



*leading tubestock  
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# Inquiry into and report on the role of technology in increasing agricultural productivity in Australia

## Interstate Quarantine

One of the largest problems for plant producers is interstate plant shipment. Currently there are seven sets of rules governing the movement of plants between the states. From an outsider it would appear that these rules are a game between officers in the relative departments in each state. There is wide acceptance across industry of the need and benefit of some level of interstate plant quarantine and restrictions on plant movement. However if it was left to industry it would be 100 times more efficient and effective.

The best solution is to use the current technology to manage plant movement. The drive seems to be traceability and record keeping over actual disease prevention. It is not possible to go to one place and find out all the restrictions on one genus of plants across the country. This makes it hard to determine what rules need to be implemented.

Plant growers are having to fill out triplicate forms by hand which come in expensive books and need to be kept for record keeping. A first year uni student could create a web based system to manage the whole issue. A simple low key investment in a database system listing all plants grown with the weed and disease restrictions entered into separate fields for each state. Even a simple spreadsheet could do this.

Most businesses use some form of accounting package or stock control package to manage orders and invoicing. These could easily be modified to include the respective plant health declarations. The concern from bureaucrats is traceability and security of information. This is simply overcome by each producer emailing the paperwork prior to each shipment. Thereby reducing paper work and making all offices and officers more efficient.

Finally some of the hoops are nonsensical. Having a declaration to say a nursery is a certain distance from a pest outbreak, attached to each plant shipment is illogical. A simple log of locations would solve this as towns don't move very often. Spraying edible plants with highly toxic pesticides prior to delivery is immoral and dangerous. The list goes on.

## International Quarantine

Sending plants in and out of Australia is a nightmare. The rest of the world laughs at the way we do things. It is a slow and cumbersome process to organise paperwork for export. There is no simple way to get plants ready for shipment overseas. This costs the grower in either time or funds. It was easier ten years ago and many growers have stopped because too much time and money was spent organising paper work. Overseas customers place orders expecting delivery in relatively short time periods (ie whilst plants look good) but end up cancelling due to long lead times.

Add on the crazy system for export of native plants. Species need a permit but cultivars don't. If a permit is needed proof of artificial propagation and registration are required even if this has been done in the past. In doing this, proof of where the parent plants came from is needed – even if it was from a hardware or nursery 20 years earlier for which there are no records.



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Importing plants is even worse with some treatments being fatal on the plants without any justification. There has been some minor improvement but there is a long way to go. The inability to import varieties of commercial and ornamental plants is restricting business development. When this is then added to flat bans on whole genera with no practical alternative has cost small growers large sums. Add in stupid ruling like seeds for consumption being allowed but seeds for growing not allowed and it is a real mess. Over the last decade some major advances have been made accessing import permits. For those plants that are on the electronic system it is a simple process to obtain a permit – which is good. However this is the only place where modern technology is working at its best.

Finally if collectors are on plant trips they are supposed to give notice of what they are bringing in and when they are coming. They are supposed to obtain a permit several weeks before leaving but have no idea what they expect to find. Importation of ornamental plants carries a serious risk to our horticultural crops and all plant collectors will acknowledge this. There are many of whom have significant knowledge and experience who can be trusted to do the right thing. Instead of having these blanket rules there should be discussion and co-operation. Flat bans encourage growers, collectors and the public to sneak in plants.

### **Plant protectants**

A long and continual discussion has been the issue of farm chemicals and the usage rules between states. It is a crazy system when a chemical can be used to treat a bug on one side of the Murray but not the other or when a chemical can be used on a bug on one crop but not another. The manufacturers can't test all chemicals in all states on all crops due to cost. Why should they when surely there is an ability to use data from other states and overseas?

### **Weeds**

The definitions of weeds on a local, state and national basis needs addressing. There are plants that are declared weeds in areas where they are a struggle to grow due to inappropriate environmental conditions. There are plants that are okay to grow which then become declared weeds leaving growers with large losses. There are plants that are staple foods easily bought in any green grocer but are banned weeds. They are being farmed somewhere whilst home growers are not allowed to plant them. Finally there are those cases when whole genera are declared weeds whilst not allowing for sterile hybrids or even non invasive species. There is no 'permit' system for the growing of declared weeds in protected conditions.

Overall the lack of consistency and logic on all these issue is frustrating to growers. It breeds a contempt for the law and a desire to get around the regulations which in turn results in a lessening of our biosecurity. It is made worse when decisions are made by people in offices with less knowledge than those growing the plants or with little understanding of the implications on the growers and wider community. Again it engenders a sense of distrust and disrespect for the laws and the lawmakers which in turn is counter productive and reduces the safety and security of our horticultural industries.



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