



April 9, 2024

Biosecurity Protection Levy

The Almond Board of Australia (ABA) provides the following response to the proposed Agriculture (Biosecurity Protection) Levies Bill 2024, the Agriculture (Biosecurity Protection) Charges Bill 2024 and the Agriculture (Biosecurity Protection) Levies and Charges Collection Bill 2024.

The ABA is the peak industry body for the Australian almond industry and represents almost 100% of all growers and processors. The industry covers 62,400 hectares, largely across the southern Murray Darling Basin and generates more than 10,000 jobs.

The ABA is a signatory to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed and has a long term commitment to biosecurity protection. In more recent times the industry has incurred a multi-million dollar debt as a result of the efforts to firstly eradicate and then transition to management of varroa destructor discovered in the port of Newcastle in June 2022. This National Response to varroa has been the largest of its kind in Australian biosecurity history and the overall cost of the response is estimated to be in excess of \$100 million. The almond industry is the largest contributor of the affected industries involved.

Since becoming an EPPRD signatory we have also been levied to help fund responses to eradicate other pests, including khapra beetle that arrived on our shores in an export container full of high chairs for babies. We have also contributed to various outbreaks of varroa jacobsoni discovered in ports in Victoria and Queensland.

It is with a great deal of bewilderment and sense of injustice that the almond industry, now finds itself being expected to contribute even more to biosecurity protection on an annual basis. All EPPRD signatories have acknowledged by their membership and ongoing participation in national responses that we have a responsibility to provide meaningful contribution to biosecurity protection, but insist there must be equity in cost sharing and that the aforementioned Bills fail to meet this fundamental expectation.

The proposed Bills aim to raise a further \$47.5 million from the same industries that are already pulling their weight on biosecurity protection. We humbly suggest that others within the supply chain who benefit just as much from an agile well resourced national biosecurity surveillance program should also be expected to contribute.

The ABA is also on record at an earlier Senate Enquiry in supporting a biosecurity levy on shipping containers arriving in Australia. We note that since that call, the concept has won the support of the Freight and Trade Alliance and the Australian Peak Shippers Association. The offer delivers a commonsense solution and achieves the very goal of sharing the cost and responsibility with one of the most likely sources of a biosecurity breach within the supply chain.



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There has not been another time in Australian agricultural history where the financial burden of primary production of food and fibre has been as wide ranging and so impactful on farm gate margins. Adding another tax by way of a biosecurity levy is unfair and fails to reflect the reality that biosecurity is a collective responsibility across the supply chain.

The ABA supports the many other submissions that have called for an immediate rethink on the proposed Biosecurity Protection Levy and a far more equitable process being implemented to improve our national defence to potentially damaging pests and diseases.

Your sincerely

Tim Jackson, Chief Executive Officer
Almond Board of Australia