



President's Report for 2022

As this year's AGM is once again being conducted by virtual meeting, I deliver my President's report in writing so it can be made available to members through our website.

As in the past, management and control of the Association occurs through the committee. This year the committee comprised me as President, James Kellaway (OzGroup CEO) stepped into the role of Vice President following the resignation in March of Stephen Thandi, Andrew Bell, Managing Director of Mountain Blue was secretary and Anthony Poiner was Treasurer. Other committee members were John Simonetta, CCO Perfection Fresh, Christian Parsons, General Manager Berry Category Costas, Harold Edlinger, a grower in Victoria and Devinder Khunkhun, an OzGroup grower.

The Association is extremely fortunate to have such knowledgeable, experienced and dedicated committee members who, unlike with many other industry bodies, provide their experience, time and effort for no fee.

I would like to particularly thank James, Andrew and Anthony who as officeholders take a leadership role in driving the Association's activities and assisting and directing the executive officers in their day to day tasks. I would also like to recognise and thank Anthony for his significant contributions to the committee over many years, not least of which has been his common sense, enthusiasm and good humour, as well as previous chair of the market access sub-committee and now as Treasurer. Anthony leaves the committee this year to take up the important role of independent chair of Berries Australia Limited.

The Committee is assisted by Executive Director Rachel McKenzie and Administration and Membership Officer, Wendy Morris (who both also work for BAL, RABA and SAI). I am pleased that during the year Rachel renewed her contract with us and we can look forward to her continued significant and valuable contribution to ABGA and the berry industry.

The Committee met monthly during the year with most meetings by video conferencing and as has become usual for many of us, less frequently in person. I am pleased to report that the Association has been meeting its objectives under its strategic plan and its annual work plan, some highlights of which I have set out below.

The Committee operates on a sub-committee system with committee members taking responsibility for specific areas of activity. I would like to particularly thank the sub-committee chairs whose work is noted below.

Marketing

The marketing sub-committee is chaired by Christian Parsons. Christian has led a successful marketing campaign, which will continue through to 2022/2023. We engaged a new marketing agency to drive better value for money and have trialled new approaches such as advertising on the Coles and Woolworths online shopping portals and radio advertising. The goal of the campaign is to drive consumption without impacting price. Whilst this season has seen lower supply, the marketing campaign is taking a long-term view on building customer loyalty. Ensuring high quality berries is also a key component of driving consumption and consumer loyalty and this is perhaps an area of focus in future years.

Export

Our export / market access sub-committee continues to be led by John Simonetta, assisted by the incredibly knowledgeable and talented Jenny Van de Meeberg. Jenny is an external consultant who provides services to the industry via a Hort Innovation project and funded through the voluntary levy with matching funds from government.

The Berries Australia export and market access project continues to deliver across the berry category and particularly to the blueberry sector. For the first time we are now an active negotiation priority in a key Asian market (Vietnam) and whilst actual export is still a few years away, it is a positive step towards achieving access. To support market access the ABGA is directly investing in a number of major phytosanitary market access projects and has successfully initiated a project looking at cold treatment disinfestation for lesser Q-fly. The team is also in negotiations with DPIRD in WA in relation to medfly research. As part of the wider berries project, blueberry growers have access to the export portal on the Berries Australia website along with training materials and other supporting resources. A new MRL app has been developed and is now in the final testing stages.

Communications and industry development

The ABGA contribution to the Collective Industry Fund within Hort Innovation continues to fund our dedicated blueberry IDO Melinda Simpson who has always puts in a power of work across the whole country. The benefit of the Berries Australia approach is that Melinda is ably supported by the IDOs in other States and it is great to hear that growers in WA and Tasmania are becoming more engaged with the IDO team. The national approach has proved invaluable particularly when issues such as rust and varroa mite emerge.

The journal continues to be a high quality production that delivers useful information to growers and is supported by the monthly Burst newsletter. Whilst BerryQuest actually fell into the 22/23 financial year the bulk of the work was done in the 21/22 year and should be recognised. The engagement of international speakers such as Juan Allende from HortiFruit and Soren Bjorn from Driscolls international was a real feather in the cap for the Australian industry and is a direct consequence of the ABGA's ongoing involvement in the IBO along with Peter McPherson's chairmanship. The addition of the ABGA bursary to encourage young leaders attendance at BerryQuest is a great initiative.

Advocacy

Whilst Berries Australia is our main advocacy vehicle, the interests of blueberry growers are certainly front and centre including input into the reducing the admin burden of the new mandatory food safety standard for berries and putting forward common sense solutions on regional planning issues. We also work closely with the NFF hort council and the Australian Fresh Produce Safety Centre. We are very fortunate with Rachel as our ED because of her background in journalism and extensive experience and achievements in horticulture advocacy.

Farewell

At this year's AGM, I step down as President after 10 years on the committee in various roles.

I first came onto the committee at the invitation of Peter McPherson and Ridley Bell to drive the Association's market access activities. China was then seen as the priority and a major export opportunity. Despite the warnings from other industries that gaining market access

was a slow process, I launched myself into the project with full expectations that we would achieve re-opening of Japan and gain China or other markets within 5 years. Sadly, neither goal has yet been achieved but as reported above, we are heavily invested in market access goals and making solid progress.

I leave at a time when the Association is in excellent shape, with strong membership, a very healthy balance sheet and financial position, strong engagement with growers and a highly talented, dedicated and knowledgeable committee and executive ready to take the Association forward to meet tomorrow's challenges.

I wish the new committee the very best of success in promoting the interests of Australian blueberry growers and I also wish all growers ongoing success in their farming businesses.

Jonathan Shaw
13 October 2022