

Pastures for prosperity — Seeds forum.

3. A time of change in the Australian seed industry

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The Australian seed industry is facing many changes, and today I will address them in 3 areas of our industry. These are the Herbage Plant Liaison Committees, the government regulatory authorities, and the Seed Industry Association of Australia.

Queensland Herbage Plant Liaison Committee

This is an advisory committee made up of representatives from DPI, CSIRO, University of Queensland (including Gatton College), Department of Heritage and the Environment, Seed Industry Association of Australia, Queensland Seed Producers and the Sub-Tropical Seed Growers.

Its role has been to evaluate the performance of new varieties under grazing conditions in different areas of Queensland, and if considered to be superior to the existing cultivars, to release them into the market place. This included organising the multiplication of seed supplies, publicity for the variety when commercial quantities of seed were available, maintaining some basic seed in cold storage, and keeping a register describing each variety released.

With the advent of Plant Breeders Rights, most of the above functions are undertaken by the breeder; so the need for these committees has been questioned.

The Queensland HPLC is in favour of continuing the present arrangements, because:

- there is a need for an up-to-date register of available herbage plant varieties; and

- not all future cultivars will be registered under PBR, as some may have only a small niche market, that would not warrant the cost of PBR protection. Such was the case with Jarrah grass and butterfly pea, both released through QHPLC in recent years.

This question will be on the agenda for our next formal meeting in Brisbane on September 6, 1995.

Government regulatory controls

The recent changes in this area have mainly been brought about by the state premiers agreeing on mutual recognition of one another's seed standards.

Queensland was the only state with physical quality standards for uncertified seed, so seed from other states with a lower quality than our minimum standards could be brought in and legally sold in Queensland. This would have been unfair competition for our local producers, so Queensland had to fall into line. The necessary legislation came into force on March 15, 1995.

Uncertified seed

No minimum standards for purity or germination, for the reasons explained.

Labelling of bags is required in accordance with the national uniform labelling policy. This would operate under "Truth in Labelling", so the seed quality is guaranteed to be at least as good as what is stated on the label.

Declared seeds. Because all states had their own declared seed lists, which were not compatible, the Australian Seeds Council agreed to abolish the lists. So far, Queensland is the only state to have done so, but Victoria and Western Australia are to follow suit. It is proposed that all seed buyers be advised to buy their seed with a current seed analysis certificate, so that they will know what is in the seed line.

Prohibited seeds. Under the quarantine requirements of each state, they will keep their prohibited seeds lists, which will be recognised by every other state. This applies to all seed — certified or not.

Certified seed

Queensland will retain minimum standards for purity and germination, as per the national standards developed by the Australian Seeds Council, in consultation with the Seed Industry Association of Australia.

Agricultural Standards of DPI are now re-writing all the seed certification rules to fit in with the mutual recognition legislation. Seed certification will be run by DPI with an advisory committee comprising representatives of seed merchants, seed buyers and seed producers, to advise the Director-General. It will be set up so that, at some future time, when the OECD allows for non-government organisations to handle seed certification, the government can hand the job over to private industry. It is also expected that, in 4–5 years, the OECD will allow seed testing for certification to be done by non-government seed testing laboratories.

Seed Industry Association of Australia

Changes are also occurring with SIAA. Andrew Henderson was elected President at our last council meeting, filling the vacancy left after Max Jongebloed retired at the last convention.

For some months now, Phillip Curtis, a management consultant from Brisbane, has been conducting a strategic management review of SIAA. He has held meetings with council and with members in all regions, receiving a good response to questionnaires and participation in the process of deciding the future structure and management of our association.

He will present his report at our mini-convention in Sydney on September 15–17 this

year, where major changes will be debated and voted on. Significant issues to decide include the appointment of a full-time executive officer, and changes to membership fees to support his activities — probably by a graduated fee structure.

A specialist group has been formed within the SIAA called the Australian Tropical Seed Group, with John Fuller as President, to cater for the needs of the northern seed industry. SIAA has now joined the Asian and Pacific Seed Association to support members' involvement in this rapidly developing region.

Australia is hosting the 1999 Conference of the Federation of International Seed Organisations (FIS), when an estimated 1 000 delegates will attend. Tenders from professional conference organisers close this week.

The Australian Seed Technology Education Centre (set up by SIAA) at Gatton College is holding another of its popular Seed Industry Short Courses from September 19–22.

SIAA produces a quarterly magazine, which has, for some time, been distributed free of charge to anybody involved in the seed industry. If you are not on the mailing list, or if you need any changes to your details, please contact me. We are hoping that this quality production will encourage more of you to become members, in which case, you would also get the Insider News with the magazine. Our membership year starts on July 1, so now is a good time to join. The membership fee is currently \$425.00, but this will be subject to adjustment after the mini-convention in September. Unless you are a big business, there is a possibility that you would receive a refund. By joining before then, you would be able to attend the convention and take part in restructuring the association.

I have some pamphlets outlining the activities of SIAA for you, and also a few membership application forms for anybody interested in having a say in shaping the future of your industry and the association representing your interests.