

President's Report to ABGA Tuesday 19 October 2021

Dear Members

Welcome to the 2021 AGM which this year due to COVID 19 is again being conducted by virtual meeting technology. There is now light at the end of the COVID tunnel and I am optimistic that in 2022 our AGM will be held in person with many members able to be present.

It is my pleasure to chair this year's AGM, which is my third as President of the Association and to present this annual President's report to members

First, I would like to make some comments about your hard-working committee.

This year, we see the retirement of Cedric Senn as a member of the committee. Cedric has been a member of the committee since 2015 and has made an enormous and valuable contribution as a committee member and Chair of the marketing sub-committee. Cedric is a grower in the Yarra Valley and with his wife Cathy run a family owned berry business. His contributions to the Association and industry are voluntary and largely benefit other growers. During his time on the committee, Cedric has devoted countless hours developing our marketing plans, reviewing different marketing options, budgets and marketing proposals and programs, interviewing and recommending the selection of our marketing consultants. He has brought a great depth of knowledge and passion to this work and the results have been an excellent program which has constantly balanced member concerns about cost and levies with a program that delivers maximum value. This has not been without its challenges as there are sometimes as many views about marketing levies, budget and program as there are committee members but Cedric has patiently guided the committee to reach consensus positions.

On behalf of the committee and members, thank you Cedric for your wonderful contributions and collegiate presence on the committee. We hope that you will be in attendance at next year's AGM or Berry Quest when we can acknowledge your contribution publicly and in person.

Of course, the key to a successful term in these roles is to transition the role to a new chair which Cedric achieved by passing the baton to Christian Parsons over the past 6 months. Christian joined the committee during 2020 and is National Operations Manager at Costas and brings not only enormous personal skill and knowledge to the role but also the backup of the excellent resources at Costa. Thank you Christian for taking on the role.

A feature of the committee, and something I have heard many people comment on, is the excellence of the quality of the representative on our committee. It is a very talented group of industry experts who are professional, capable and committed to achieving the best for the whole of industry. Of course, as our industry has matured and larger corporate growers have emerged, so too has the calibre and expertise of people working in industry increased. It has been a pleasure to work with the committee over the past year where there is always access to a well informed and considered opinions based on solid evidence and data. Add to that a high level of professionalism by the committee members to the conduct of the Associations business and what you get is a highly functional and effective committee which I believe is delivering excellent work for the Association. It also makes my role as President a breeze.

By way of brief overview of the membership of the rest of the committee:

- a. Stephen Thandi has continued his role as vice president. Stephen is a grower in the Coffs region and former Chair of OzGroup. Stephen has been of great assistance in presenting the views of Oz Groups 150 plus members and keeping the committee informed and involved in the many issues which arise in the Coffs area, which is by far the largest growing area in Australia;
- b. Anthony Poiner is Treasurer and will present the Treasurer's report shortly. The role of Treasurer requires a significant commitment of time and effort given the requirements for keeping the committee informed regarding the association's finances, approving and authorising expenditure and ensuring management and statutory accounts are properly maintained. In addition, Anthony has chaired the R&D sub-committee working with Melinda Simpson from DPI and until earlier this year also chaired the market access sub-committee. I would like to thank Anthony on behalf of the committee for his commitment and dedication to these roles and the good judgement he brings to commercial matters. Anthony is a director and owner of Smart Berries, which is a major grower and marketer of berries.
- c. Andrew Bell, Secretary. We are grateful that Andrew is always available to assist with a range of issues which arise for the association from legal and contractual matters to membership. Andrew is Managing Director of Mountain Blue and as most of you will know, is the son of life member of the association, Ridley Bell;
- d. John Simonetta, COO at Perfection Fresh and who took over as chair of our market access sub-committee which carries the important responsibility of opening up new overseas markets for all growers.

Despite COVID and lockdowns, the committee managed to meet face to face in December 2020, March 2021 and May 2021 and we held six meetings, plus their AGM, online.

Adam Bianchi stepped down from his role as CEO of OzGroup and resigned from the committee in July 2021. James Kellaway has been appointed the new CEO of OzGroup and has nominated to be a committee member at the AGM.

Market Access

You will hear from chair of the marketing sub-committee, John Simonetta in a moment regarding market access but I want to briefly make some comments. Market access has been and remains one of the top priority action items for the committee. Our industry is producing increasing volumes of high quality fruit and market access provides the opportunity to double demand for our production over coming years, and follow the success stories of table grapes and citrus. If we can achieve market access to all of our priority target markets, we have the opportunity to double GVP from around \$350M to \$700M. With a economic multiplier of 3 for horticultural industries, this has the potential to add another billion dollars to Australian GDP. The opportunity is significant. The Association is in a strong financial position and based on continuation of our existing levy of 7c/kg, we will be able to fund the significant investment of almost \$2.5M required to progress these market access projects.

The committee has made a number of achievements during the year and been successful in delivering on our work plan which supports the blueberry industry strategic plan. Some of the main achievements during the year are:

Benefits to ABGA members through Berries Australia

- Our link with Berries Australia has been running smoothly so therefore all ABGA members have benefited from the delivery of the communications project including the Journal and the Burst as well as the updated website
- The benefit of the consolidated approach was emphasised in the response to Covid-19 and associated worker shortages where members were provided with detailed resources relevant to each growing State as well as being provided with an advocacy function into each State's working groups.
- Through Berries Australia we have been able to have input into the design of the new Ag Visa which although perhaps different from what many people hoped, is still a step in the right direction.
- The network of IDOs around the country has also meant that all ABGA members have access to a local IDO as well as the Berries Australia team.
- Berries Australia has advocated strongly on workforce shortages and ensuring that growers were well supported to understand and meet their WH&S obligations. The national engagement has allowed greater integration between the state based responses.
- The successful contracting of the Market Access and Trade Development which brings the professional skills sets of Jenny VanDeMeeberg into the organisation for at least the next three years.
- Berries Australia continues to have a very good working relationship with many parts of DAWE developed by Rachel and Jenny over the last 18 months. It is looking very likely that we will be successful in obtaining ATMAC funding from DAWE as a result of Jenny's excellent project application.
- ABGA is represented on the BAL board by Andrew and Anthony and on behalf of members, I thank them for the many hours they devote to BAL. I would also like to acknowledge and thank industry veteran and stalwart Peter McPherson who continues to provide wonderful leadership and expertise as Chair of BAL.

Export

- There has been significant activity in progressing the existing applications for market access for Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam.
- A major R&D assessment has been done which comprised a technical assessment of additional R&D needs to ensure access to those markets, particularly as the medfly research in WA has been unsuccessful
- ABGA intends to make significant R&D investments in the next 12 months to fast track this research

Social License

- Social license issues are primarily addressed through the Coffs Harbour and North Coast working group which is across all berries and Chaired by Peter McPherson. This group has been able to address issues as they arise and also engage with government over Covid restrictions. Due to concerns raised in this group Berries Australia was able to get important concessions on the restrictive carpooling provisions.
 - Berries Australia continues to take a deliberate stance to publicly support the actions of regulators in the region. That said, widespread reports of non-compliance don't help with the industry's image.
 - The ABGA funded legal advice for growers who had been told to remove their nets as they did not have DAs. This advice was provided to the council who have not taken any further

action. Berries Australia provided a submission to the NSW government regarding streamlining planning regulations and we anticipate a response by next week. • Worker mistreatment continues to be an issue with the release of the McKell report

Hort innovation

-whilst the failure of the Medfly project is deeply frustrating and points to a number of ongoing issues with Hort Innovation and its management the funding of both the IDO comms project and the export project has delivered significant value back to our members.

BerryQuest 2022

Planning for BerryQuest International 2022 is underway and on track for 25th to 28th July 2022 at SeaWorld Resort and Conference Centre on the Gold Coast. Sponsorship and exhibitor packages are now available with the sponsorship prospectus being distributed via hard copy in the September edition of the Australian Berry Journal, via email to a broad network of industry associated businesses, and to all committee members and IDOs for sharing across their networks. To date, we have sold \$42,500 worth of sponsorship with many interested businesses currently in the pipeline. Covid has made it difficult for members and the committee to meet face to face but we are optimistic BerryQuest 22 will provide an opportunity for members to reconnect and catch up with other growers. Please diary the event.

I would like to thank Melinda Simpson from NSW DPI who continues to provide great support for our R&D initiatives and to Wendy Morris who provides administrative support to Rachel and the association.

I would like to pay particular thanks to executive officer Rachel Mackenzie, who is capably supported by Wendy Morris, the Administration and Membership officer. Rachel has achieved great successes for ABGA (as well as BAL and the other berry industry bodies) as noted above. The work of the committee progresses effortlessly as Rachel and Wendy keep the wheels moving, with a gentle nudge or push to help guide the direction of our various initiatives. It is said that you never notice how good things are operating until something goes wrong. Fortunately, there are no hiccups to report in the work of the committee and we are fortunate to have executive officers who are on top of their demanding workload.

Despite Covid, 2021 has been a year of quiet achievement and hopefully in the next year, we can make some good progress on our priority actions on market access. I hope to see many of you at BerryQuest in July next year.

Jonathan Shaw
ABGA President
19 October 2021