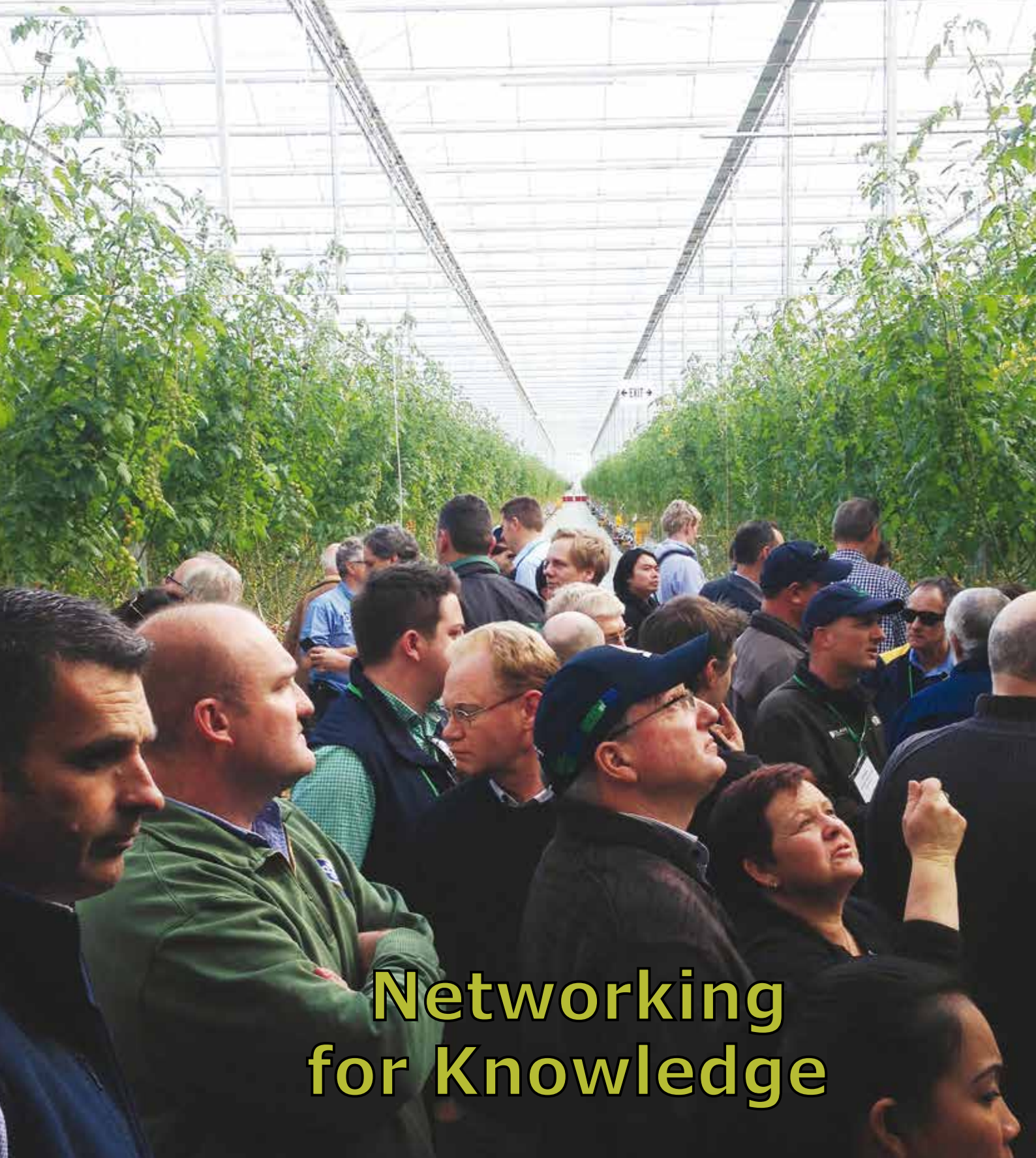




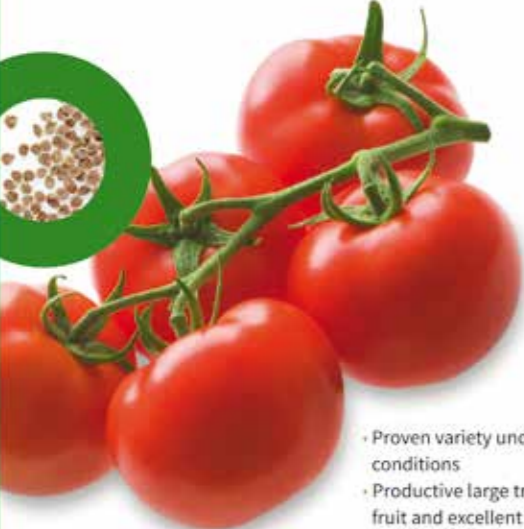
SOILLESS AUSTRALIA

Official Newsletter of the Australian Protected Cropping Industry
Volume 3 / 2014 Spring www.protectedcroppingaustralia.com



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Front Cover:

HFF Conference delegates toured Katunga Fresh; 12 hectares of highly automated tomato glasshouses, in the heart of the Riverina, Victoria.

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Any correspondence concerning the newsletter should be sent direct to the editor.

PCA News

PCA loves the opportunity to get together with members and industry at a conference to "Network for Knowledge". Indeed this was the theme at the recent Hydroponic Farmers Federation (HFF) conference in Mulwala, July 16-18 2014.

Greenhouse and hydroponic growers and their allied trade came together from around the world to share, network and learn how they can improve their business.

PCA took advantage of the HFF gathering to hold our AGM and a grower forum on the proposed Fresh Tomato Levy and Bombus terrestris (Bt) bumblebee greenhouse pollination trial.

The PCA trade booth showcased the resources available in membership, including this magazine, Soilless Australia, also reference books available for sale and the breadth of knowledge and experience in the PCA Directors - all available on-hand at the HFF conference.

The PCA AGM was an opportunity to note the success and influence of the association over the last 12 months, and for Marcus Brandsema to announce that Leigh Taig is now the PCA Chairman.

Leigh Taig has been on the PCA Board for over a decade and is very familiar with the ongoing issues and systems in place. Leigh's day job is the Program Coordinator at Goulburn Ovens TAFE, in Shepparton.

New PCA Chairman Leigh Taig Representing Allied Trade Sector

Leigh Taig has been involved in horticulture for over 30 years. He began his career as an apprentice with the City of Bendigo and has worked continuously in the industry for most of his working life. In 2002 he completed a Diploma of Applied Science at the University of Melbourne's Burnley campus, focussing on Nursery Production.

Leigh began teaching horticulture at Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) in the early 90's and was instrumental in establishing Amenity Horticulture at GOTAFE's Shepparton campus.

Leigh has qualifications in training, education and leadership, and during his 15 years at GOTAFE has had many roles. "I've been very fortunate to work in an area that brings together two passions - horticulture and education - as well as developing new courses and coordinating programs for the Horticulture Industry" said Leigh.

Leigh's passion and fascination for the Protected Cropping Industry was fuelled (like many others) on a PCA study tour to the Netherlands. In 2007 he was awarded an International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship which enabled him to travel to the Netherlands and join Australian growers on a 2 week study tour.



The PCA trade booth at the HFF conference was a wealth of information and inspiration, including functional mini greenhouses, PCA Company Secretary/Editor, Saskia Blanch and PCA Director Annie Hart.

Leigh Taig and all the PCA Board and members are very grateful to Marcus Brandsema for his two years as PCA Chairman.

Marcus remains on the PCA Board of Directors and will continue to drive several issues on behalf of members, including bumblebees, the Tomato Levy, Greenhouse Construction Code and Insurance.

Each of these subjects is gaining a lot of traction for the benefit of greenhouse growers Australia wide.

Several topics that were raised at the AGM follow on the following pages.



Leigh's focus in the Netherlands was to look at how specialist training organisations such as PTC+, provide training in Protected Cropping, with the view of advocating for a similar facility here in Australia.

"Travelling to the Netherlands, meeting specialist Dutch trainers, visiting innovative greenhouses, talking to researchers and then joining Australian growers on their study tour has been such a motivator for me." Leigh explained.

"The Dutch have successfully linked research, the industry and education - each sector supporting and driving the other. We've been able to utilise Dutch technology and adapt it to Australian climates, but Australian-based research and education will ensure that our industry continues to develop and expand."




The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for the Environment

MS14-001604

Mr Frank Costa OAM
Chairman
Costa Group
Locked Bag 1000
SUNSHINE VIC 3020

COPY

11 AUG 2014

Dear Mr Costa 

At our meeting on 19 February 2014 I indicated that I would seek further advice on legal options for the possible commercial use of the feral bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) in Tasmania. I also sought advice on the impacts of bumblebees on the honeybee industry in New Zealand and Tasmania.

I note that to facilitate the use of the feral population of bumblebees in Tasmania, I would have to seek an amendment to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Although it is not known whether bumblebees were accidentally or deliberately introduced into Tasmania, because the species is not on the live import list it is regarded as unlawfully imported. Section 303GN of the EPBC Act prevents personal or commercial gain from unlawfully imported specimens. In addition to the legal risks associated with amending the Act to allow use of such specimens, I must consider whether an amendment to the Act would undermine the purpose of the legislation by setting up a perverse incentive for illegal importers.

Although bumblebees are already present in Tasmania, it is possible that activities associated with their commercial use may have an adverse impact on the environment. To enable me to better understand these risks, I invite you to submit a comprehensive assessment of your proposal to use the feral population of bumblebees in Tasmania. I have attached the terms of reference on which to base your assessment.

As a previous assessment of *Bombus terrestris* for inclusion on the live import list addressed the risks to the Australian environment of import of the species, your assessment would not need to duplicate that work. The information in that report, including potential risks posed by bumblebees, still applies unless new information is available.

For procedural fairness, once I am satisfied that you have provided information that comprehensively addresses the attached terms of reference, I will provide your assessment report to state and territory governments and other interested stakeholders and seek their views on your proposal.

I will make a decision about whether or not to pursue an amendment to the Act once I have considered the outcome of this assessment and stakeholders' views on the matter. I note that any amendment to the Act would need to go before Parliament and before I consider taking that course I would first need to be satisfied that such an amendment would not pose a serious environmental or legal risk.

I have copied this letter to the Prime Minister, the Hon Tony Abbott MP.

Yours sincerely,


Greg Hunt

Terms of Reference for an assessment of the environmental risks of commercial use of existing feral bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) in Tasmania.

This assessment should focus on potential risks to the environment of the commercial use of bumblebees in Tasmania, utilising the existing feral bumblebees already present in that State. It does not need to duplicate the work of the previous assessment of *Bombus terrestris* for inclusion on the live import list, which addressed the environmental risks of import of this species into Australia (refer application by Australian Hydroponic and Greenhouse Association, concluded 2008).

1. Summarise the potential impact on the Tasmanian environment of commercial use of the specimens. Address both the potential impacts of the particular activity that is proposed, and the potential impacts of the species should the specimen(s) ever be released from effective human control. It is important that a full explanation and comprehensive analysis of each aspect is undertaken. Details should be provided of proposed processes for harvesting the feral population, mass-rearing of bumblebees (if applicable), housing in glasshouses and removal or destruction of excess/unwanted specimens.

The assessment should include, but not be limited to, an assessment of the likely changes to the overall number of bumblebees, their density and distribution as a result of commercial use, and potential impacts that these changes may have on the Tasmanian environment.

Consideration should be given to aspects such as: competition with native animals for nectar and pollen; interference in pollination systems; impacts on habitats; spread of weeds; disease transmission; impacts on primary industries (including potential impacts on pollination of existing crops).

2. Assess the likelihood of bumblebees being transferred to mainland Australia as a result of commercial activities and movement of produce, compared to the current situation with existing feral bumblebees.
3. Discuss any control/ eradication programs that could be applied in Tasmania if the proposed activities resulted in negative impacts on the environment.



Bt Bumblebee Trial

To legally use the feral populations of Bt bumblebees in Tasmanian

commercial greenhouses, there needs to be an amendment to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Section 303GN of the EPBC Act prevents personal or commercial gain from unlawfully imported specimens.

As the species is not on the live import list it is regarded as unlawfully imported, even though it is not known whether they were accidentally or deliberately introduced into Tasmania, some 20 years ago.

The Tasmanian Senator Jacquie Lambie has joined the push on Federal government and now we have the terms of reference for a comprehensive analysis for what Environment Minister Greg Hunt calls an **"Assessment of the environmental risks of commercial use of existing feral bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) in Tasmania."**

Once The Honourable Greg Hunt, Minister for the Environment has read the comprehensive report, he will then consider whether he takes any amendment of the Act before Parliament. See Minister Greg Hunt's letter to Frank Costa, of Costa Group, Blush Tomatoes outlining the criteria to be addressed, on page three.

The Terms of Reference say there is no need to replicate the 2009 submission by the Australian Hydroponic & Greenhouse Association (now called PCA) which focused on the environmental impacts of importing Bt bees into Australia.

The next comprehensive assessment needs to focus on the environmental risks and potential impacts of using the feral Bt populations already within Tasmania.

Also to be considered is the proposed processes for harvesting the feral population, housing in glasshouses and removal or destruction of excess/unwanted bees.

The Bt Bumblebee Assessment Report must also cover any effects on the existing Bt population and the likelihood of them entering mainland Australia through movement of produce, compared to the current situation with existing feral Bt bumblebees in Tasmania.

Other environmental risks to be covered must include competition with native animals for nectar and pollen; interference in pollination systems; impacts on habitats; spread of weeds; disease transmission; impacts on primary industries (including potential impacts on pollination of existing crops).

If the greenhouse trial was to result in any negative impacts on the environment, then one must detail in advance any control or eradication programs that could be applied in Tasmania.

PCA will keep members informed of the progress of the Bt Assessment Report, as always.



PCA Energy Discount Scheme

All PCA Full and Affiliate members are encouraged to phone Luke Murnane of Progressive Green and Utilicar, on 1 300 080 608 for real savings on electricity and gas. This is a tangible demonstration of how the PCA is working for you and your bottom line.

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AGM Special Business Motion - Aquaponics



PCA Members were all in favour of a change to the constitution to reflect the increasing significance of the Aquaponic sector.

A place is now available for an Aquaponics representative on the PCA Board of Directors, within the Leafy Greens sector.

The maximum number of Board positions is still ten, with two from each of the following categories; F&V vine crops, Flowers, Leafy Green growers and their Allied Trade.

The two ballot system sees that one of the Directors may be elected as an Aquaponic representative, in the second round of elections, and replaces one position from any sector, to become part of the Leafy Green Sector.

Aquaponics globally is emerging as a significant new sector of the greenhouse and hydroponics community with many new commercial and research enterprises evaluating their contribution to enhancing integrated food production systems. Many aquaponic research projects and commercial developments are well underway in this exciting new field.

Many countries have already established professional facilities to investigate and refine these integrated production systems incl. Holland, Canada, USA, Israel, UAE, Norway, Finland, UK, Belgium, Sweden, China, Singapore, to name but a few.

There exists strong potential for existing growers or new investors to value add the commercial production of aquatic animals through integration with greenhouse systems.

Aquaponics has some integration issues, usually related to fertiliser inputs. The PCA needs to be involved at these relatively early stages to ensure we all keep abreast of new and emerging developments and communicate these to industry.

Through proactive endeavours, PCA remains relevant and positive on behalf of industry members with timely involvement of global industry issues.

Fresh Tomato Levy

A greenhouse growers' forum was held following the PCA AGM, for open discussion and updates on feedback on the proposed Fresh Tomato levy.



Everyone agreed that the next stage in the process was to ask four of the large tomato producers if they could pledge financial support to establish the formal consultation process.

A goal of \$40,000 voluntary contribution from industry has been set to clarify the details of when, where and how to apply the levy. A very technical and detailed submission to the Minister for Agriculture is also required, including who is on the committee that recommends expenditure.

The PCA will approach 'the big four' greenhouse tomato producers, and keep you informed of the outcomes.



Next Big Conference



The AIS Greenworks conference is your opportunity to get answers to real problems from industry experts and specialists who are available to talk and provide advice over the course of three and a half days.

You can network and meet other hydroponic greenhouse growers who may be in the same position and have similar concerns as you. Pick up skills of the trade, on the Gold Coast. You can visit a brand new 2 Ha glasshouse.

The conference theme is **Future Farming** focusing on innovative solutions to produce food and flowers with less water, energy or fertiliser inputs.

The format will follow that of the previous twelve PCA biennial conferences, with a few tweaks.

Due to popular demand, an additional stream of workshops will cater directly to berry growers, keen to learn the tools of our trade.

Monday will now be exclusively plenary sessions, followed by Tuesday concurrent streams of seminars for 5 crop-specific groups;

- F&V Vine crops
- Leafy Greens
- Aquaponics
- Cut Flowers
- Berry Growers

Acclaimed international and Australian speakers will share their knowledge on new and emerging production systems.

- Efficiency with energy, water, nutrients and growing area
- Reductions in chemical use for insect and disease control
- Reduced waste, run-off and labour saving methods to suit both low-tech and high-tech growing systems
- Adoption of new technology, food security and biosecurity, and export potential
- Savings and techniques to make alternative energy sources such as bio-char produced from waste to use for heating

www.pca2015.org

Greenhouse Construction Code

This project has been taken on by consulting firm, Osborn Lane Consulting Engineers. The PCA Board have supplied Osborn with material to assist them with what is needed to streamline and make relevant the greenhouse building process. We wait in anticipation of the outcome, and will distribute as it comes to hand.



Greenhouse Insurance

This is an agenda the PCA continue to pursue. As reported at 2013 AGM, the broker we were dealing with came to a dead end as a QBE key person left the organisation, and their replacement was not open to the idea. But since then, working with another broker, in a different area, we may be making some headway. Our objective is to provide members with a collective package that will be competitive, and provide an alternative.



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