committee?

Mr BARDON - We had it at around \$150 to \$200 a plant but it is something I -

Mr WILLIE - That is not a total figure, though.

Mr BARDON - Multiply that by 200 000.

Mr FINCH - What is the extent of the blueberry rust issue identified on your property? Is it right through the property, or just certain areas or certain styles of blueberry?

Mr BARDON - Yes. BT can probably elaborate further. It was not high level. If we are talking of sample size, it was very low. I am not sure of the numbers now. I did have the information a while back, but it is very low. At the moment, if I was on the farm, I doubt I would find any rust at all. Again, when our horticulturalist found rust, BT had a negative. I question the

PUBLIC

whole sampling process in regard to identification of rust, which makes me think if it was not identified and I have picked it up, could that have been identified elsewhere, on other farms or on host species?

Mr FINCH - Could you provide the committee with that advice or reading that you received from Biosecurity Tasmania?

Mr BARDON - Yes. I can do that.

Mr FINCH - Chair, I have asked for the information from Biosecurity Tasmania that indicated to Costa there was an issue with blueberry rust. David is suggesting it was only in a minor way -

Mr BARDON - Not all samples were positive. It was very minor. It was not like the rust was on every leaf. We are talking a very low sample.

Mr FINCH - How about at this time now and your understanding of what numbers of your plants might be affected by blueberry rust?

Mr BARDON - I would say zero. Biosecurity would come in and do a sample and check to verify that, but I would be saying zero.

CHAIR - Did Michael say at the beginning that during the 2016 outbreak at Costa, the tests came back from Biosecurity and they were negative?

Mr TOBY - They were.

CHAIR - So you had proven you had rust and had identified this to Biosecurity. Biosecurity then took samples and did they come back to you, Costa, and say it is a negative result?

Mr BARDON - What happened was in one block we sampled when we weren't too sure whether we actually had rust. We have a trained horticulturalist that no-one else really has and they have come in and seen what looked to be rust. They got that sent away and it came back positive. We are talking about a leaf with a spot on it.

Biosecurity did come back and did some sampling and found some blocks had a couple of samples in a block with a positive and again, in one of our samples that was positive, their sample came back with a negative.

To me, it showed that the sampling process does not necessarily pick up rust. I question whether rust would be picked up on other farms. It definitely could, based on that, or other host plants like rhododendrons.

CHAIR - Thank you, David, for clarifying that.

Ms RATTRAY - There has been some suggestion and criticism around the chain of custody process that BT undertakes in taking samples. What was your experience when the samples were taken? Could you clearly identify, not only on a piece of paper, that they belonged to you, they were from whatever area of your patch of blueberries?

PUBLIC

Mr BARDON - From memory, we did see block numbers and whether we had a positive or negative. I cannot recall fully at this stage, but when they were on the farm they were there for a few weeks and I thought they were very thorough. They were spending quite a bit of time looking in every block and every variety, so to me they were quite thorough in getting around the farm collecting samples. I was not allowed to be there at the time; we can only observe them from a distance, but certainly I thought they were quite professional in how they undertook all of that.

Ms RATTRAY - What about the report that came back? Were you satisfied that that completely outlined the situation?

Mr BARDON - No, based on the fact that I or the team found some rust and we had a negative, it made me start to think whether the protocol was correct with the sampling method. I guess I am just questioning that personally.

Ms RATTRAY - Since that outbreak and the subsequent processes that followed that, can you give me some understanding of Biosecurity Tasmania and the processes they have in place when they come to your properties now and undertake follow up?

Mr BARDON - In the last few months I have taken a role up north but I will speak about this period following the detection.

Ms RATTRAY - You mean up north in Tasmania or elsewhere?

Mr BARDON - No, northern New South Wales, Corindi. I have just flown in.

Ms RATTRAY - I thought you might have moved up north to the Launceston area.

Mr BARDON - I move around a lot. They have been very thorough with us. We have worked with them on protocols and certainly you need to talk about this -

Ms RATTRAY - I am just looking for your experience.

Mr BARDON - In my experience they were very thorough. We worked closely with them to make sure of the protocols, and that came to every part of the operation, not just the harvest but also how we mow or put tractors onto the farm or people. They were very thorough in making sure we followed all their protocols in regard to access to our sites. We worked very closely with them on a daily basis. If they came to the farm they would sign in and be wearing the white suits, certainly following all their protocols. I thought they were very professional. We certainly worked closely with them to come up with the protocols.

Ms RATTRAY - Before Biosecurity Tasmania made the decision to go down the path of containment and not eradication for your farms, what discussions did you have with the Government, as in the minister or the department, around what that might do to your business if they decided to continue with the same policy that they had in place in 2014?

Mr TOBY - We had various discussions. We met with Mr Rockliff where we presented one of the papers that we put in our submission, the Bernadine Strik document. We had various meetings with BT and DPIPW, and we also provided information to Macquarie Franklin more around the economic cost. We also put the view that we felt eradication wasn't the best course of action.

PUBLIC

Ms RATTRAY - Did you raise any concerns about eradication in 2014?

Mr TOBY - No we didn't, but I wish we had.

Ms RATTRAY - Had you stepped up and said, 'We don't think you need to eradicate these two small guys' -

Mr TOBY - We should have.

Ms RATTRAY - So in hindsight you could have done something differently.

Mr TOBY - Definitely.

Ms ARMITAGE - I have just been looking at Costa's website and I notice under 'community and sustainability' that they try to reduce chemical usage. It says:

Costa is committed to sustainable agriculture. Not only is it a key strategy for maximising our profitability, it is also crucial to ensuring that our country's natural resources are utilised in both an environmentally responsible and efficient manner.

It goes on to say that where pesticides are used, every effort is made to minimise their use to avoid any biological disruption.

We are hearing from the organic growers that the current method we have at the moment, the use of chemicals, is of real concern. We have heard from you today that you consider what you are doing is satisfactory, whereas a lot of the other smaller growers we have been speaking to, obviously not on the scope of Costa, are taking a lot more precautions than you take when it comes to their farms. They are not letting people on their property if they have come from places like New South Wales unless they have washing facilities there to wash their clothes in. They also have foot baths.

I take from what you have said that they can come on the *Spirit*, but those people from the *Spirit* are not necessarily driving their car and I would hope that they would not then drive straight on to your property. I would imagine you would not have people that come across on the *Spirit* from somewhere, maybe in New South Wales where there might have been blueberry rust, and saying it is alright to drive onto Costa property without us checking where they have been.

Do you really consider, reading from Costa's website, that you are trying to be environmental and are doing everything you possibly can on your farm to prevent blueberry rust coming into Tasmania and the sustainability of the organic farms, or are you willing to look at perhaps taking stronger measures to try to prevent it so we do not lose the organic growers in Tasmania?

I understand that you grow your blueberries and you sell them, and that is fine. You are not worrying whether they come from Tasmania, New South Wales or where they come from. They are your blueberries, they go into the Driscolls brand and they are sold. But people in Tasmania really benefit and use the fact that -

CHAIR - You need to let him answer and we're running out of time.

PUBLIC

Ms ARMITAGE - All right, sorry - but that is the basis for the organics.

Mr TOBY - Of course we do not want to see the blueberry industry adversely impacted. We do not want to see any grower adversely impacted, but in our view the best way to deal with blueberry rust is through treatment and containment.

Ms ARMITAGE - Through chemicals, which does not suit the organic farmers.

Mr TOBY - We are not an organic grower -

Ms ARMITAGE - No, so you don't care about the others that are?

Mr TOBY - I can only talk to what we produce and our production methods. I don't want to see any other growers affected.

Ms ARMITAGE - But you won't take any stronger measures than what you are already taking? I guess that is the question.

Mr BARDON - We are taking measures, and we certainly followed all the biosecurity protocols and have taken that further to other sites in regional areas. When I walk the farms, and I have walked a lot of organic farms, I do not see any of these procedures that we have in place. We are going to be putting in more hygiene protocols as part of our inductions and we spoke about this earlier but it is something that we can take further.

Ms ARMITAGE - So you will live up to your website?

Mr BARDON - Definitely.

Mr TOBY - I rate that.

Mr BARDON - Again, 80 per cent of rust is airborne so I do question whether a lot of what we do with foot baths is going to prevent it. To me, it is in the air. I would like to know how it came on to our farm. That has been a question of mine for a while.

CHAIR - If we can keep our questions and answers short I would appreciate it because there are a few questions I have.

Mr FINCH - Clarify for me that blueberry rust does not affect the quality of the fruit at all.

Mr BARDON - I guess if it gets out of control, but in 60 years in Oregon and 15 years here, I am going to say it has minimal impact, particularly in a cool climate like ours. Yes, there are concerns around the evergreens, but it is controllable in a very difficult climate where rust can be more prevalent in the north under their conditions than in Tasmania. It can be controlled. That is why a lot of the information that we have says it has low impact on growers. After 60 years in Oregon, that says something.

Mr FINCH - The fact that you are one of the four growers that have been recognised in Tasmania, you don't see that as an impediment to your production, your distribution or your turnover as far as the fruit is concerned.

PUBLIC

Mr BARDON - I would say no. We are utilising chemical controls and I know we are talking here about us, not the organic farmers here, but I am not concerned at all. I have dealt with it for 15 years in Coffs Harbour. I do not see it as an issue impacting production for Costa.

Mr FINCH - You are talking about a \$40 million industry here and future expansion. How much is that predicated on support from the federal and state governments?

Mr BARDON - It is more like \$90 million in sales.

Mr FINCH - What about your partnerships with state and federal governments in respect of your expansion and growth?

Mr TOBY - We have received government funding, state and federal combined, for the expansion of the distribution centre and the modified atmosphere facility that we have at East Devonport. That is a small percentage of the capital we have invested since 2009. As I said before, we have a program of expansion in the four berry categories that we are continuing to pursue whether there is federal government money or not.

Mr FINCH - At this stage, do you have a submission with the Tasmanian Government to assist you with that growth and development?

Mr TOBY - No, we do not.

Mr FINCH - No, okay.

CHAIR - In quantum, what have you received from the state and federal governments?

Mr TOBY - I think it is \$2.4 million, all for the distribution centre and modified atmosphere facility works.

CHAIR - When did you receive the most recent grant from the state or federal governments?

Mr TOBY - It was early 2016.

CHAIR - We have raised the issue of the clean, green image of Tasmania and the Tasmanian brand. I take it that Costa is well and truly aware of the significance of the Tasmanian brand to Tasmanian producers and as to where the clean, green image fits in this state. It puts us over and above every other producing place in this country. How do Costa see that, and are Costa conscious of the fact and the need to preserve that at all cost?

Mr TOBY - Under the Driscolls brand, we operate as a joint venture between Costa and Driscolls. That is a brand that is marketing on behalf of what we grow and about half-a-dozen other growers in Tasmania. It is very important, given that at that time berries are being produced here they are not being produced anywhere else in Australia - maybe in Victoria - and that it is not possible to import. From an export perspective, it does give you a marketing advantage.

CHAIR - It has been suggested to us that Biosecurity was of the view that Costa was producing about 75 per cent of blueberries in this state. Whatever it is, you are seen as a big producer. I think it is about 40 to 45 per cent. That is the figure we have been given.

PUBLIC

Mr WILLIE - You said 50 per cent before.

CHAIR - I know you have said 50 per cent and we have from 40 to 45 to 50 per cent. The situation is this: Costa has received grants from the governments, and Costa is a big producer in this state; Biosecurity had seen fit to eradicate the 2014 farms that were infested with rust, however, when the outbreak on Costa occurred in 2016, a contrary approach is taken. It has been suggested and I put it to you that you, Costa, had a big influence on Biosecurity, on the department, as to the action they were going to take on your property.

Mr TOBY - We stated our position to those parties -

CHAIR - What is your position? What sort of an influence did you have on them?

Mr TOBY - As I said before, we had various meetings and stated our position, and also gave information to Macquarie Franklin.

CHAIR - That is interesting. The Macquarie Franklin report, I think you would be aware, is flawed in a number of respects and they also refer to the 75 per cent-

Ms RATTRAY - Eighty percent.

CHAIR - They might have referred to 80 per cent. That is one of the many flaws in the Macquarie Franklin report. You would be aware of some of the other flaws. I could go back through, but there were a number of flaws in that report.

Are you saying that report has had an impact or an effect on the containment rather than the eradication on Costa properties?

Mr TOBY - I do not know.

CHAIR - As to the meetings you had with DPIPWE and the Biosecurity personnel, can you tell us when they occurred in relation to your outbreak on your property?

Mr TOBY - After the outbreak there were various meetings.

CHAIR - Was it the position of Biosecurity at that time, when they initially came onto your property and it was identified that you had rust, that they would eradicate?

Mr BARDON - There was discussion of it. There was no trade as we were in our winter period, so nothing could occur until we had approvals for protocol. That was over a considerable time. We produce fruit in late December. Yes, it was mentioned but I can't say it was -

CHAIR - You have said you had a number of meetings. I am not sure how difficult this would be, are you able to identify the meetings you had? If you can't answer the question here now, could you take that on notice? I imagine Costa would have records of the meetings and the times you met with Biosecurity, the department and the minister.

Mr TOBY - Sure.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - Can you provide all figures and details to us as being taken on notice? Thank you, I appreciate it.

Mr BARDON - There were ongoing meetings on the farm that we couldn't document because they will turn up at certain -

CHAIR - Costa seems to be basing a lot of what they are now doing in the management of disease in this state on what has happened in New South Wales and what you are doing on your properties in New South Wales. I take it you would concede easily the climate in New South Wales is nothing like it is here in Tasmania. It is significantly different.

Mr TOBY - That is right, it is significantly more difficult.

CHAIR - In a number of reports we have been referred to today in relation to this, most seem to harken back to climatic conditions not similar to or consistent with the climatic positions here in Tasmania in the statements they are making. Do you agree with that?

Mr TOBY - The paper from Dr Strik is comparing it to Oregon where we would say the climate is similar, which is the reason for that comparison.

CHAIR - We have covered it but I raise it again. It has been put to us that Tasmania should not allow evergreen plants into the state. We should be simply deciduous because it protects against disease in that they drop their leaf, the climate is cold during the winters and therefore it kills off the rust, the spores and so on. It is a natural predator of disease. What would you say to that position, that we should not entertain the evergreen variety?

Mr BARDON - The evergreen variety we are talking about gives us an advantage. It is a great variety, a good producing variety that offers good cross-pollination for a number of other varieties. Yes, I would be concerned. I would like to see that continue. There has been significant work in breeding programs, particularly for our customers. I would say that with disease, disease can hang onto non-senescent leaves. It is not to say that because they go deciduous in winter are not going to have the disease. That is well documented. I am more concerned about growers that don't spray than growers that do spray, particularly when it comes to disease and outbreaks.

CHAIR - For the evergreen plant, as I understand, the benefit and advantage is because it produces much quicker. I think they produce within the first one or two years, whereas other plants take a longer time to yield. That is the benefit and advantage to Costa.

What would you say to the proposition that you weigh that against the organic and other growers in this state who have a market position well and truly above that of Costa; around 60 per cent of the product in this state is from the smaller organic growers. How do you see your position, of wanting to continue to grow evergreen and produce that way, as to the risk you impose on the organic growers in this state - many of whom earn their livings, their family's livings and employ people, from farming blueberries. How would you see that?

Mr BARDON - Particularly when it comes to evergreen varieties, I still say that the rust is airborne. The horse has bolted, so no matter what we do now to eliminate evergreen varieties, it's here and is going to be on our deciduous varieties.

PUBLIC

Ms ARMITAGE - We heard previously when we had the hearings in Launceston that it is only airborne for a kilometre or something like that. Would you dispute that?

Mr BARDON - Yes, definitely. I would say it got to New Zealand from Australia.

Ms ARMITAGE - I asked the question at the time about hobby farmers and they were saying that it does not travel that far. So you think it does?

Mr BARDON - Bernadine Strik, in the document you have, certainly highlighted that. The horse has bolted and this has happened. Going back to that question of plants coming into Victoria, that was identified through a bad practice or rust coming in from another state. I can understand that position, but again, how did we get rust? We followed every protocol. We have put in for every plant health certificate that has come into the state. I am asking the question: how did we get rust? I think we can identify why it came into that other farm.

Ms ARMITAGE - Not from your pickers from New South Wales?

Mr BARDON - Could it come from pickers from other farms?

CHAIR - Time is running out. I have a number of other questions and other members might have as well so we might have to ask Costa to come back once we have received further information and evidence. Hopefully Costa will accept that if we need to do that. We will only do it if there is a real need to do it. We can sometimes ask you a question by way of correspondence if there are any other issues so we may opt to do that. We certainly do not want to make it difficult for Costa in any way.

Michael made the comment at the beginning that eradication creates more problems than it will solve. I would like you to expand on why you say that. That's not the way the organic growers and some of the other growers would see it.

Mr TOBY - The main point is that you have other host plants and other possible host plants. If you are eradicating or taking out and destroying blueberry plants, to be absolutely sure you would also need to focus on those other possible host plants such as rhododendron and azalea.

CHAIR - That is a question we will ask the department. Obviously it hasn't been detected in any of those hosts plants at all or any evidence of it occurring, but you are not aware, I take it, in this state, in Tasmania, of any evidence of it being on -

Mr TOBY - Not aware of it being identified by Biosecurity Tasmania.

CHAIR - Right, and no evidence of it existing on any of these host plants in Tasmania?

Mr TOBY - I don't know.

Mr FINCH - This mention of rhododendrons and azaleas is in evidence that we received. Would they be plants that are in close proximity to the blueberry farms?

Mr TOBY - There is a rhododendron garden in Burnie.

Mr FINCH - How far away is that away from Costa's farm?

PUBLIC

Mr BARDON - About 15 kilometres possibly, to the west.

Mr FINCH - So your suggestion is that it might be airborne and travel that far.

Mr BARDON - Yes. I guess when it was first detected on that property, we always heard that in close proximity with the prevailing winds it was always likely that, irrespective of eradicating that farm, we would end up with rust. It could well be any number of host plants, blueberry farms, in that near vicinity.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms RATTRAY - In regard to the Macquarie Franklin report and given Michael said your company had input into that, did you try to source a copy of that once you knew it had been completed, or did you find it through FOI as well?

Mr TOBY - No copy was provided. It was provided to us when it was FOI'd.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for your attendance here today. We probably started off a little bit on the wrong foot but we got there. If you can get those matters taken on notice, we can provide those to you. If there is anything else you want to pass through to the committee on what you have said today, please feel free to do that as well. Thank you very much and a safe trip back to the mainland.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

PUBLIC

Dr JOHN WHITTINGTON, SECRETARY, AND **Mr LLOYD KLUMPP**, GENERAL MANAGER, BIOSECURITY TASMANIA, DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, PARKS, WATER AND ENVIRONMENT, WERE CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Thank you, John and Lloyd. You have both given evidence before these committees on many occasions so you know very well what the situation is regarding parliamentary privilege and all of that so I will not bother with that. These public hearings are being broadcast live today, as you are aware. We received your submission and a number of attachments and they are quite expansive, so we appreciate that and thank you very much. The committee was very happy to provide the extra time because of the work you had to do.

Dr WHITTINGTON - There was a second submission provided I believe late last week which I am not sure has been provided.

CHAIR - I do not think we got that.

Dr WHITTINGTON - It certainly has been provided but as part of an introduction I am happy to just run through what that is about. It is about IP4.

CHAIR - I can give you the opportunity to do that now and speak to your section or add to it.

Dr WHITTINGTON - Thank you for the opportunity, we appreciate that. It is an important committee dealing with an important matter and one we have spent a lot of time working on as an agency and in BT. I will start with overview remarks and will not go into great detail because the submission is very thorough, but Lloyd is across some of the more technical detail so I might defer to him midway through this.

I thought I would take you through three things in the opening comments - a little about the process that this response sits within, the biosecurity framework; a little bit on the current status and that really goes to the second submission I have just mentioned; and third I would like to touch on some of the lessons learned to date as a way to finish my other comments.

The first part is about the process. It is important to understand our response framework and associated processes that we use are entirely consistent with and encapsulated within the Tasmanian biosecurity system. That system is built on a series of principles used nationally and internationally, which are that we adopt the procedures that are the least burdensome and restrictive but provide the highest level of protection or whatever we are seeking; that the decisions are evidence based and there is risk-based allocation of resources; and the cost benefit is very much a part of our decision making. They are the principles the Tasmanian biosecurity system is built upon. It operates within national and international frameworks. An incursion such as blueberry rust or any incursion, whether it is in the plant or animal world, triggers a number of responses. As in our submission, consistent with the generalised evasion curve on page 5 of our submission, our aim is to focus on prevention. That is where the cost benefit is the greatest. Then eradication, then containment, and then management. There is a well documented process about how you shift from one to the next.

When it comes to a specific incursion we have a range of decision tools to assist in our decision making. We have described those on page 15 and 23 of our submission. Those tools

PUBLIC

have been used consistently through a range of incursions, whether it was AVG back in 2007, the POMS in 2015, both blueberry rust incursions and a range of other incursions along the way. We have a set of tools we use in both the plant and animal world to help frame our decision-making. If you want more detail on any of those then we will throw to Lloyd later on.

As I mentioned initially, there are currently four infected properties in Tasmania. The fourth property was only recently found. The properties are the Costa property, there are two near Stowport about nine to 10 kilometres due west of the Costa property, and then this additional property that we have just found, which is 45 kilometres from the Costa property. We found that property as part of our statewide surveillance. It was part of our market access arrangements, and because we want to understand where the rust is we survey all of the commercial properties in the state three times during the season. As soon as leaf burst occurs, we have a program of surveillance, and then we do it two more times during the growing season. As part of that statewide surveillance program, we are going to 60 or 70 properties - I cannot remember the exact number. Lloyd?

Mr KLUMPP - Seventy-two.

Dr WHITTINGTON - One of those had a small number of suspect plants. Samples were taken from those plants, sent to our laboratories and they were confirmed as blueberry rust. Immediately we began a process of notifying the affected owner. I will come back a little more to IP4 in a moment.

Our focus now with blueberry rust is on regulated containment and we describe what that means in our submission. We have a strong focus on managing the impacts on growers. We work very hard with the affected growers. There are three other IPs as well as Costa. We have a very strong focus on maintaining market access and we have been very successful to date, I believe, in doing that, including for the coming summer season. We work hard on developing and implementing site management plans on infected properties.

Those site management plans have statutory effect and they require - as do directions, which are provided before we have a site measure plan in place - certain actions to be taken by the landowner. I was here for the last of the Costa group. They have a number of requirements placed upon them, which I am happy to speak to, or Lloyd will speak to later if you would like, requiring washing down the vehicles, leaving the property and the like. The other thing I mentioned is that we have a statewide surveillance program that is run three times a year.

We have learned many things from this, from both the 2014 and 2016 incursions. After an event like this we do an after action review. We are still in the process with what is happening right now but post-2014 we did an after action review and we have continuously reviewed how we have gone with the 2016 incursion. I think that review and reflection also follows things like appearing before your committee at budget Estimates. We take all of these as learning experiences.

One of the things we have learned is that our communications were less than ideal, following the 2016 incursion. As I mentioned at Estimates, that was an area we did need to improve and we have taken positive steps in that area. Since that time, we have had direct email contact with growers. We have a much better understanding of the blueberry growers in the state. We have a much better understanding of where they are and who they are. Our databases are better. Lloyd has sent something like 12 direct emails to all growers, keeping them updated of where we are at

PUBLIC

with respect to market access, farm hygiene requirements and most recently about IP4 and its detection. We have a much better website than we had previously, which is updated regularly and we have more workshops planned with growers to talk about market access arrangements for the summer.

Another area that we have learned a lot about is - I will call it - industry intelligence. What we learned after 2014 and again re-learned in 2016, is that we do not have an adequate understanding of where blueberries are grown commercially in the state. That is not limited to blueberries. The same can be said for pretty much any plant-based production system. There are no state or national registers of what is grown where. To contrast that, in the plant production systems that we regulate, you would be aware of PICs - property identification codes - that properties have and then that is linked to the NLIS, the tagging system. In the animal production systems we know where animals are bred, we know where they are growing, we know where they move to when they are sold and when they are slaughtered. There is no such similar approach in the plant system. That is something that is a gap nationally and there are discussions happening nationally about how this could occur. Part of the work that we are doing with TFGA with the monies, part of the grant they have recently been given is to think a bit more about how we get a better handle on what is grown where. There is always going to be a real difficulty in this. As you mentioned, you have two blueberry plants in your back garden now.

Ms ARMITAGE - I do. They are both still alive.

Dr WHITTINGTON - I have three that I was given as a birthday present a few weeks ago.

Ms ARMITAGE - Don't give them fluoride water or chlorine water. I was told it has to be rainwater to keep them alive.

Dr WHITTINGTON - Okay. The point I was going to make is there is a continuum between people like you and me with residential back gardens through to the last speakers you had here. This is always going to be a dilemma in something like the trace forward/trace back processes we have. Even if we had fantastic information on every commercial grower, there is that grey where we may trade things. I might give you some eggs for some blueberries and so we get into that sort of grey area and then there is an issue.

Ms ARMITAGE - My spores could travel. I am learning it could be 1000 kilometres.

Dr WHITTINGTON - The point I am trying to make is that industry intelligence is vital and we need to get better at it but it is not the panacea for everything. As you can have a pet sheep, you can have a pet blueberry vine.

The third area that we have learned a lot about is that our systems we use - by 'our' I mean the biosecurity systems the Tasmanian Government uses through Biosecurity Tasmania, whether they are the national ones rolled out here or the ones we built ourselves - there is not enough knowledge of those and how they are used more generally. That is a communications problem for us and we need to get much better at explaining to the agricultural sector, as well as the broader community that is interested, how the biosecurity systems do work. When there is an incursion, people understand the pathway that we are all on together, rather than trying to understand the pathway. It is very hard to get that information right now. We are aware of that and we know we have to do better.

PUBLIC

Mr KLUMPP - John has given a pretty good overview. If you would like detail about any of those systems I am more than happy to elaborate.

CHAIR - We will probably find out through questions following John's comments, thank you.

Mr FINCH - Gentlemen, from the evidence we have received from growers and concerned people in this industry, this does not seem to have been a good process for Biosecurity Tasmania or from the department. Would you care to comment on it? Is that being unfair? There has been a lot of adverse discussion about the role Biosecurity Tasmania and the department has played.

Dr WHITTINGTON - I do not in any way want to belittle anybody's experience. If people have felt they had been badly treated then they have felt that. I don't for one moment want to belittle or talk down their experience. From Biosecurity Tasmania and the department's perspective, these are extremely difficult and challenging circumstances.

If we go back to the 2014 incursion, we found rust at a distribution centre. We went through a process of trying to trace that rust, both backward into Victoria and forward into Tasmania - if you bear with me there is a point to this - we ended up tracing those roots back into Victoria and, we understand, from the nursery the infected plants came from.

We also found that, moving forward, around 42 residential properties were infected. We found infected plants on 42 residential properties right across the state - there is a map in the submission. I cannot remember which page it is on. It shows you where those infected properties were. It was found in a freight depot, we found it in nine other separate nurseries and on two small commercial properties. We often think it was only the two commercial growers impacted but there were over 50 infected premises that we dealt with.

The point I am making is when one of these incursions comes it generates an enormous amount of work that needs to be done really, really quickly so it is all hands on deck. There is a lot of tension and stress in that situation. We know that when we go onto somebody's property we understand, absolutely, that it is not only a workplace, it is often their home, it is their life, it is their livelihood, it is their property. So we are very conscious that we are impacting on people. All those things put stress on our staff as well.

If you look back at the 2014 incursion in summary, we believe that we had eradicated the rust at that time. That is an extraordinary event. Rusts are not normally eradicated; they are so complicated to trace and eradicate. Whether we were truly successful, that will be an argument for the ages because I can't stand here and say we were, but statistically at that time we were convinced we were.

Come to the 2016 incursion, again, a lot of stress and work placed on good people in Biosecurity who are working, in my view, to the best of their ability in trying times. We had a property with over 150 000 plants on it. We had properties all around that needed to be surveyed. We had an enormous amount of work to do in a small period of time and I think, on the whole, our response has been technically sound. As I said, we can always learn and we can do better. I think the examples I have given of learnings like communications could be better and our understanding of where disease is could be better.

PUBLIC

It is a very longwinded way of saying, Mr Finch, I think we could have done better but from Biosecurity's perspective, I think we did a pretty good job.

Mr FINCH - Thanks. Did you want to comment?

Mr KLUMPP - Yes, in answer to your initial question, the framework we work in is well constructed and very mature. It is a framework that has been built nationally and we implement that framework in Tasmania in a very consistent way.

We have national plans called PLANTPLAN in the plant work, AUSVETPLAN in the animal world, and they are well thought out, well-constructed emergency response plans. They are supported by a range of protocols and procedures sitting underneath those, right down to standard operating procedures for what happens in the field. We take those plans, procedures and the training associated with that and the implementation of that very seriously.

You asked if I thought it was unfair. I think it is a bit unfair for us to be accused of not following those procedures. They are our bible; they are what we live by.

Mr FINCH - The criticism has been strong and that is why we are here with the inquiry.

I am wondering about the resourcing of Biosecurity Tasmania. You say, John, you have those emergency plans and you put them into place and you go with it. What is the quantum of the budget for the department - the numbers - and do you have an opportunity to call on extra people in those times of emergency?

Dr WHITTINGTON - I will answer the question in three parts. The expenditure for BT for the coming financial year, as in the budget papers, is about \$25.3 million, which is higher than it has been in the previous years. There are more resources going into BT now than there have in my time in the role. We have an FTE count of 170 people in BT paid in the last fortnight. Again, compare that to a couple of years ago and it is higher. It was about 160 in the same fortnight a couple of years ago. We have more money and more people in BT now than we have had in the past.

We are also better organised and trained now than we would have been if you go back four or five years. We have restructured the way Biosecurity operates and we have an operational arm, many arms and legs, that can move between animals, plants, environmental pests and production pests. They are quite agile. We have more people and more money and we are better able to respond.

More broadly than that, and I will use myrtle rust as an example. When we had myrtle rust and blueberry rust, almost a coincidence, we were spread thinly. I can call on other parts of the agency and we did in the case of myrtle rust. We used people from the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens and we used people from other divisions within the agency because we train one set of response protocols across the agency. I can draw on the resources of the whole agency.

If it turned into a particular level of escalation, then I can call on my equivalents from other states to provide resources. The blueberry rust did not reach that national level, but there are examples of diseases that have come into Australia for the first time. BT staff, and staff from other parts of the agency including Parks and the like, will go off to assist other states with responses. We have had people assist with banana freckle and white spot with prawn responses

PUBLIC

within the last year. We have resources in BT, we have them in the agency, I can call on other parts of government under certain circumstances, and I can call on other governments in extreme circumstances.

Mr WILLIE - I know we covered some of this in Estimates. I want to go to the ex gratia payments. How was that amount determined? What was the methodology?

Dr WHITTINGTON - It was a recognition of the hardship suffered. There is no algorithm that I can give you.

Mr WILLIE - As the department, do you acknowledge there is a perception that the treatment of those first two farms, in light of more incursions, was unfair and whether the department could have done more to help them re-establish their farms? Potentially, could the ex gratia payments have been more reflective of the economic loss?

Dr WHITTINGTON - I will answer that in part. The first thing that is important to note is that the current legislation that operates in this space does not provide for compensation for these sorts of things. In fact, it is explicitly not providing for that. I should have said there were four lessons out of this. This was something we knew prior to this incursion, which is represented in these difficult situations we have here with those two properties. The Government has recognised that through an ex gratia payment. The new legislation we are drafting at the moment has owner reimbursement built into the foundations of that draft legislation, the new biosecurity bill. That will help in future incursions.

The second part of your question is, I am paraphrasing, did we do the right thing in 2014? In the 2014 incursion, because we knew where the plants had come from, Victoria, and we knew where they were sold through the distribution networks, we had a red-hot go at eradication. That meant removal of those infected plants on those properties. I absolutely understand and accept that it must have been an awful experience for the two properties and I know that they were deeply affected by that. My staff also - they did not lose their livelihoods through this but they were there pulling out the plants and experiencing and witnessing the owners.

It was the right decision in the context of the information we had at the time using the protocols that we had. Could we have done it better? If the legislation had owner reimbursement built into it, like the draft legislation is proposing to do, then I think the situation could have worked a lot better. The ex gratia payments help but by no means do they take away the pain that those growers suffered.

Mr FINCH - Could those ex gratia payments that were made have been, and by your recognition it sounds as though you agree they were, inadequate for the circumstances?

Dr WHITTINGTON - I did not say that. I said they were in recognition of the hardship suffered. I am sure that if you were to ask those two people they would say that no amount of money could give them back what they have lost.

Mr FINCH - I wanted to put words in your mouth, that's all.

Dr WHITTINGTON - I am very careful that you don't.

PUBLIC

Mr FINCH - I am wondering whether that circumstance could be revisited for those people. We have them moving into the future feeling they have lost, they have been disenfranchised and not treated well. Could a case be mounted for them to approach the Government again to suggest they might be reconsidered and given some support?

Dr WHITTINGTON - It is always open to approach the government of the day to have a discussion about how we might assist them. I am sure any minister would welcome continuous contact. I know it is not my place to say it. I know my minister has been in contact and I am sure is very motivated to ensure they have a good future in their businesses.

Ms RATTRAY - In regard to the more efficient workforce, we heard some evidence this morning to say there was a property inspection about an hour-and-a-half out of Hobart. The people who were undertaking the inspection went down at 8.30 a.m. and finished at about 11.30 a.m. There was another block across the road with the same property owner and yet they went back to Hobart, came back the next day and travelled again, effectively three hours, and did the other side of the road. It took about the same time, from 8.30 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. Do you think it is really that efficient? Would there be some reason?

Dr WHITTINGTON - I am not aware of the circumstances.

Mr KLUMPP - I don't know the circumstances either. It may well have been, depending on what else was happening at the time, I do not know.

Ms RATTRAY - They were going back to HQ; that was what they told her. When we hear stories like that, but we also hear -

Mr KLUMPP - I can postulate a couple of things but I do not know the circumstances.

Ms RATTRAY - Maybe you might take that on notice?

Dr WHITTINGTON - One of the things we do is keep really good, accurate running sheets of our activities in these surveillance programs. I have read through the submissions. There are certain assertions made around when people came to the property, what they did and what samples they took. We have really good running sheets, minute by minute, hour by hour of who was where, where they went, what they did, what they observed, how they have bagged things, where they have gone and what our travel times are. We will provide the information but it is important to understand that our processes do document it. If there are examples and it may be that sometimes we get it wrong, we will work it out. We will find out the circumstances of that for you.

Mr KLUMPP - There may be a very good reason, a suspect case on that block and they did not want to go and infect the other block.

Dr WHITTINGTON - That is another good point. Another thing I have read in the submissions is that we might be inadvertently moving rust from one property to another during our surveillance. We have really strong protocols around how we maintain hygiene on ourselves and this happened with IP4. Once we go onto a property and in this case there is a suspect plant, the people who were involved in that inspection effectively go offline until that issue is resolved. There is then a potential waiting time before they can then restart work in the field. We are acutely aware that we could be a vector if we did not manage that really carefully. All of those

PUBLIC

things come into play about where our staff travel and how frequently and all those sorts of things.

Ms RATTRAY - You told us if you have been involved in that and have identified the rust issue then you have to remove yourself and you are not available. Is there a high turnover of staff?

Mr KLUMPP - A high turnover of staff involved?

Ms RATTRAY - Yes, or high turnover of staff generally. We heard that one property had people doing the detection, that was their first day and they really did not know what they were looking for. We are giving some feedback, that is all. The questions are posed to us.

Mr KLUMPP - Our staff go through pretty rigorous training before we allow them on properties.

Ms RATTRAY - That would not be the case?

Mr KLUMPP - I do not believe that would be the case.

Dr WHITTINGTON - We also work in teams and there could be a different level of experience within the team.

Mr KLUMPP - They are teams. Sometimes there is a team leader who is very experienced and they may have people who are less experienced with them. They will have all gone through training.

Ms RATTRAY - You would never send out a team of four, with it being the first time for all of them looking for blueberry rust on a farm.

Mr KLUMPP - No, we would not do that.

Ms RATTRAY - No, that is good. I am pleased to hear that.

Chair, if I can also ask about the Macquarie Franklin report. I would like to understand why that report wasn't made available to the industry more broadly and had to be accessed under an FOI. That is something that has puzzled people in the industry and it has puzzled me, considering the information would have been gathered from the industry. They would have every right to look at it.

Dr WHITTINGTON - I will talk a little about the MacFrank report, the Macquarie Franklin report. As I said in the lessons learned, one of the things we did not know a lot about and we still don't have great data on, is the value of the industry, where the commercial properties are and their production systems in the economic context.

Ms RATTRAY - They were way off with the numbers, weren't they?

Dr WHITTINGTON - We had ABS census data from 2010-11 at the time. That was clearly out of date. We commissioned Macquarie Franklin, a well-known and reputable Tasmanian agricultural company. They used whatever data they could find and that included ringing around

PUBLIC

our database and other networks that they had. They talked to the grower representatives at the time. Through that process they tried to pull together a snapshot of the industry at that time.

The better data that we have now is the ABS census data that was recently released and we have reproduced that in the scorecard. I don't know if you have seen this document but it is worth a read. The department has put it out and I have a number of copies here. That data is the most up-to-date across the sector, so that is what we would be relying upon now.

That was the background. Macquarie Franklin was a snapshot done under a very short time frame and, I am sure, if the company they were given three months or six months the report would have improved because of that. I was desperate to get some information about the industry.

Why didn't we release it as soon as it was written? In hindsight, there are a lot of things I have learned about communications and that might have been something we could have done better. We did get information from growers and some growers were providing the information in confidence. We thought the best way of releasing was to go through an RTI process and that way we could ensure that everybody who was potentially affected had an opportunity to object to its release. I think it was an unredacted version that was finally released, so everybody was comfortable. That is the best way I can describe it. Time again, I think we should have worked harder to release earlier and we should have built into the initial contract that we were going to be releasing it straight away. A lot of that angst would have gone away.

Ms ARMITAGE - How important does the department consider Tasmania's organic blueberry industry?

Dr WHITTINGTON - All primary producers are important to the agency and we have some resource within the agency that is dedicated to supporting the organic industry.

Ms ARMITAGE - Tasmania's organic industry and clean, green image and so on?

Dr WHITTINGTON - That extends right across, whether it is GM-free, growth hormone-free, organic; there is a range of production systems that all make up Tasmanian agriculture and they are all part of who we are.

Ms ARMITAGE - It is all equal?

Dr WHITTINGTON - It is all important, yes.

Ms ARMITAGE - Would you agree then that containment over eradication and chemical spraying puts the organic industry and farms at risk?

Dr WHITTINGTON - There is no doubt if blueberry rust becomes widespread in Tasmania it will be much more complicated for organic growers to produce and with blueberry rust they may not be able to produce and export.

Ms ARMITAGE - So they could go, totally, as the TFGA mentioned to us.

Dr WHITTINGTON - There are organic blueberry growers in rust-affected areas on the mainland so it is not impossible. I do not underestimate that it is a much more complicated task. I am not a blueberry grower and I don't produce fruit for a living.

PUBLIC

Ms RATTRAY - You only have three plants.

Ms ARMITAGE - You only have one, haven't you?

Dr WHITTINGTON - No, I have three. They are probably the size of one.

Ms ARMITAGE - We have done some site visits as well as hearings. Concern was raised about how spraying affects the environment, the animals, flora and fauna, how it runs off into the water and so on.

Dr WHITTINGTON - Much of Tasmania has conventional agriculture and non-organic. There are rules around the use of herbicides, pesticides and fungicides. Most production in Tasmania is done with the use of crop protection products. They can be used safely as long as it is done appropriately and as required under the label.

Mr KLUMPP - And the Agriculture and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act.

Ms ARMITAGE - I notice you have protocols for farms that may be infected by things leaving other farms. Do you have equivalent protocols to try to prevent the blueberry rust? Some of the farms we spoke to are saying they have the footbaths, they have the washing facilities and they don't employ people from places such as New South Wales. Do you encourage that? As we heard from Costa, they are not overly concerned about that. They employ from New South Wales. You have protocols for people coming off the farms. Are you looking to prevent and, equally, looking to have some protocols for people going onto the farm?

People also mentioned cars coming across on the *Spirit*, some had a fair bit of mud on them and they were given a cursory glance and asked where they were coming from. Do you consider that adequate? Could we do more to try to prevent the blueberry rust coming in those areas, apart from the airborne spores?

Dr WHITTINGTON - There are a number of questions in there. I will ask Lloyd to talk about the farm hygiene workshops we are running to assist growers to understand good farm hygiene practice, also a little about border protection operations.

Mr KLUMPP - I have often described farm biosecurity plans as the holy grail of biosecurity. We would like every farmer, every enterprise to have a biosecurity plan, which includes the sorts of things that you mentioned. If we had those sorts of systems on every farm we might get an incursion there that will never go anywhere else; that is our holy grail. We work through a whole range of avenues to try to promote those sorts of systems. Animal Health Australia and Plant Health Australia have template biosecurity plans for a range of industries.

We have workshops of our own, particularly for the blueberry growers, that we have focused there recently. In the past we have had workshops about farm biosecurity planning, we have organisations like the Cattle Council of Australia run a livestock biosecurity network extending on-farm biosecurity plans through their industries. They are not mandatory.

Ms ARMITAGE - I accept where you are going with that. We heard from Costa and many others during hearings in Launceston that they hold a lot of stake in who is coming onto their properties. Are you happy with the procedures and the protocols that Costa has?

PUBLIC

Mr KLUMPP - We have a site management plan, which is mandatory.

Ms ARMITAGE - Are you happy with what Costa is doing at the moment, with regard to bringing their workers from New South Wales, or with people saying equivalent comes in on the ships? Do you think they are doing all they could, or do you think they could do more?

Mr KLUMPP - I am not sure what more they could do.

Ms ARMITAGE - A lot of the others have washing facilities for people coming onto the farms. Workers have to do it on-site. They have the footbaths and they do not have people from New South Wales coming to work on their farms.

Mr KLUMPP - Costa has people coming from New South Wales, but they have those other measures in place that you mentioned. Can we stop people moving and being employed? I am not sure that is the role of Biosecurity Tasmania.

Ms ARMITAGE - Do you consider that evergreen plants should be planted in Tasmania, considering we have heard from a variety of different people they are more prone to blueberry rust? I know they crop better, but do you feel consideration should be given to not allowing the evergreen blueberry plants in Tasmania because of the likelihood that they may have blueberry rust?

Mr KLUMPP - I do not think there is sufficient evidence. We have not seen sufficient evidence that the banning of evergreen plants would improve the disease control situation.

Dr WHITTINGTON - One of the other complications is the use of polytunnels, which are very much a part of modern production systems. My understanding is that even deciduous plants in polytunnels can retain some leaves through the years. They are not an evergreen bush but you can get a carry over of leaf material. It is not as simple as remove evergreens and we will break the cycle. There is a lot that we do not understand about the rust. As Lloyd said, the evidence is not there for us to make that statement at the moment.

Ms ARMITAGE - I appreciate it. As novices, we are learning and we have to question the information we receive.

CHAIR - As a follow up, evidence along this line was given to us by a number of organic growers. I suspect you would have read the transcripts. They note the evergreen plant is more susceptible because it carries it for longer as it does not drop its leaves. Tasmania's climate is such that the deciduous trees drop their leaves. The climate, which is quite cold, will kill off the rust spores and all of those things, so there is evidence. That has been one of the issues raised with us.

You would have gleaned also from the transcripts of evidence, the suggestion that Biosecurity, the department, is failing to keep up with the science around the blueberry growing areas. They have failed to look at the up-to-date science, the studies now out, the right reports and they are taking notice of some reports that are flawed in many respects and in some respects are outdated. That is the information that we have been given. What would you say to that position?

PUBLIC

Dr WHITTINGTON - I might start and then pass to Lloyd. As we said in our submission, and they produced a submission to you directly, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture is the university's agriculture department. We seek advice directly through Holger, the professor who runs TIA, and his advice has been emphatic around eradication. We have also worked with New South Wales DPI, as have representatives of the fruit growers, and the final piece of advice we have had from there again is that our eradication appears to be the most sensible way forward at this time.

We do not pretend to know everything about blueberry rust. We are looking to invest in research in this area and I am encouraging TIA to develop an active research program in the soft fruit berry area. As you have heard, the industry has grown rapidly from a low base to now, if you look right across the soft fruit, it is probably around \$60 million-plus a year if you look across the full berry basket, and is growing considerably year on year. We need our agricultural R&D to be keeping up with that expansion. There is more we can learn and I am confident that TIA will put more effort into that.

CHAIR - That is one of the issues for the organic growers. For a lot of them, it's their livelihood; they are living off it. They are not seen, and there has been criticism levelled at the department for identifying a number of these people as simply hobby farmers and so on. You have copped a lot of criticism over that - there is no doubt about that - and probably justified as well. They live and breathe blueberries.

Dr WHITTINGTON - We understand that.

CHAIR - That is their livelihood, and what they are saying, and it is fairly clear if you look at all the evidence we have received so far, is that they've got a damn good knowledge of it and they keep right up with what is happening around the world and Oregon and these other places where it came from. They are making the statement that Biosecurity is left to do a lot of work in coming to terms with just how they should manage it and what they should do. Do you accept the position that you need to do more work in this area to ensure that you have a good grasp on this because of the way it is going?

Dr WHITTINGTON - As I said previously, we take advice from wherever we can get it. The Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture at the University of Tasmania is a major supplier of advice to us. We have also worked with the New South Wales DPI. We certainly don't know everything, but -

CHAIR - Sorry. One of the areas the department has been criticised for is that you're taking too much notice of what is happening in New South Wales, because the climatic conditions are grossly different to what they are here in this state. It is not a good pattern -

Dr WHITTINGTON - We absolutely understand that they also produce more than 80 per cent of Australia's blueberries. They produce by far and away most of Australian blueberries, so that is where there is a lot of knowledge - the New South Wales DPI.

Ms RATTRAY - It's 90 per cent actually, John.

Dr WHITTINGTON - I knew it was more than 80, I just didn't know what it was. We then are second. We go there because there is knowledge there, but we also use TIA and we will use anybody else and everywhere else we can. We can learn more and we will and there needs to be

PUBLIC

R&D that is Tasmania-specific. As I said, the industry is new and this will be an area of R&D into the future.

Mr KLUMPPP - As you would expect, I am going to defend my staff. In terms of the lack of respect for the industry, that has arisen from one comment by one staff member in one meeting. That staff member was a lab staff member, not a field staff member. That lack of respect for the industry has been a lack of understanding of the industry and has been grossly over estimated, over stated.

CHAIR - Is that so? You've already said here today that you still don't know the number of growers in the state, and going back to the 2014 outbreak, you said there were something like 40-odd growers in the state when in fact there were 80 or 100, or whatever it was. You were very clearly wrong with the production of Costa and what they were doing compared with the rest of the state and so on. You didn't have the information I thought the department would have had, because blueberries have been growing in this state since about the 1980s, I think, at a level where they have been sold off and packaged and so on.

Mr KLUMPP - I acknowledge that there are gaps in that data, but I don't acknowledge the lack of expertise in the staff who do the research, undertake that gathering of knowledge and assess scientific evidence. As John said, that evidence is gathered from a wide range of places - Plant Health Australia, New South Wales DPI, TIA, international papers and, in fact, even papers submitted to us by growers through the process of feedback to us.

I don't think that information is assessed in a narrow way, it is assessed in a scientific way. We have staff who are highly skilled, with national and international reputations, working for us within DPI/PWE and BT, but that does not stop them reaching out to all of their colleagues in many other organisations..

CHAIR - You would accept, wouldn't you, that it is difficult for the organic growers in particular to have confidence in your department, when your department can't even tell them the number of growers in the state and how much is being produced and so on. They are saying to us that they have no confidence in the department.

Mr KLUMPP - I can understand that view but, as John said earlier, that would be the view of pretty much every sector in the state other than the livestock industry. That is something we recognise both within the state and nationally and there is a major national project about to kick off that the agriculture ministers have set off in trying to address that particular issue about coming to understand where things are grown.

Clearly there is a lot of work to be done there in terms of what the system might look like. The National Livestock Identification System is nearly 30 years old and we still have problems with that system. There is a big chunk of work for us to do in terms of traceability in the horticulture sectors and the fruit growing sectors. We have nothing at the moment. We relied very much on the communications program we put out, which was quite extensive, in order to try to gather that information. We relied very much on who we thought were the appropriate industry representatives to help us gather that information, but we were left wanting and that is the fact of the matter. We need to improve that system.

Dr WHITTINGTON - If I may add to that - and this goes to the point I was making before about the continuum between a large-scale commercial, medium or small, something that is

PUBLIC

bigger than a backyard but still not quite commercial - if you look at IP2 and 3 in the 2016 incursion, despite all the communications that have been around blueberry rust working through the grower representatives, both of those properties were unknown to us at the time they were discovered. One self-reported and then we worked out it was the property across the fence. One had 100 plants, they were commercial and they supplied through 'pick your own'. When the fruit was ready the sign went on the gate, which was important to them. We don't have systems for capturing that.

So when it goes from 50 growers to 60 growers to 70 growers, some of those can be quite large growers coming in that we didn't know about, but we also have this grey area as well between smaller, moderate and large and then residential. Even if we had, as we have in the livestock space, really good systems with PICs and NLIS, when you get into that end you never actually know where the last one is. That's not a reason not to do it but just to recognise that it is hard. To your point, we did not have full appreciation of the size of the industry at the time and we've acknowledged that.

Mr FINCH - My question goes to confidence in the department and the advisors. We are here today because the evidence that has come through the discussion that is out there in the community and coming through to our committee has been concern about the way the processes were handled and the future of not only the blueberry industry but also other aspects for Biosecurity Tasmania and the department. I know communication has been an issue and that is being or has been addressed, but I am also wondering what other steps might be considered by yourselves to rebuild that confidence so that Tasmanians, the community in its entirety, can be confident that it is in good hands.

Dr WHITTINGTON - Again, in the lessons learned we have talked about communication, so I will give that as a given. We operate within an international and national system, so we have processes that are well tested, well proven and well used internationally, nationally and in Tasmania. What we need to be doing, and what I would like us to do better, is to share those and for people to understand a lot better about the biosecurity systems that operate currently so that when there is an incursion there is an understanding of the pathway we are all on together. That would go a long way to understanding and confidence. Having a really solid, single piece of legislation that encompasses the field and biosecurity is really important. As you are aware, there is a draft biosecurity bill in the final stages of preparation. That will provide a really solid foundation for managing the biosecurity system. That provides a really good opportunity to reset the whole communication and education around what biosecurity means.

Third, we have a Tasmanian biosecurity strategy. It has been reviewed once previously. We have had it about 10 years. The minister has committed to us reviewing that strategy and it is a good opportunity to do that. The last time we did it was with PIBAA - the Primary Industry Biosecurity Action Alliance. That was a very successful process, working with industry to jointly develop a strategy. It is the time to do that again.

Right now, nationally, there is what is sometimes called the Craik Review. There was a review into the Australian Biosecurity system that was released by the Australian Government and/or jurisdiction ministers in the middle of the year. That review looks at Australia's biosecurity system and includes us in that view.

The governments are developing their response to that at the moment. That provides a fantastic overarching umbrella in which to review our biosecurity system. One of the outcomes of

PUBLIC

the Craik Review is it has addressed Tasmania's concerns around biosecurity and will allow us to join the IGA, the Intergovernmental Agreement, on biosecurity. That will be an important step for Tasmania as well.

Mr KLUMPP - My short answer is we need to work with our industry partners and community better than we have in the past.

Mr WHITTINGTON - If I may Chair, I realise now the committee has probably never seen the Craik Review. If I may, I will send a copy to you all because it gives a really good overview of Australia and where Tasmania sits.

CHAIR - If you can provide a copy of that to our secretary that would be great. We may have to ask you to come back. You answered this question in Estimates, and it was brought up by one of our witnesses who gave evidence last week.

The question is around a statement on your website advising that the blueberry rust disease was now endemic and would be removed from the exotic pests and diseases register without consultation with industry, discovered by growers on the DPIWE website after the FGT conference in May 2017. This was taken down from the website after written verbal complaints to various ministers by growers. One of the witnesses raised that with us. What went wrong there? What happened there? How did this occur?

Mr WHITTINGTON - As you can understand, we have a range of contingencies on the go. It is part of running a system like ours. There was a contingency that had the movement of blueberry rust from one schedule to another under the act - I have forgotten the specific schedules -

Mr KLUMPP - From part A to part B.

Mr WHITTINGTON - From part A to part B. We had communications on that scenario and we had communications on not doing it. Unfortunately, a mistake was made in the department; that went up onto the website when it should not have. The decision was never made to do that. It was considered, but not made. We are always reviewing our approach.

CHAIR - Sorry, what did you say? The decision was -

Mr WHITTINGTON - Considered, but not made. Unfortunately, at a point later - there are thousands of things going onto our website - that went up and it should not have. It was a mistake and was pulled down. When it was brought to our attention we pulled it down. As I said at Estimates, it should not have gone up there. It was not a decision made, but clearly we have communication materials for all sorts of eventualities and that was what happened there.

CHAIR - Once again, it was very damaging to the department. Witnesses are still referring to that and they feel if the department does this, what else are they doing or not doing?

Mr WHITTINGTON - We have learnt from that. If I may, because it did get a little bit confused in the call back on this, I might ask Lloyd to explain the difference between the two schedules so that you can understand. It is important to do that, if that is alright, Chair?

CHAIR - Yes, sure.

PUBLIC

Mr KLUMPP - Prior to detection in Tasmania, blueberry rust was a List A disease. List A diseases are those diseases we consider exotic to Tasmania. They do not exist in Tasmania. Upon detection of a disease within the state, if that disease clearly is present in the state it is no longer appropriate to be a List A disease and we then move that to a List B disease. List B diseases are still regulated. They are regulated within the state and those powers are used to manage List B diseases in the control of those diseases for eradication, all the way through to management of declared diseases. That was the shift. Somebody mistakenly called it deregulation. It was not deregulation. It was changing from List A to list B because the disease is in the state. Simple as that.

Dr WHITTINGTON - I have not made the decision to shift yet because I am entirely hopeful that with crop protection products supplied to the infected properties, that maybe -

Ms RATTRAY - Supplementary to that, in Costa's submission and what they have said today, they have already said that it is likely that it is already endemic in Tasmania. He said, 'the horse has bolted'. Those were the exact words. Do members recall that?

Dr WHITTINGTON - We do not agree. If we agreed with that the strategy would be entirely different. The strategy would not be one of regulated containment. We do not accept that. We believe that regulated containment is the right approach. What that does is put in every control we can think of that sensibly maintains the rust to property. We believe that is the right strategy.

I thought it was also interesting to hear from the previous speaker, which I came in at the end of, was that they do not believe there is any rust on their property at this time. I do not know if that is true or not, but we will be looking as part of our regular sampling. I do not know if they are right, but it would be great news if it turned out to be true. It certainly was there.

Mr WILLIE - On containment, we heard from the TFGA and they could not put a time line on it, but if it continued to spread, the last figure they gave was within 10 years there will not be an organic industry. Since 2014, it has been negotiated by Biosecurity Tasmania on a farm-by-farm basis into Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. Have those states given you an indication of the tipping point, when to not bother?

Mr KLUMPP - Under the pest-free places of production system there is no tipping point. You could have one farm who, if they can prove that they are free of the disease, will still have access and it could be surrounded by disease.

Mr WILLIE - Even if it was endemic in Tasmania, a farm-by-farm negotiation could still occur?

Mr KLUMPP - Yes, and that happens for a number of other diseases. We have pest-free places of production for fruit fly in the Sunraysia that allow export of that fruit to other states. That is the system under the interstate certification agreements and that system allows for farm-by-farm certification freedom; pest-free places of production.

Mr FINCH - Maybe we did not go down the path of fruit fly-free.

PUBLIC

Ms RATTRAY - It would put a cloud or a question mark over the organic status, wouldn't it, if you were surrounded by farms that have blueberry rust but you are lucky enough to have been able to stay blueberry rust-free and keep your organic status?

Mr KLUMPP - It comes back to evidence.

Mr WILLIE - You mentioned before, John, there are organic growers in New South Wales in a place where the rust is endemic. They could, with farm-by-farm negotiation, export into South Australia and Victoria as well. Is that the case?

Mr KLUMPP - They already do.

Mr WILLIE - They do? Okay.

Ms RATTRAY - Only 10 per cent of their market.

CHAIR - There are a lot of things you require to be done and you gave us one example today; site management plans are mandatory. Evidence has been given to us of requirements when you would have been at Costa, security and all those things that needed to be complied with. Are there any penalties that apply in any of these cases where they do not comply?

Mr KLUMPP - Yes, in the Quarantine Act.

CHAIR - So if you give a direction and it is not carried out, has anybody ever been charged?

Mr KLUMPP - Not in the blueberry rust space. I don't know, Mr Dean, I would have to go back and find out.

CHAIR - You might be able to get that. It has been suggested that because Costa is a big grower that has received both state and federal government grants, they were given preferential treatment in their outbreak. In other words, the election was made to control and manage rather than eradicate. What do you say to that?

Dr WHITTINGTON - Costa make a strong case for their business, as would any other grower. We listen to arguments but we make up our own minds.

CHAIR - What was your first approach when you went to Costa and it was found that there was blueberry rust on their site? Was your first and initial position that there would be eradication?

Mr KLUMPP - No, that is not how the system works. The first thing we do is apply containment measures. We have an infected property -

CHAIR - Did you apply that with the Schwinds, the other property?

Mr KLUMPP - Yes, we did. A direction is issued that you must do this and these conditions are put in place. We then collect all the information we can. We don't have knee-jerk reactions. We collect all the information we can find. We go through a process that is called 'disease delimitation' and that is about doing traces back and forward and collecting other information to try to determine where the disease has come from, where it has gone, where it might be now, and

PUBLIC

all the other disease factors. That process has to unfold. That is why the first thing we had to do was contain the disease because we need the time to collect all of that information. We certainly don't go in and say, 'You've got the disease so we're going to pull your plants out', and we also don't go in and say, 'You've got the disease and we're not going to do anything'. We have to go through that process of gathering the information and undertaking that disease delimitation phase before determining what the next steps are.

Dr WHITTINGTON - In the table on page 6, we were contacted by Costa Group on the ninth, it was confirmed on the tenth and we issued a direction notice, which is a notice under the Quarantine Act which requires certain things to be done, on the tenth. By the seventeenth we had a site management plan established and an infected area declaration in December. We immediately put barriers up on the property to minimise the risk of infected material coming off and then we work through the process that Lloyd described.

CHAIR - Did you at any stage consider eradication at Costa's farm?

Dr WHITTINGTON - Yes, absolutely, that's part of the process of the decision-making tool.

Mr KLUMPP - There is a process, nationally developed, called the appreciation process. The appreciation process is a well structured process for assessing all of the options, eradication being one of them, so we go through that process collecting the data and applying that data to that decision in order to determine the best courses of action.

CHAIR - A number of the growers who have presented to us and provided submissions to us are of the view, rightly or wrongly, that because Costa was in a different league as a big grower there was treatment given to them that wouldn't be given to the smaller growers like the Schwinds. What would you say to that?

Mr KLUMPP - Not from our point of view. We assess every case on its merits. We apply science and science doesn't like bias.

CHAIR - What changed your mind? If your first initial position was to eradicate at Costa's?

Mr KLUMPP - I didn't say that.

CHAIR - I will ask the question again. What was your first decision in relation to Costa's?

Mr KLUMPP - To gather the information in order to make some decisions.

Dr WHITTINGTON - On day one, minute one, it is containment. We then step through our process of which eradication is one of the options.

CHAIR - Am I right to say, then, that eradication was considered?

Dr WHITTINGTON - Yes.

CHAIR - So if you considered eradication, what changed you to move towards management rather than proceed with eradication?

PUBLIC

Mr KLUMPP - I need to be clear about where we are at at the moment. We are in a phase of regulated containment. If you look in our submission, you will see that generalised invasion curve. Regulated containment is the next stage where you don't believe it is feasible to eradicate, but it doesn't necessarily mean we're transitioning to management. That might be the next step, but it also might be that we can find techniques or other knowledge or other avenues for eradication. We might go back there.

It is not about deciding that eradication wasn't an option. What we have done is look at what is the appropriate course of action under the circumstances we have now and with the evidence we have. That is regulated containment to try to give us the time to either help the industry through the process, get the market access arrangements in place, and develop new information, knowledge and tools. We have a whole set of trigger points in place as part of those processes for us to continue to review those decisions.

CHAIR - In accordance with the fourth term of reference, what is the capacity of Biosecurity Tasmania to manage blueberry rust outbreaks and other risks into the future?

Mr KLUMPP - John probably answered this earlier on when we talked about the system that we use for escalation of events. Our emergency response systems mirror those of most emergency response agencies, where events are classified in levels from 1 to 5. With level 1, the local office can pretty much handle it, and we have these all the time. We have little outbreaks that are effectively just detections and they're nipped in the bud. Level 5 is an international event like foot-and-mouth disease. Each stage of those levels has a different escalation. The way that we operate within Biosecurity is that at level 1 the locals can do it; at level 2, the branch may have the resources to do it; at level 3, the whole division needs to be involved; and at level 4, we need the whole state involved.

CHAIR - My last question comes from the TFGA. The TFGA identified a number of diseases right on our doorstep in potatoes and tomatoes, bees and something else which they were saying is a real concern. The concern is that we had rust getting into the state from a nursery in Victoria; I think you identified it back to them. What more needs to be done on our borders to try to ensure that we don't get these infestations occurring in this state? When you look at rust getting in here in those plants, something must have gone wrong somewhere, I would have thought, so what needs to be done to try to protect us in a better way?

Mr KLUMPP - I disagree with the 'something must have gone wrong' part.

CHAIR - Well, if something didn't go wrong, how did it get here? It came in on their plants.

Mr KLUMPP - Or it came in on somebody's boots.

CHAIR - No, in 2014 it came in from a nursery in Victoria or whatever it was, the supplier in Victoria. Do you agree that something did go wrong?

Mr KLUMPP - Yes, in Victoria.

CHAIR - What went wrong here, though? Victoria had the plants and they're sending them across here to Tasmania, so what went wrong on our border?

Mr KLUMPP - It wasn't the border.

PUBLIC

CHAIR - How did it get here if it didn't come across the border?

Mr KLUMPP - I will explain if I'm given the chance. What is in place for the nursery chain are these quality assurance programs that are meant to manage the risk within that supply chain. Those quality assurance programs are audited by government auditors, by Plant Health officers in Victoria. That consignment of blueberries into Tasmania was certified to have met the requirements under that quality assurance program. It may well have met the requirements, but the fact that it's a rust meant that the disease either didn't show up or there was some breakdown in the system in Victoria. When it presents at our border, we've got a consignment - and it may well be hundreds of thousands of plants - which is certified free of disease. We can't pull out and inspect every plant. We rely on that certification.

What went wrong in that case was that certificate was for a batch of plants that had blueberry rust in it. The process was then for us to feed that back and get an investigation done in Victoria, which we did.

Ms RATTRAY - Did the minister receive a response?

Mr KLUMPP - You would have to ask the minister that.

Ms RATTRAY - I will ask the minister's secretary. Did the minister receive a response?

Dr WHITTINGTON - I would have to take that on notice. I know there has been communication, but I do not know exactly what the response is. I will take that on notice.

CHAIR - Is there a good argument to show there should have been quarantining of large quantities of plants coming in that form, to give more protection?

Dr WHITTINGTON - I will defer to Lloyd, but there is an enormous movement of freight to and from Tasmania. We benefit from all sorts of freight export and these exact same protocols that we rely on for import are the same protocols others rely on for export. We operate within a system, into domestic markets and internationally, we rely on having confidence in. Sometimes it fails and this was an example of it failing.

We have to be really careful that we recognise that this system serves us well. It could serve us better. My point, Chair, is that these are nationally and internationally accepted protocols for the movement of products. Whether it is cherries to South East Asia that are fruit fly-free, blueberry plants or blueberries coming from New South Wales to our supermarkets over our winter, we rely on the certification systems. If they break there are problems and this is an example of that. Our efforts have to be to make sure we have really good quality assurance processes in place.

I dread to go here, but it is in the public knowledge. We have an import ban on unprocessed salmon into the state. Despite extreme efforts by all, occasionally that chain has broken down. It can be at a distribution centre in Western Australia where a piece of salmon is put into the wrong pallet and the next thing you know it turns up in a supermarket in Sandy Bay. We trace back and we work with whatever distributor and national chain it is to say, 'Don't do that again or you will get issued a notice.' If it happens again you do get issued a notice. The systems, in the main, work but they can always be tweaked and improved.

PUBLIC

Some of the things we are working on are better electronic management systems, so we can better track where things are. All of that is a continually evolving process, such as the increase in the amount of freight that has moved through online shopping. If you look at the amount of freight that comes through the freight centres now that we assess, you would be staggered at the amount of additional stuff that moves and the absurd things that are shipped in cardboard boxes. We have detected odd things at the airport and at mail centres. You might want to speak a bit about that because it is a fascinating story.

Mr KLUMPP - At mail centres.

Dr WHITTINGTON - Yes, through online shopping.

Mr KLUMPP - I think the principle is that we are faced with ever increasing risks. They are ever increasing risks for good things, because of good things happening to this state. Greater production, greater trade, more tourists and all of those things are good things for the economy of this state. They impose greater risks to be managed by Biosecurity Tasmania. What we need to do is improve the way that we manage that risk. The old days of picking up and looking at every bit of fruit or opening every container is practically impossible. You would need every person in Tasmania working for BT to do that.

Ms RATTRAY - Good jobs, I heard.

Mr KLUMPP - Yes, sometimes. We are passionate about our work. We love this state and we believe in what we do for this state. It is a good job, but very challenging at times. What we are trying to do is improve the way we do that in order to manage the risk. Put better systems, better risk management, better processes, better partnerships and hopefully - one of the lessons - better communication in place to manage that risk.

Ms RATTRAY - Lloyd and John, we heard today that not all growers belong to the industry groups. You said in communication you have given us that your regular emails to all growers will continue.

Dr WHITTINGTON - To all the growers on our database.

Ms RATTRAY - We have heard people have sent emails and not had a response. Is there a real push to increase the level of communication, genuine level of communication with growers?

Mr KLUMPP - We have absolutely done that. Not just the emails, but a number of ways. I go back to that question about knowing who the growers are. We largely work through representatives simply in order to get to the growers.

Ms RATTRAY - But not everybody touches base and we heard that this morning. One grower said, 'I keep to myself.'

Mr KLUMPP - Yes, and we make appeals for people to let us know they are there so that we can communicate.

Dr WHITTINGTON - If look at IP4, which is the one found the other week. The communications around that; once we had it confirmed, the first people we talked to were the

PUBLIC

TFGA. We picked up the phone and had a discussion with them on the morning we were going to start the process. Blueberry grower representatives were informed that morning and the grower was informed. An email went to all known growers on our database and a press release was released in the evening.

Ms RATTRAY - But the media already knew who it was before the rest of the growers did. That was the concern.

Dr WHITTINGTON - We gave the municipality. We thought it was important we gave growers some knowledge about where it was. We also wanted to protect the grower so they could process what was happening. In the end they worked it out. This is a real dilemma for us around this type of incursion. There is a demand for, quite rightly, for as much information as possible, but we are dealing with people. There was more than one grower in that municipality and I know that because I did the check.

Mr FINCH - A point of concern for me, and I imagine for other members of the committee, has been the criticism of the TFGA, who we look to as our peak body for agricultural matters. In their submission to us they mentioned that Mr Rockliff wrote an article that was published in the *Mercury* on 18 August 2017. In the article he outlined the importance of a strong and durable biosecurity system in Tasmania and one that has, 'capability to identify and respond if an incursion occurs.'. In their submission, the TFGA note -

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 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.

Would you care to comment?

Dr WHITTINGTON - I think the whole article needs to be taken in context and not only taking parts of sentences to create a story. Reading the whole article in context is very important. I cannot say what is in the minister's mind; that is something you would have to ask him. The minister has been very supportive of an evidence-based approach to regulated containment. He has taken advice from us on the science and what we have done. The way the minister is presented there is an unfair characterisation of some of the discussions I have had with him.

CHAIR - John, perhaps you might want to take that on board and come back to us.

Dr WHITTINGTON - It is probably better if Mr Finch writes the specific question.

Mr FINCH - I wanted to comment that if you chose to read the TFGA submission and give us a detailed answer to the aspect they have highlighted.

Dr WHITTINGTON - I am aware of the paragraph.

CHAIR - Gentlemen, thank you both, and for extending the time. We appreciate it. I thought it was better than having to ask you to come back, hopefully it was more convenient to do it this way. We appreciate the way you have answered the questions. Yours is a large submission that covers well for the committee so we will be taking that into account. We are hopeful of

PUBLIC

having the report done early next year. I am not sure how early next year it will be. When parliament is prorogued it impacts on our business. That is when we would hope to have the report out.

If there are any other matters that have come today you feel you would wish to respond to us in a little bit more depth, feel free to do so. The committee will receive that and we will give you those questions taken on notice. Julie will correspond with you on those. Thank you.

Dr WHITTINGTON - Thank you for the opportunity. We are more than happy to come back and answer any questions. I would much rather do that.

CHAIR - We might put them in writing to you. Thank you.

Dr WHITTINGTON - Thank you.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.