



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
PLANT HEALTH
2020

Everyday plant health heroes Protecting plants, protecting life



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How did you choose your job? Or did it choose you?

I chose my job, as I saw a great opportunity to lead biosecurity nationally, bringing together industry, government, and community to protect plant health – the backbone of our everyday existence. I'm very fortunate to be leading Plant Health Australia, a company that has established itself as a trusted mainstay in Australia's biosecurity system and is recognised nationally and internationally as leaders in plant health and biosecurity. The foundations for a career in this field were, however, built from a young age. As a child I had a strong fascination for natural science and my love for taxonomy was realised when I received a book on classifying wildflowers for my 7th birthday. My mum and dad also did the best thing they ever could for me and my love for science – after selling up our farm, they took me out of school to travel around Australia for 12 months! They taught me to appreciate the diverse landscape we live in and the many agricultural industries in all parts of the country. It was from this point onwards that I knew I wanted a career protecting Australia from exotic pest and disease threats, as I love the diversity and uniqueness of our beautiful country.

How long have you worked in this industry?

When I first started out in my career (about twenty five years ago), biosecurity was known as quarantine. Things have gone full circle and the word quarantine is now back in vogue!

What does plant health mean to you?

Plant health is of global importance for sustainable agriculture, food security and protection of the natural environment. We can't survive without plants. They need to be protected and nurtured as they feed us, shelter us, clothe us and sustain all life on earth. They are our livelihoods and when our plant industries or environment are under threat, we need to work together to achieve the best possible outcome. Whether it be through eradication,

containment, investment in science to develop better understandings or adapting and assisting in recovery.

It's also a field of great complexity, requiring lateral thinking and importantly collaboration to solve problems and develop solutions with those that have the experience and knowledge. And that experience and knowledge is held in many locations within industry, government and community here and overseas. The best biosecurity outcomes are achieved through partnership, good communication, sacrifice and support, and the plant health community has this in droves.

What are your greatest achievements in this role?

I enjoy the challenges and rewards from protecting plant health and keeping industries viable. Our world changes rapidly, even more so in the past year and we are faced with shifting risks in exposure to the introduction and spread of pests and diseases. To keep one step ahead of the introduction and spread of pests and diseases, one has to look outside the square – a philosophy that I will continue as I embark in this current role. This approach has served me well and I have had many achievements from my career to date that I'm proud of. These achievements have been possible with the help of teams that I have led, developed, mentored and who have similar values and enthusiasm as myself to see Australia's agricultural industries thrive.

- Delivering proof of freedom on 1 February 2019 for one of the largest plant pest eradication programs ever attempted and achieved in Australia for the National Banana Freckle Eradication Program.
- Being awarded a collaborative Industry/Government Australian Biosecurity Award in 2019, recognising my contribution to maintaining Australia's biosecurity integrity through the response to citrus canker in the Northern Territory.
- Initiating successful training of the world's first odour detection dogs capable of detecting the browsing ant, providing valuable return on national cost share investment and support for eradication programs in the NT, WA and Queensland.

- Leading the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program and delivering successful eradication of fire ants from Yarwun, Gladstone a year and a half earlier than the previous incursion in 2006, setting a new standard in invasive pest management.

What does a typical day look like for you?

A typical day for me is working from our office in Deakin, Canberra with a team that's primarily located in the Australian Capital Territory but also has staff in Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. We work with a variety of stakeholders and importantly bring them together to achieve great biosecurity outcomes. Whether that's through hosting virtual meetings on fall armyworm, fruit fly workshops with leading researchers, biosecurity planning with industries or response to detections of plant pests, it's diverse and there's never a dull moment! Plant industries are also committed to building their capacity to respond to potential biosecurity threats and we work closely with industry biosecurity officers from the vegetable, grains and bee industries allowing industries to participate in a range of biosecurity initiatives and improve on-farm biosecurity.

What advice would you give anybody wanting to get into the industry?

One of my very first jobs out of University in far north Queensland was working for the United States Department of Agriculture to find a biocontrol agent for melaleucas that had become an invasive species in the Florida everglades. Knowing that Australian species can be just as invasive in other parts of the world spurred me on to pursue a career in biosecurity. The challenges we face are global and the solutions are available, we just need to look. And if you want a rewarding career that protects Plant health and ensures sustainable agriculture, food security and protection of the natural environment for generations to come, then this is the career for you!