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Nursery industry warns: imported bananas threaten more than just banana crops

By Kate O'Neill

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John McDonald (left) with nursery owner Andy Cameron. Picture supplied

A biosecurity expert from Australia's nursery industry has thrown his support behind the campaign to keep imported bananas out of the country, saying the biosecurity threat extends beyond banana plantations.

John McDonald, director of R&D and biosecurity at Australia's peak body for the nursery industry, Greenlife Industry Australia (GIA), says imports would put nurseries at risk.

"It only takes one infected shipment to undo decades of biosecurity work," he said.

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"Potential pests and diseases don't just threaten banana production, but greenlife production across various commodities, including hemp, heliconia and species of Alpinia."



© John McDonald. Picture supplied

In September, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry [announced a review of quarantine arrangements for the importation of bananas from the Philippines into Australia.](#)

The review, which has the potential to open the door to Filipino imports, has been met with [huge backlash from the banana industry.](#)

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Growers argue there is no quarantine measure that can reduce imported disease risk to zero and warned that diseases present in the Philippines could devastate the Australian banana industry if they were to arrive in Australia.

Mr McDonald says Australia remains one of the few banana-producing regions currently free from moko disease, black sigatoka, bract mosaic virus and the banana skipper butterfly, which are all present in the Philippines.

These diseases not only threaten the nursery production of bananas, but also other plants.

Mr McDonald said moko disease could affect *Heliconia* spp; banana skipper butterfly and black sigatoka could target hemp (*Musa textilis*); and bract mosaic virus could affect hemp and *Alpinia purpurata* (flowering ginger).



📷 Moko disease can affect *Heliconia* spp. Picture by Manfred Richter/Pixabay

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"Since February, more than 13 new incursions have been recorded nationally, with some infestations linked to non-plant imports, such as ships, planes, tourists, and shipping containers," Mr McDonald said.

"Trade, travel, and tourism remain one of the leading causes of incursions in Australia.

"The biosecurity protocols surrounding imported goods cannot guarantee the safety of our onshore green production.

"Producers are already responding to several threats in their production nurseries and plantations.

"We cannot expect them to take on the management of introduced pests that could've been avoided.

"We have a strong banana industry supported by highly professional banana production nurseries generating thousands of jobs across regional areas of QLD, NSW, WA and NT."

- John McDonald, Greenlife Australia

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"Beyond the threat to local biodiversity and biosecurity, we have to consider the livelihood of our local producers.

"GIA represents the nursery sector under the national Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed and urges further industry consultation before importation is considered.

"Any move toward importation must be weighed against the potential cost to regional jobs, food security and Australia's hard-won pest-free status."

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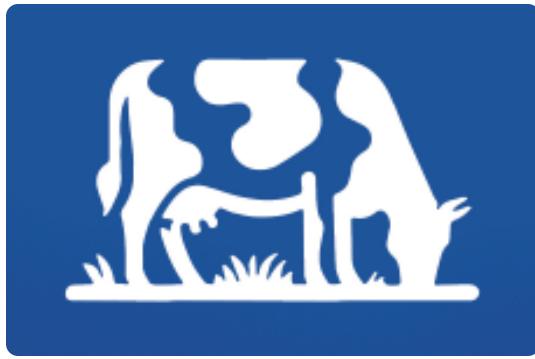
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