



Fruit  
Growers  
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Mrs Gabrielle Woods  
Committee Secretary  
Legislative Council Select Committee on Growing Tasmania's Economy  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House, Hobart, 7001

Dear Mrs Woods,

### **Fruit Growers Tasmania submission to Growing Tasmania's Economy**

Primary industry in Tasmania plays an integral role in the Tasmanian economy and many of the industries have developed and expanded due to the biosecurity freedoms the state offers, which underpins the "clean and green" reputation. The fruit industry in Tasmania is one such industry which relies on these unique freedoms to maintain market access with premium products to such countries as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and China.

Fruit Growers Tasmania represents apple, pear, cherry, stonefruit and berry growers in the state and represents a contribution to the Tasmanian economy of over \$100 million. The fruit industry plays a significant role in the ongoing sustainability of rural and regional towns across Tasmania.

Fruit Growers Tasmania would like to present to the Committee at a suitable time on the following points:

#### **Biosecurity:**

It is Tasmania's unique position in the world which provides this State with equally unique market access into China, Japan and Taiwan for cherries and apples and Korea for cherries only.

Mainland apple and cherry growers are not able to access these markets and therefore are confined to non-protocol and domestic markets. Although market access is a matter for the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, there is unfortunately little improvement for mainland growers.

However, equally at risk for this State are our biosecurity regimes and therefore our unique market access on which increasing investment is occurring. Two incursions into the State this year with blueberry and myrtle rust highlight the increasing pressure on the regimes with reduced resources and staff.

Queensland fruit fly detections in New Zealand with 14 male and female flies and larvae are of very strong concern to both fruit and vegetable growers here as two flies in two traps within two weeks will see protocol markets lost.

It is the position of Fruit Growers Tasmania to lobby biosecurity officers, given the value of the protection they provide the State's economy through



detection, response and export and import audits, recognised as “front-line officers” – the same as emergency services, nurses and teachers. – and therefore funded and resourced as such.

## **Market Access**

In 2014 Fruit Growers Tasmania undertook a full Skills Needs Analysis in order to understand the current and future requirements of the sector. One element of the report was an analysis of the growth of the sector over the next five years.

The growth is projected through up-scaling either through individual farm development or through external investment such as joint ventures. Large growers (91%), medium (71%) and small (64%) have indicated intention to up-scale to meet market demand over the next five years.

A majority of this growth is focused on export markets given the tight domestic markets in apples and cherries predominantly and increasingly the berry market. As an example: given the current level of apples in Australia, the domestic market is very flat. Outside contracted mainland markets into larger pack-houses or supermarket chains, Tasmanian growers are struggling to move apples to the mainland markets.

Therefore export is vital to the growth of the fruit and vegetable sector in this State. As outlined in the Fruit and Vegetable Task Force Report August 2014, the production targets are to effectively double in the next five years. The domestic market will not absorb another \$50m in fruit and \$250m in vegetables so the focus has to be on export markets in order for growth to be achieved.

Market access and improved market access is negotiated by the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture. The State Government has no stake in what commodities are put for negotiation and the Department of Agriculture is not known for its proactive nature.

Therefore the projected growth, including through Tasmanian Irrigation projects, are going to be increasingly challenged by the lack of market access.

## **Job and Career Pathways**

Agriculture is not a sector which has clearly defined pathways. Jobs are usually word of mouth or resulting from the harvest trail. Careers are even more difficult to identify and the seasonal nature of the sector doesn't provide longevity in the work place.

Backpackers will always be the surge capability for the sector so the focus is how do locals, including young people, become work ready. While this question is answered under the next heading, there are issues around how do people find jobs in the agriculture sectors?

Some growers advertise on Seek for higher level jobs but mainly vacancies for lower level jobs are circulated through word of mouth in local areas. Accessing these jobs becomes problematic and therefore many locals don't make the effort. The situation isn't assisted when politicians trivialise jobs in the industry as only fruit picking.

The discussion needs to be held around how are regional jobs advertised and how can locals move around regional areas to gain longevity in work.

This "hubbing" is being discussed in many areas but there is a need to generate a base for a consistent model.

### **Skills, Training and Education**

In this category Fruit Growers Tasmania has been working to increase capacity in the industry through hosting certified training in production horticulture on orchards using Tas TAFE as the registered training organisation. These courses are targeting medium and senior management at the leading hand/assistant manager level. The position of orchard/grower manager is a critical shortage across Australia.

Identifying there were no entry level courses, Fruit Growers Tasmania negotiated with Tas TAFE for Certificate II courses at Huonville Trade Training Centre. Similar courses are under consideration for the Warrane, Launceston and Burnie campuses accompanied by job placements.

These courses are in production horticulture and beneficial to the fruit, vegetable, wine and nut sectors as well.

The growth in the sector cannot be sustained without a trained workforce including the projected growth in exports. However to succeed this needs consolidating and funding in order to produce work ready staff. Much of the work undertaken by Fruit Growers Tasmania in this area is not funded.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to present to the Committee at some point on the topics above.

Yours faithfully



Phil Pyke  
Business Development Manager  
Fruit Growers Tasmania