



THE TRUFFLE & WINE CO

MANJIMUP ~ WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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The Truffle Business

BIO-SECURITY
SPECIAL EDITION



The Australian truffle industry is maturing

Michael Lowe, General Manager
The Truffle & Wine Co.

As our industry matures grower focus will broaden from the individual farm to include regional and national issues – Bio-security is one of these issues.

The Federal government has, together with various State and grower bodies, developed a response protocol on how to deal with any exotic pest incursion – not your everyday bugs and diseases – but pests that are not native to this country; and by rote of slipping through our quarantine, pose a real biological and financial threat to our agricultural industries. This protocol defined by the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) is administered by Plant Health Australia (PHA).

The Australian Truffle Growers Association (ATGA) is recognised as the peak industry body by the federal government, and as such, is now signed up as a member of Plant Health Australia and is a signatory to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.

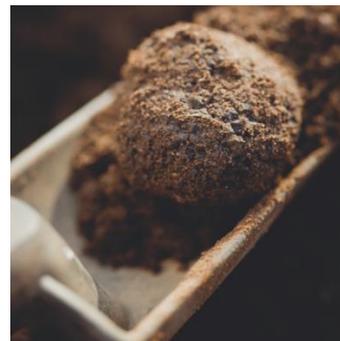
What does this mean to us all as growers?

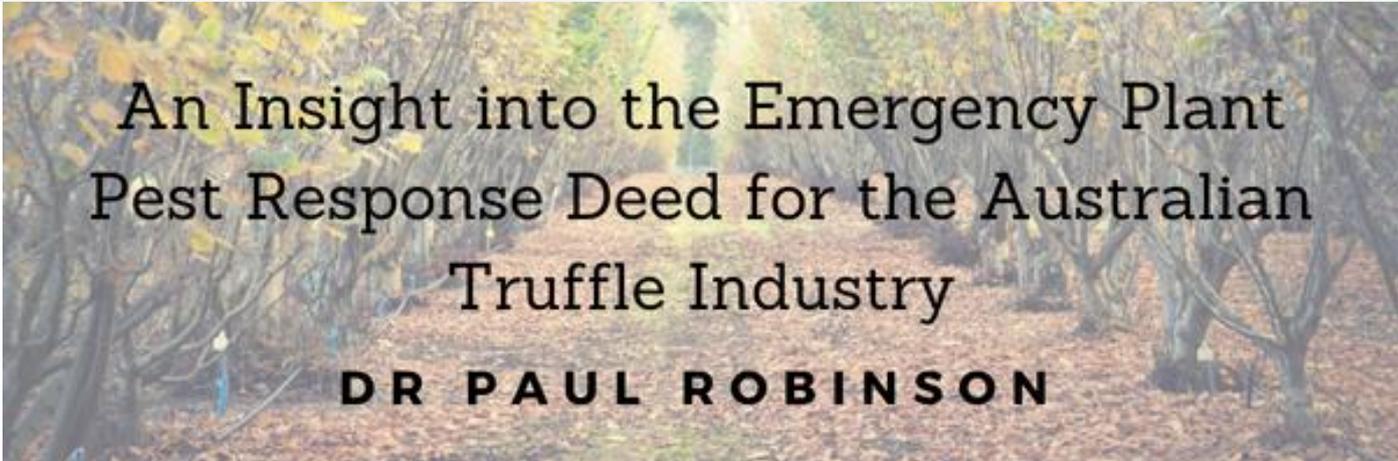
At a recent truffle growers seminar in Manjimup representatives of PHA explained its potential role in helping to assist the Australian truffle industry should a pest incursion occur.

There are implications for us all whether we are members of ATGA or local Truffle Grower associations or not.

The Truffle & Wine Co. feels that this PHA issue is so important that we are devoting the whole of this issue to it, in the hope that it will inform growers of the industry's and individual grower's responsibilities and the procedures which are available as a result of the truffle industry signing up as a PHA member. The intention of the article is not only to inform but also to stimulate constructive discussion.

The author of the article is Dr. Paul Robinson who, along with his wife Rose Yeoman, is the owner and operator of Silverwood Truffles. You can read Paul's full biography at the bottom of this newsletter. Paul attended the Manjimup meeting. His paper below has been reviewed by PHA and will be a useful tool to assist truffle growers throughout Australia to understand an important risk management issue.





An Insight into the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed for the Australian Truffle Industry

DR PAUL ROBINSON

The following article is an assessment based on publically available materials and is not written on behalf of any industry group, association or company. It is written to inform others within the truffle industry and is not a definitive review and may be subject to inadvertent errors or omissions.

Primary producers are generally acutely aware of biohazard risks and impacts to their farming business. They are also likely to be implementing biosecurity practices to mitigate these risks. However, with increasing globalization in food production, the potential of changes in climate, and the advent of agritourism, the risks could intensify bringing more frequent and more detrimental pest incursions.

Are individual growers or grower groups prepared to control and eradicate plant pest incursions?

In April this year, Plant Health Australia (PHA) notified the Australian Truffle Growers Association (ATGA) that the association's admission to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) had been accepted. ATGA's admission to the EPPRD was initiated by ATGA applying in writing to become a signatory in October 2017 and all existing signatories (including PHA) voting in the affirmative on their admission. This was followed by the signing of a Deed of Accession between PHA and ATGA. Upon signing of this Deed of Accession, ATGA become a Party to the EPPRD and is bound by and accepts the obligations and liabilities arising under the EPPRD effective from the date of signing (8 March 2018).

To many, if not most in the truffle industry, this was totally new news. This may have led to a perception by many that this was an autocratic move by a few that has repercussions for the entire Australian truffle industry and that consultation was either minimal or non-existent.

The following brief synopsis hopefully provides some insight into the EPPRD and into the ATGA and PHA roles in managing biosecurity risks and implementing a joint response to control and eradicate an emergency plant pest incursion that may affect the entire truffle industry.

Who is PHA?

PHA is a not-for-profit, member based, public company limited by guarantee. It is the national coordinator of the government-industry partnership for plant biosecurity in Australia. PHA is the "custodian" of the EPPRD with a remit to work with members to improve plant biosecurity outcomes. The EPPRD is a partnership agreement between the Australian Government, all State and Territory governments, 37 national plant industry bodies representing specific cropping sectors (including ATGA) and PHA. Collectively these are the "Parties" to the EPPRD.

ATGA is a member of PHA, and is recognised by the Government as the peak body for the truffle industry and is therefore eligible to submit an application to become a signatory (Party) to the EPPRD. As already indicated, ATGA signed up to the EPPRD in March 2018.



What does this mean for individual truffle growers and for the truffle industry?

The EPPRD establishes a mechanism to facilitate the making of rapid responses to, and the control and eradication of Emergency Plant Pests (EPP) by:

- facilitating immediate reporting of suspected EPPs;
- facilitating an early and comprehensive response to an EPP, in order to define the nature of the EPP and eradicate it;
- providing to parties which fund a response to an EPP a role in decision making about the response and its funding, and
- defining funding responsibilities up to certain limits for each EPP including providing a framework where:
 - the beneficiaries of the eradication of an EPP pay an appropriate and equitable proportion of the costs of mounting a response;
 - no one person or organisation is made better or worse off as a result of reporting an incident or suspected incident; and
 - there is appropriate accountability by each party to all of the parties which fund a response to an EPP

It is well to note that under the provisions of the EPPRD a party may withdraw from the EPPRD or be replaced by a (more) representative body, though this is subject to the agreement of all the other Parties. Also, if a party fails to comply with the terms of the EPPRD or is deemed by all parties to be no longer representative of its nominated crop it can be removed as a Party to the EPPRD.

Are all truffle growers now bound by the EPPRD and if so what are the implications?

Truffle growers are now a Party to the EPPRD. However, it is worth summarising the consequences, benefits and impact of this.

If it is deemed that an Emergency Plant Pest (EPP) has made an incursion into the truffle industry either by infestation or infection of truffles or by impact on the host trees then under the EPPRD, ATGA becomes an “Affected Party”. Under such a circumstance all Affected Parties will be involved in the decision making for the EPP incident with ATGA representing the truffle industry. Decisions relating to the EPP are made by consensus, except for those relating to cost sharing (see below) which must be unanimous.

There is a generic national Response Plan that provides guidelines for the development of an EPP (truffle) industry-specific Response Plan. This Plan would cover all activities whether cost shared or non-cost shared and it includes a response budget. The Plan is drafted by the “Lead Agency” which is the department responsible for biosecurity within a State or Territory Government with participation and consultation from the affected industry parties, but requires national endorsement prior to implementation.

With an approved Response Plan, the Owner Reimbursement Costs (ORC) paid to affected party growers can be implemented.

How are Owner Reimbursement Costs determined and who pays?

Presently there is no formula for ORC's for the truffle industry. This is needed and would be developed by ATGA liaising with PHA. This is an opportunity for input from all involved in the truffle industry.

The funds required for the OCRs are met by government and industry funding. There are four categories depending on the portion of public versus private benefit of eradication of the EPP; these vary from 100% government (Category 1) to 20% government and 80% industry (Category 4).

There will be limits set on the industry cost sharing amount so that funding will not cripple the industry and the industry funding will be a contribution through an Emergency Plant Pest Response (EPPR) levy.



[Image source](#)

How will the EPPR Levy work?

In the event of an EPP incursion and where a Response Plan has been agreed by truffle industry and government, the industry will be required to meet their cost sharing obligations. Where the industry cannot meet its obligations directly, which would be the present situation for truffle growers, the Commonwealth will initially meet the industry's obligations and will allow the industry a reasonable period to repay via the EPPR or PHA levy process or another process to raise funds as deemed appropriate through liaising with the industry and accepted by the Commonwealth.

As part of the obligation of an industry grower group joining the EPPRD, the industry intends to use its best endeavors to establish an EPPR levy.

There is currently **no** EPPR levy mechanism established for the truffle industry and it is acceptable that if a levy is negotiated the levy value could be set at zero. This is another important opportunity for industry involvement.

Should an EPP incursion be declared it is at this point that the truffle industry will initiate it's already agreed repayment process.

What will the EPPR levy look like and what is the process to achieve it?

The structure of EPPR levy for the truffle industry has not been determined and the process to achieve this needs to adhere to Government requirements and protocols. The process to establish a levy involves preparing and submitting a business case in accordance with the Australian Government's "Levy Principles and Guidelines for the Management of New or Amended Levies" (2009). This requires recorded truffle industry consensus on the 12 Levy Principles set out in the above document. Again this is the opportunity for the entire truffle industry to contribute and direct a levy system that is fair, equitable and manageable.

Why should the truffle industry be a member of PHA, party to the EPPRD and exposed to a possible future levy imposition?

Highlighted in the opening paragraph the biosecurity risks to the growing truffle industry are likely to increase. Risks to all growers will increase as the number of truffle host tree plantings and truffle production escalates, and as the impacts of food industry globalisation, potential climate change, agritourism and the rising international demands for food quality increases.

It therefore seems appropriate to have a mechanism in place where by truffle growers and truffières will receive potentially substantial assistance and funding to control, eradicate and recover from an Emergency Plant Pest incursion. Particularly in a situation where the growers have an equal role in the decisions relating to the response to that incursion and WILL NOT be required to contribute any funds until after the response has been initiated. Furthermore, the level of contribution will be commensurate with the industry's financial capability and that, through an agreed EPPR levy process, is deemed fair and equitable to all those involved in the truffle growing industry.

BIOGRAPHY



Paul Robinson and wife Rose Yeoman purchased a 32 hectare farm in the Middlesex Valley, southeast of Manjimup in 2008 and planted a 5 hectare truffière comprising oaks and hazel trees in November 2009, with first production in the winter of 2013. Paul and Rose have focussed on soil and tree health; and truffle quality. Silverwood Truffles also rears prime beef cattle.

Paul trained as a geologist and has a background in research and industry. He has owned and operated technical and advisory consultancies. He has served as a director on private and listed company boards, is a member of the Board of Management for Truffle Kerfuffle and is Treasurer of the Truffle Producers WA Inc.



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