

**Potato Cyst Nematode
information sessions -
Putting the Science in PCN**

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MEDIA RELEASE

Summary of PCN Roadshow

- A Potato Cyst Nematode information roadshow was conducted around Australia between 17th November to 21st November.
- Tour participants included René de Jong, Manager of Potatoes, Elders, Keith Blackmore, Manager of ViCSPA (potato seed certifying body) and Keith Ingleton, Certified Seed Potato Grower for the whole trip. Con Powell, Chairman of Seed Potatoes Victoria and Peter Britt Certified Seed Potato Merchant also joined the group for the SA leg of the trip. Local SA and Qld government staff representing these states involved with the National PCN Management Plan also attended including Bruce Baker, Manager of Compliance and Surveillance, Plant Health Operations with Plant Industries and Research, SA and Neil O'Brien, General Manager of Business Operations, Biosecurity Queensland.
- Meetings were held at Parilla and Virginia, SA; Dorrigo in NSW; Gatton in Sth Qld and Atherton, Nth Qld and open to all growers and industry related people to attend
- Discussions centred around PCN in the context of a grower, a summary of what PCN is, its life cycle, survival, management options to control it and the benefits of using certified seed potatoes as a seed source.
- South Australian and Queensland biosecurity representatives spoke of their support for the development and implementation of the National PCN Management Plan and it's general themes.
- Many major potato producing countries around the world live with PCN and have maintained viability.
- PCN is not a human health issue, it is a potato production issue.
- Discussion style interaction occurred and most growers attending the meetings took part in this. The information was well received and brought attendees up to date on PCN at Thorpdale, the safeguards by using certified seed potatoes and the status of the National PCN Management Plan.

Prepared by René de Jong, Elders Limited, Ballarat.

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Putting the Science in PCN**

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Purpose:

To maintain access to markets by Thorpdale certified seed potato growers and ware potato growers after the detection of Potato Cyst Nematode in Thorpdale announced on 20th October, 2008 by informing the eastern mainland Australian potato industry about PCN including:

- history of PCN in Victoria
- technical aspects of PCN (life cycle, longevity, control etc)
- benefits of using certified seed potatoes
- development and status of the National PCN Management Plan

Acknowledgement of funding:

- Elders Limited
- ViCSPA – national seed potato certifying organisation
- Seed Potatoes Victoria
- Horticulture Australia Limited



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Objective and Strategy

The objective of the information sessions was to inform potato levy payers about the latest technical data following the detection of Potato Cyst Nematode at Thorpdale in Victoria.

Specifically this project informed the Australian potato industry of:

- the process of detection of Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) at a certified seed grower's property at Thorpdale.
- technical aspects of the growth, survival attributes and effects on potato crops of PCN and the monitoring being undertaken to survey all Thorpdale growers for the presence of PCN
- The status of the National Potato Cyst Management Plan and the future of the potato industry in relation to this plan
- A seed grower's perspective of having no PCN in a quarantine zone due to PCN
- An agent's perspective of the PCN detection in the Thorpdale area
- Provide growers with an opportunity to give feedback on the PCN outbreak

Method

Based on information from scientific knowledge and using industry practitioners including certified seed growers, travel was necessary to key potato growing regions in eastern Australia to inform potato levy payers of the implications of the detection of Potato Cyst Nematode at a certified seed growers property.

The presenters visited key potato growing areas at;
Virginia and the Mallee in South Australia,
Dorrigo in New South Wales,
Gatton and Atherton in Queensland

Levy paying growers of potatoes in these regions were invited to meetings where the issue of PCN was discussed. The meetings were arranged by Elders Limited. At the meeting a series of technical presentations took place. The meetings were open to all potato industry people.

Presentations at each meeting focussed on:

- the seed production scheme, it's system of certification and the rationale behind supporting certified seed growers from Victoria and Thorpdale.
- Technical aspects of the PCN growth, survival and effects on potato crops and the rationale behind the monitoring regime being conducted
- An outline of The National Potato Cyst Management Plan and the industry's future under this plan
- A seed grower's perspective of growing seed potatoes and living in a PCN quarantine area
- An agents perspective on the future with PCN at Thorpdale.

At the completion of the presentations discussions including questions and answers held to assist in communication and to provide some feedback. An evaluation sheet was completed to gauge success of the meetings.

Issue/Rationale

The detection of PCN at Thorpdale announced on 20th October, 2008 is poorly understood by potato growers particularly those interstate and well removed from the Thorpdale area. Thorpdale is currently a quarantine area of 20km radius from the detection site and Thorpdale growers are being viewed by the wider potato industry as being an unknown risk. Hence trade of potatoes from the quarantine area is severely restricted.

It is reasonably assumed that the quarantine area will be reduced significantly to a smaller area through the implementation of a National Potato Cyst Nematode Management Plan. With monitoring and movement protocols in place, trade of seed and ware potatoes will likely be legally possible interstate to Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia.

However, buyers and traders of certified seed potatoes may be unwilling to purchase seed potatoes in the short term (significant disruption to trade has already begun) and this will continue until effective

communication about the current situation about the PCN outbreak and the risk of disease transmission is discussed with industry.

As Thorpdale growers supply 17% of all certified seed potatoes, a major disruption to potato supplies, particularly in early supply areas may occur and disrupt an otherwise efficient system before the PCN detection. It is considered that quick and effective communication will provide potato growers with the necessary information and knowledge to make rational decisions to resume near normal trade in the short term.

Outcomes

It is estimated that some 4,000-5,000 tonnes of certified seed potatoes (that is able to be transported from Thorpdale) may not be planted, let alone sold due to current geographic quarantine restrictions, and probably current resistance by buyers to purchase such seed resulting in an estimated loss of \$3.25M loss to potato levy payers who are growers of the seed potatoes. Losses due to use of non certified seed would be an additional loss attributed to other virus and soil borne diseases that are more prevalent in uncertified seed.

At the completion of the project it is expected that there will be significantly reduced disruption to trade in seed potatoes, along with stability in the potato market as a result. The livelihood of growers and community in Thorpdale will be minimally disrupted.

After sessions report

All the meetings were held as planned and the information provided. Presentations are attached.

- All areas made us welcome
- Attendance
 - Parilla = 6 major growers and packers and 2 consultants representing most of the growers in the area; the South Australian Potato Company was not represented.
 - Virginia = 9 growers & packers represented and included Bruce Baker and David Cartwright from PIRSA (10 days earlier, PIRSA also presented something similar so numbers lighter than hoped but relatively well attended);
 - Dorrigo/Guyra = 13 growers representing most growers from Dorrigo area and 2 from Guyra;
 - Gatton = 18 growers and several industry representatives as well as Neil O'Brien Biosecurity Queensland;
 - Atherton = 16 local growers and 2 from Charters Towers and several industry representatives and DPI staff and including Neill O'Brien, Biosecurity Qld
 - Bundaberg – Elders has also made the presentations at Bundaberg with some growers after the week long tour in response to growers seeking this information and after comments from growers that it was too far to travel to Gatton.

Questions & comments from growers

- market potatoes purchased from central markets or packers are a risk
- potato waste to recyclers and possible spread to commercial properties
- how much PCN is at Thorpdale?
- movement of shared machinery is a risk
- commercial potatoes graded in seed sheds
- inadequacy of 20km quarantine zone (fear of own possible future situation)
- issues around detection levels and techniques of sampling and accuracy
- implications to other potato growing areas of presence of PCN in Thorpdale prior to its detection
- chemical control options

Non intended outcomes

- We found that some areas felt isolated through inadequate communication due to their geographical isolation – there should be an allocation of industry funding for communication – Guyra in particular and some outlying areas surrounding traditional potato areas in general
- Structure/people not working as well as it could in NSW
- Guyra growers not receiving Potatoes Australia publication

Assessment of effectiveness

- The communication events at each location were held as planned and an opportunity was offered to all growers, government agencies and industry representatives to attend (newspaper advertisements) so the process was completed successfully
- An evaluation sheet was filled in by all attendees. The answers to the questions in the evaluation summarised a positive response from the meetings.
- The “mood” of the meetings improved as the meetings were completed at each location based on having more information.
- The types of questions showed that the attendees understood the PCN issue and some of these questions involved the details of yet-to-be completed risk analysis charts which are being developed for the National PCN Management Plan and proved that the growers at the meetings were thinking in terms of the regulators and scientists.
- Personal contact with seed buyers after the event has provided some positive feedback on intended seed purchases from the Thorpdale area in the coming supply season.
- The ultimate effectiveness will be demonstrated in uninterrupted seed sales business for those in the seed business and same for the trading of market potatoes and processing potatoes. This has yet to be demonstrated.

Acknowledgements

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- Keith Ingleton (attendance at all meetings) and Con Powell (attendance in SA) from Seed Potatoes Victoria
- Keith Blackmore, Manager, ViCSPA (attendance at all meetings)
- Peter Britt, potato agent at Ballarat with J Cutbush & Co. (attendance in SA)
- David Beardsell, Principle Officer, Industry Liaison and Strategic Planning Department of Primary Industries, Victoria (assistance with technical information)
- Bruce Baker, Manager, Plant Health Compliance and Surveillance and David Cartwright, Chief Inspector, Plant Health, both from Primary Industries & Resources, South Australia (attendance at Virginia meeting to outline National PCN Management Plan)
- Neil O’Brien, General Manager, Biosecurity Queensland, Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (attendance at Qld meetings to outline National PCN Management Plan)
- Karen Symes and Greg McPhee, Horticulture Australia Limited for assistance with HAL funding submission under short time frame)

Appendices

- Media release
- Assessment of meetings
- Presentations
 - Putting the Science in PCN (technical presentation about life cycle, crop effects, spread, control etc)
 - ViCSPA Certified Seed Potatoes – some facts about PCN (about the certification scheme, benefits of using certified seed in relation to PCN etc)
 - National PCN Management Plan
- Media release