

Final Report

Almond Industry Communications Programme

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Project:

Almond Industry Communications Programme AL16000

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Summary

The Australian Almond Industry Communications Programme focused on providing a broad range of timely information to all Australian almond industry stakeholders and interested parties, including Hort Innovation.

The ABA is extremely well positioned to undertake and provide industry communications due to its broad membership base, comprising almond growers/ levy payers, processors and marketers, with grower membership currently representing approximately 95% of planted acreage. Associate membership is also taken up by an extensive range of industry service providers including nurseries, beekeepers, banks, investors, chemical suppliers and researchers.

All of these contacts are included in communications distribution, capturing an estimated 98% of Australian almond growers / levy payers.

This project encompassed a wide range of industry communication activities, including:

- “In A Nutshell”, the Australian almond industry’s quarterly newsletter
- Best Practice Fact Sheets
- Youtube videos
- Almond Bytes (monthly e-blasts)
- Annually updated Australian Almond Information Booklet (Almond Insights)
- Regularly updated industry website
- Regularly updated almond industry contacts database
- Regional Grower Forums
- Hort Innovation project report updates
- Media releases
- Social media.

Communications are intended for and distributed to a wide range of audiences including:

- Almond growers / levy payers
- Almond processors and marketers
- Researchers
- Investors in the industry
- Industry suppliers including chemical companies, nurseries and beekeepers
- Industry service providers, including agronomists, consultants and pest and disease monitors
- Government agencies
- Domestic and export nut traders
- Partner organisations.

Evaluation of communications activities was undertaken during the project to assess the program and effectiveness of communications. These evaluations were distributed twice during the project lifetime and delivered via interactive email. Survey questions were designed to assess quality, timeliness, frequency, format, distribution method and relevance of information provided.

This process was supplemented by informal evaluation processes and discussion with individual members. Findings from these evaluation processes were taken into account when planning the industry communications program. The project is monitored by the ABA Directors who represent 98% of production.

Keywords

Almond; industry; market development; communications; engagement; statistics; information dissemination; research and development

Introduction

The development of the Australian almond industry into a major horticultural industry has occurred in little more than 15 years. It is now Australia's most valuable horticultural export product and domestic sales growth has been around 10% per annum for many years. The industry is continuing to grow rapidly from 29,000 hectares in 2016 to 45,000 in 2018 with orchard area expected to reach 50,000 hectares by 2021. The industry is a combination of corporate enterprises and private farms providing a mixed audience of industry participants for industry communications with a need to cover a broad spectrum of information to enable sound business decisions to be made. The delivery mechanisms continue to evolve to most effectively convey the information that the Almond Board of Australia both produces and collects for dissemination. This project provides the resources to enable industry participants to be informed on matters from across the supply chain from best practice in the orchard to retaliatory tariffs on Californian almonds in China.

The Australian Almond Communications Programme (AL16000) is a continuation of previously funded projects (AL11005) and (AL08014). The industry's communication program plays a critical role in ensuring world's best production systems and management strategies are put in place to maximise the competitiveness of the Australian almond industry.

The Australian almond industry's communication strategies play an important role in supporting growers, industry organisations such as the ABA and Hort Innovation, research organisations, suppliers and investors to make better business decisions. The Almond Board of Australia (ABA) uses a variety of communication methods to effectively engage with its key stakeholders. The official publication of the Almond Board of Australia is the quarterly newsletter, *In A Nutshell*. This publication provides a range of information including:

- Extension of research and development project information
- Technical information on growing based on existing knowledge from Australia and international consultants and research providers
- Information on market research and market development programs
- Current planting production and import/export statistics
- Consumption data
- Quality issues, standards and management practices
- Crop forecasts
- Trade issues
- Industry events such as the regional meetings, field days, research forums and industry Conference
- Hort Innovation updates and membership call.

The Australian almond industry website <https://australianalmonds.com.au> and its dedicated grower section <https://industry.australianalmonds.com.au/> contains continuously updated industry information.

Electronic media (email) is also used to communicate timely information to lists of growers, almond processors and marketers, government officials and other industry participants. Circulation encompasses a free subscription email list of the full supply chain including all known Australian almond growers, processors, marketers, exporters, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, investors, researchers and service providers including nurseries, beekeepers, government representatives and partner organisations. This information is sent on an 'as needed' basis to topical opt-in lists including:

- Industry workshops
- Field day invitations
- Industry best practice information and Fact Sheets
- Regional grower meetings and other major events such as conference information
- Hort Innovation project Milestone and Final reports
- Hort Innovation events such as strategic planning meetings
- Supplier demonstrations
- Budwood sales and information
- Media releases

The Australian Almond Industry Database is confidential and maintained by the ABA in compliance with privacy requirements. The information contained within the database is used for newsletter and e-news mailings, and statistical collection activities. Planting, sales, import and export statistics are managed and collated from within the database to compile the annually published Almond Industry Statistics booklet '*Almond Insights*' that is made available publicly via email blasts, hard copy print and on the Almond Board of Australia's website.

Methodology

The almond industry in Australia is a vibrant, cohesive and rapidly expanding industry and high levels of corporate investment have brought with it an expanding base of information needs required by industry stakeholders. The industry comprises growers and people in associated businesses from broad geographical and social cross sections. Different communication methods are suited to different people, and this project utilises a range of communication methods including print, digital and written media as outlined below. Communication methods are integrated so each contains links with others and encourages feedback and information sharing. It is essential that these communications are readily available to all participants and service providers in a variety of formats to suit the diverse nature of each audience.

The cohesive nature of the industry has enabled the establishment of an effective information collection system, which provides the underlying basis for much of the industry communication activities. This information requires regular updating and analysis to ensure that it remains accurate and relevant.

The ABA team has been working on industry communication activities since its inception, providing knowledge and experience essential for effective communication. The team is led by the ABA CEO and employs a number of staff who oversee all communication to stakeholders throughout the industry.

Evaluation of all communications activities was undertaken during a mid-term review to assess the program and the effectiveness of communications. The assessment of each communication activity was tailored to suit the individual activity itself, whether that was via the use of online platforms, electronic surveys, or via forms handed to growers at face-to-face meetings. Survey questions were designed to assess the quality, timeliness, frequency, format, distribution method and relevance of information provided to stakeholders. Informal evaluation methods also supplemented this process, as it has been well noted that many almond growers are uncomfortable when providing feedback in formal situations and often prefer to have a face-to-face or telephone conversation with individuals from the ABA. Findings from these evaluations are taken into account when planning each year's communications program.

Industry Database

The ABA designs, manages and maintains a tailor made custom database of over 1,100 stakeholders from within the Australian almond industry including growers, processors, marketers, researchers, industry suppliers and other Australian and international contacts that enable distribution lists to be tailored to the communication being dealt with.

The Australian Almond Industry database, maintained by the ABA, contains confidential information, and as such is not available to any party outside of the Almond Board of Australia office. It is maintained by the ABA in compliance with privacy requirements. The information contained within the database is used for newsletter and e-news mailings, membership management, distribution of media releases and statistical collection activities.

The ABA uses the email management program, MailChimp, to distribute E-blasts promoting Field Days, Orchard Walks and other events of interest. MailChimp is also used to distribute download links to ABA publications including APVMA chemical permits and Hort Innovation reports.

The ABA distributes information provided by Hort Innovation to the ABA mailing lists as requested. The ABA also encourages growers to join Hort Innovation so as to provide contact details directly.

***In A Nutshell* Industry Newsletter**

In A Nutshell is the official voice of the Almond Board of Australia. It is a quarterly, 28-32 page, online publication focused on both technical and industry issues. *In A Nutshell* is the national online magazine for almond growers and interested stakeholders throughout Australia and any interested international party. It is published seasonally in February, May, August and November. This publication highlights key information relevant to industry, spanning research and development, market development, industry issues and events. Updates on Hort Innovation almond projects are included in the magazine.

Each edition of *In A Nutshell* is distributed throughout Australia and overseas to more than 1,100 industry stakeholders and an estimated readership of over 2,500. Circulation encompasses the full supply chain including all known Australian almond growers/ levy payers, processors, marketers, exporters, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, investors, researchers and service providers including nurseries, beekeepers, government representatives and partner organisations. One to two pages (minimum) every edition is dedicated to promoting information on the industry R&D levy and Hort Innovation membership. Two pages are also set aside for the Hort Innovation Industry Services Manager. The majority of the pages in the magazine relate to research findings, best practice, and matters relevant to implementing the industry strategic plan including:

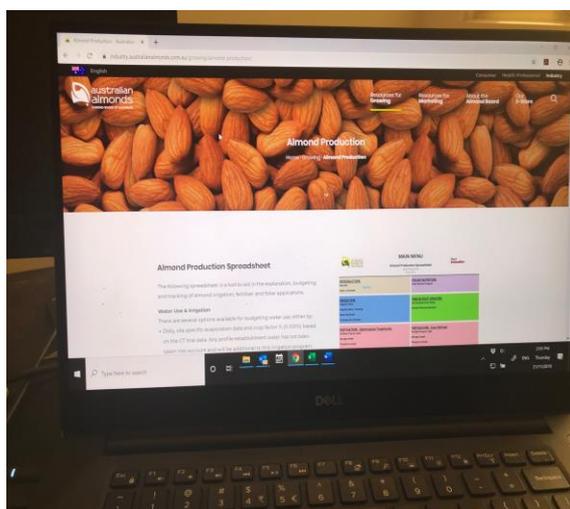


- Current, planting production and import/export statistics
- Consumption data
- Quality issues, standards & management practices
- Crop forecasts
- Extension of Research & Development project information
- Trade issues
- Information on market research and market development programs
- Technical information on growing based on existing knowledge
- Annual Industry Conference updates & information

Editorial meetings were held on a regular basis to strategically plan the content of the magazine, as well as to ensure a synergy with other communication tools to drive knowledge uptake. ABA Publications Manager and the CEO, Ross Skinner, together with other ABA staff collaborate on writing, researching, sourcing and editing articles for this publication. Articles and content suggestions on best practice are produced or reviewed by the Almond Industry Development Officers and ABA Grower Directors. Decisions on the content for this publication are also determined through consultation with research providers who commit to providing articles as part of their project agreements with Hort Innovation. The following ABA advisory committees: Almond Plant Improvement Committee, Pollination Committee, Production Committee and Market Development Committee, in addition to the ABA Board also identify content that would be beneficial to industry stakeholders.

In A Nutshell editions are available to the general public and interested parties via the Almond Board of Australia website via the “Industry” page: <https://industry.australianalmonds.com.au/almond-board/in-a-nutshell/>

Industry Website Updates



The Australian Almond Industry Website <https://industry.australianalmonds.com.au/> and grower/ levy payer dedicated pages located at growing.australianalmonds.com.au contains continually updated industry information in a format that is easy to understand, on a broad variety of industry related items including the R&D program for almonds, the ABA’s background, programs, news and extension events and other developments within the industry.

Industry pages contain links to many useful water, drought and industry partner pages, as well as industry statistical data, **ABA Annual Reports** for almonds, **fact sheets**, **videos** and conference and forum information. New pages are added to the site as required and allow visitors to navigate easily to find information.

Copies of project reports are uploaded to a dedicated area for almond levy payers (growers), and distributed via email download link to all almond levy payers. This area also includes download links to fact sheets, technical articles and research outcomes, as well as copies of all current chemical permits for almonds.

The industry website is available for access by all interested parties, and is advertised in all Almond Board of Australia publications via email footers, newsletters and e-blast references.

Regional Forums

Regional Forums are undertaken in the four major producing regions at least once annually. These focus on issues of industry importance as well as provide researchers with the opportunity to present their projects. The ABA Board has grower directors from each almond growing region of Australia who will consult with almond growers in their region ensuring the topics are tailored to suit each area.

Online Videos & Social Media Engagement

The ABA utilises social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube* to communicate to almond growers and other interested parties on research project outcomes and other videos and articles of industry relevance. The social media communication program provides linkages to industry stakeholders as well as the broader supply chain and horticultural community. All guest replies, posts and comments are carefully monitored and evaluated prior to being approved on social media channels.

*The ABA moved to the video sharing platform, Vimeo, during this project.

Best Practice Fact Sheets “All About Almonds”

ABA Industry Development staff prepare industry and seasonally relevant Best Practice Fact Sheets on a quarterly basis to be formatted, uploaded and distributed to almond growers. New fact sheets are sent to almond growers via e-blast with a digital copy of the fact sheet attached. Online fact sheets are also available to download a PDF copy, with registered site users able to comment and ask questions of technical staff. The article and fact sheet section of the website is searchable, with each post meta-tagged with relevant references to group and suggest similar topical articles that may be of interest to readers.

Annual Report on Almond Research



Previously, the ABA provided a report to industry members on Hort Innovation almond projects as part of the ABA Annual Report. Hort Innovation now publish individual industry annual reports. The ABA has continued to include a full list of Hort Innovation funded projects in its Annual Report each year.

The ABA also distributes Hort Innovations’ Almond Annual Report at its AGM and R&D Forum / Conference.

Hort Innovation Project Reports

Notifications of Hort Innovation project reports are sent to levy payers by email as they become available and then uploaded to the ABA industry website for electronic download.

Outputs

The outputs for the duration of the project, (AL16000) Australian Almond Industry Communications Programme, from 22/09/2016 until 22/09/2019, were:

Program Logic and Monitoring & Evaluation Plan Developed

The Program Logic for this project was developed and submitted, along with the project Monitoring & Evaluation Plan, at Milestone 2. These documents are included in this report (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Communications Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Calendar of Events

A Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Calendar of Events were prepared for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 (see Appendices 3 and 4).

12 Industry Newsletter *In A Nutshell* were researched, written, designed, published and distributed to more than 1,100 industry stakeholders throughout Australia and overseas, as well as uploaded to the Australian Almonds website <https://industry.australialmonds.com.au/almond-board/in-a-nutshell/> where the publications are available to read online. Editions covered in this project include:

2016	2017	2018	2019
16.2 - Winter	17.1 - Autumn	18.1 - Autumn	19.1 - Spring/ Summer
16.3 - Summer	17.2 - Winter	18.2 - Winter/ Spring	19.2 - Summer/ Autumn
	17.3 - Spring		19.3 - Autumn/ Winter
	17.4 - Summer		19.4 - Winter/Spring

36 x E-blast Monthly Newsletters (“Almond Bytes”).

E-blasts were sent out during this reporting period to interested opt-in groups using email management program, MailChimp. The E-blasts promoted Field Days, Orchard Walks and other events of interest. MailChimp is also used to distribute download links to ABA publications including APVMA chemical permits and Hort Innovation reports.

During the reporting period, there were 36 e-blasts (“Almond Bytes”) were sent to industry growers with an average open rate of 40.4%.

15 x Best Practice Fact Sheets were produced and/or, formatted, uploaded and distributed to almond growers.

Each Fact Sheet was also uploaded to the ABA website <https://industry.australialmonds.com.au> and is downloadable as a PDF.

- Managing Mice in Australian Almonds <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Quality-Pests-Storage-Almonds-Mice.pdf>
- Australian Almond Variety: Carina <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Est-Varieties-5-Carina.pdf>
- Australian Almond Variety: Vela <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Est-Varieties-1-Vela.pdf>
- Australian Almond Variety: Maxima <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Est-Varieties-6-Maxima.pdf>
- Managing Food Safety Risks in Australian Almonds <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Quality-Food-Safety-Managing-Food-Safety-Risks-in-Almonds.pdf>
- Managing Carpophilus Beetle in Almonds <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Pest-Disease-Pest-2-Carpophilus-Guidelines-2016-17-1.pdf>

- Phenology standards for almonds <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Phenology-standard-for-Almonds-27June-2018.pdf>
- Assessing phenology of almonds <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Assessing-Phenology-in-Almonds-27June-2018.pdf>
- Reducing the risk of Haloxypop breach <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Reducing-the-Risk-of-Spray-Drift-Haloxypop.pdf>
- Diagnosis and management of canker diseases in almonds <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Pest-Disease-Disease-Canker-and-trunk-diseases.pdf>
- Australian Breeding Varieties Update 2017/18 <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Breeding-Varieties-Update.pdf>
- Using glyphosate in almond orchards <https://industry.australionalmonds.com.au/growing/glyphosate>
- Implementing Best Practice for Orchard Hygiene <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Orchard-Hygiene-Fact-Sheet.pdf>
- Viruses in Australian Almonds <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Bacteria-Viruses-and-Viroids-in-Australian-almonds.pdf>
- Lower limb dieback research update <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LLD-research-update.pdf>

Grower Forums

Grower Forums were held each year in 2017, 2018 and 2019 in each of the four major growing areas of Adelaide, Sunraysia, Riverland and Riverina.

2017 – 3-5 July

2018 – 2-4 July

2019 – 1-3 July

The Grower Forums were well attended with ABA CEO and Industry Development staff providing region specific and industry wide updates in a more intimate environment.

6 x YouTube Videos

- Australian Almond Harvest Celebration: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWQE_cqFAzenuiEBGf32jJQ
- Australian Almonds Orchard Management - Carob Moth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eD-7IW61l-g&t=108s>
- 2017/18 Season Report with Brendan Sidhu: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIYdDescKX0>
- Almond Centre of Excellence Update July 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkyRxGw1W4w>
- Orchard Hygiene with Brett Rosenzweig: <https://vimeo.com/301104918>
- Ben Brown (General Manager – Horticulture, Select Harvests) 2019 Update: <https://vimeo.com/324886619>

Online videos have also been released on the Integrated Disease Management Programs, funded by Hort Innovation:

- Integrated Disease Management in Almonds with Dr Jacqueline Edwards, Agriculture Victoria: <https://vimeo.com/289184838>
- Integrated Disease Management in Almonds with Dr Paul Cunningham, Agriculture Victoria <https://vimeo.com/289184068>

The ABA has chosen to move to Vimeo as its preferred video sharing platform due to its stronger security over other video sharing platforms.

Annual Reports

ABA Annual reports were collated and distributed to industry for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19. They are also available for download on the ABA website as per the links below. Whilst Hort Innovation now publishes industry annual reports in-house, the ABA ensures that a list of current Hort Innovation projects are compiled on the inside back page of each year's Annual Report.

- 2018/19 ABA Annual Report: <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ABA-AnnReport-2018-19-1.pdf>
- 2017/18 ABA Annual Report: <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ABA-AnnReport-2018.pdf>
- 2016/17 ABA Annual Report: <https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2017-ABA-Annual-Report-LR-WEB.pdf>

Social Media Updated and Monitored

The Almond Board of Australia utilised a number of social media platforms to engage target audiences on topics and issues of interest including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. All channels are monitored on a regular basis. Traffic on all platforms has increased remarkably over the three year period (September 2016 – September 2019) as the general trend for including almonds as part of a more plant-based diet has popularized.

Media Releases

For the duration of this project, media releases were distributed to ABA contacts lists including media, almond growers via the email management system, MailChimp, on varying topics including:

- Australian Almond Conference: International Speaker Information (October 2016)
- Almond Crop Mainly Intact (November 2016)
- 2017 Australian Almond Crop Predicted to be a record (December 2016)
- Almond Industry Shows Strong Growth (June 2017)
- Pollination season update – poor weather impact bee flights
- Frost damage in Australian almond orchards
- Final 2017 crop tonnage
- Almond Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed levy introduced for Varroa Mite eradication
- Almond Board of Australia appoints Anthony Wachtel as experimental orchard manager
- R&D Forum to be held
- R&D Forum highlights
- Almond orchard expansion – 2017 plantings survey
- California Almond Conference
- 2018 crop estimate – 82,000 tonnes
- Frost damage in Californian almonds
- Price impact on almonds of California frosts
- J Fielke - ABC Interview - Orchard recycling. (13/11/2018)
- R Skinner - ABC interview - Almond industry booming but more bees needed (30/11/2018)
- R Skinner - Weekly times - China now biggest import destination for Australian Almonds (21/1/2019)
- Joseph Ebbage - Trade show online interviews regarding Australian product at SIAL Paris (22/11/2018)

During the project the ABA Board decided to lower the industry profile as it was concerned that input surety, particularly in respect of water and bees, was being threatened as a result of the industry's rapid expansion.

Hort Innovation Project Reports Distributed

Notifications of Hort Innovation project reports were sent to growers by email as they became available and uploaded to the ABA industry website for electronic download.

Industry Website Updated with all Communications Activities

Copies of all communications activities during the milestone reporting period were uploaded to <http://growing.australialmonds.com.au>, and distributed via email download link to all almond growers.

This site includes download links to fact sheets, technical articles and research outcomes, as well as a link to the APVMA for information on current chemical permits for almonds. Information and report links are updated regularly to ensure growers can access the most recent information made available to the Almond Board of Australia. The industry website is available for access by all interested parties, and is advertised in all Almond Board of Australia publications via email footers, newsletters and e-blast references and all promotional items.

Industry Database Updated from Communications Activities

Contact information within the ABA industry database was updated and amended continuously as notified by contacts. Growers, investors, research providers, consultants and suppliers are added to the database on an ongoing basis as are relevant government officials.

Outcomes

The communications strategy for the Almond Board of Australia is to ensure that its communications programme is relevant to the Australian almond industry. The combination of activities within this project are designed to provide the industry with relevant and timely information supported by on-going expertise and consultation to enable the development of programs that will meet the communication objectives of industry.

Comprising a range of publications, our communications are designed to deliver comprehensive and timely information in a format that suits industry. The ABA is very aware of the diversity of needs within industry and is committed to assisting all businesses with the information required in the areas of technical expertise and knowledge, training and staff support, supply chain and business skills and effective communication of levy funded projects. The suite of communication tools developed as part of this project combine to enable the ABA to communicate updates on outcomes from key organisations that interface with the ABA.

The Australian Almond Industry Communications project has a strong focus on providing all Australian almond growers/ levy payers and associated businesses, export contacts, industry service providers and government agencies with relevant information on the almond industry, plantings, production, sales, consumption and current issues relevant to their business in a timely manner. All participants in the Australian almond industry have the opportunity to receive information in their preferred format.

The aim of this project, which published a number of industry publications and resources, was to enable the ABA to keep Australian almond growers/ levy payers informed of research results relevant to current and emerging situations, and to deliver progress reports on continuing projects. It also informed industry of technology uptake by industry stakeholders.

The outcome has been effective information transfer, particularly of research results, to the Australian almond industry and its support industries, resulting in an informed growers, better able to make decisions through the timely availability of relevant information. Feedback suggested that readers were satisfied with the content of the magazine, finding it useful, informative, interesting and relevant.

A key outcome of the project has been the communication of the need for orchard hygiene to overcome the pest damage occurring to almond nuts that had escalated and peaked in 2018. With articles and videos focusing best practice to address this issue the damage of \$25 million in 2018 was reduced by more than \$20 million during 2018/19 growing season and the industry went a long way to restore the export trade's confidence in the quality of Australian almonds.

Other areas where the communications program has been of crucial importance is in having growers adopt best practices for maintaining bee hive health whilst pollinating almond orchards. The program has also sought to increase awareness amongst beekeepers of the need to expand hive numbers to match future demand as new plantings begin producing.

The key outcomes of this project have been:

- A well-informed industry community for the duration of this project (September 2016 – September 2019) including information on research projects, Hort Innovation projects, industry investment, market factors etc.
- Ease of communication and access to industry members through having an up-to-date database and email contact management tool.
- Increased transparency and two-way information flow.

The outcomes of this project will also continue to be used as the platform to ensure that communications, public relations and marketing addresses relevant issues imperative to the future growth of the industry.

Monitoring and evaluation

The ABA conducts industry wide annual evaluations of communications activities to assess the program and the effectiveness of communications. This evaluation is distributed via individually preferred method including email and hardcopy post. Survey questions are designed to assess the quality, timeliness, frequency, format, distribution method and relevance of information provided to stakeholders. This process is also supplemented by informal evaluation processes including face-to-face communications. Findings from these evaluations are considered when planning each year's communications program. Subsequent surveys and input from the ABA committees continue to guide a program of continuous improvement in the associated communication outputs.

This Communications Plan is reviewed annually by the ABA and modified to ensure feedback and changes to improve the programme of activities is implemented. The Communications Plan is dynamic and is updated to suit changing circumstances due to seasonal variation and industry change leading to different requirements on the programme from year to year.

Below is a summary of some of the findings from the evaluation of each of the eight communications activities as listed in the ABA's Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (Appendix 2).

Activity 1: *In A Nutshell* e-zine

Each edition of the *In a Nutshell* was distributed via the email management program, MailChimp. Through this project, ABA staff have been able to monitor the performance of each email campaign through statistics including open rates, total clicks, top locations and the most popular pages. This data has been useful in creating content for future editions by better understanding the audience's interests and/or needs. The *In A Nutshell* magazine has had an average open rate for the 12 editions published throughout this project of 43.43%. Full statistics are reviewed at the completion of each campaign and evaluated for rates of success regarding readership engagement. The "*In the Orchard*" feature, written by our industry development team, is usually one of the most clicked on articles.

Online surveys provided individuals an opportunity to provide evaluate content, frequency, appearance of the digital newsletter, as well as feedback towards the value of receiving an electronic newsletter and feature items / topics. Results were compiled into a database, which has assisted the ABA to determine content and communication strategies going forward. Feedback from our readership base through the surveys as well as face to face conversations with industry members has indicated that in general, the content provided through the *In A Nutshell* publication is of a high standard and is meeting expectations from industry.

Activity 2: Almond Industry Grower Forums

At the conclusion of each grower forum, the ABA provided attendees with the opportunity to provide feedback toward current communications activities and suggestions moving forward. This was via a prepared PowerPoint presentation giving a brief overview of the current program and benefits to industry and examples of how direct feedback can improve delivery of communication to growers, with attendees then completing a digital evaluation feedback form to be emailed the day following the forum. The ABA welcome verbal feedback as recognition that some do not feel comfortable providing written details, particularly in the instance where English is their second language.

The Industry Development team have been instrumental in speaking with growers regularly to gauge and improve on the information delivery via these forums. Through this process, it was again highlighted the importance of face-to-face communication as being one of the preferred methods of communication sharing for growers.

Activity 3: Best Practice Fact Sheets

Members on the ABA distribution list were emailed a "feedback and evaluation" form which provided individuals with an opportunity to offer evaluate content, frequency, appearance of "All About Almonds" best practice fact sheets, as well as feedback towards the value of receiving having these fact sheets in digital format on the ABA website www.australianalmonds.com.au. This feedback was communicated to Industry Development Staff, Board members and committees, who were then able to determine content and topics for future fact sheets going forward. The website statistics provided an excellent insight into our most popular Fact Sheets which have been on the subject of pollination. From September 2018, the top three most-read fact sheets were:

- Pollination 101 (338 views)
- Interactive Flowering Graph(235 views)
- ABA Flowering Observation Tool – (133 views)

These were followed by pest control fact sheets including Carpophilus Beetle Guidelines and Orchard Monitoring & Pest Control.

Activity 4: Industry e-news (*Almond Bytes*)

Almond Bytes was distributed monthly throughout the duration of the project. Similar to *In A Nutshell*, the MailChimp email management program has allowed the ABA to closely monitor open rates and engagements. *Almond Bytes* has an average open rate of 40.4%, a statistic the ABA are looking to improve.

Often, the number of “clicks” through to read the full article of a story are quite low, relative to the number of email opens. It is likely this is due to many readers only wanting a basic summary or headline of the articles and or/links.

However, some of our most read articles and “clicks” through to the corresponding landing page have been:

- FACT SHEET: Bacteria, Viruses and Viroids in Australian Almonds:

<https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Bacteria-Viruses-and-Viroids-in-Australian-almonds.pdf> 96 September 2019, 96 opens.

- Phenology standard for almonds:

<https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Phenology-standard-for-Almonds-27June-2018.pdf> July 2019, 207 opens

- FACT SHEET: Orchard Hygiene:

<https://2q1ee4456oc52trll42uctl1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Orchard-Hygiene-Fact-Sheet.pdf> 483 June 2019

- ANIC 2019 Program:

https://nutindustry.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ANIC_2019_Program12-03.pdf March 2019, 348 opens

- 2018 Conference Preliminary Program:

https://gallery.mailchimp.com/6357d6ca3a5f5f0baece1af40/files/31c8e166-ba5f-4f93-9c29-a2ae5b3be2ba/2018_Preliminary_Program_1_4_PDF.pdf?_ga=2.143099059.708292146.1575508554-1173724762.1566532208 Oct 2018, 836 opens

- Link to news article: Extent almond freeze damage will take time to reveal itself:

<https://www.farmprogress.com/tree-nuts/extent-almond-freeze-damage-will-take-time-reveal-itself> March 2018, 104 opens.

- Almond Production Spreadsheet:

<https://industry.australionalmonds.com.au/growing/almond-production-spreadsheet/> Jan 2018, 186 opens.

- 2017 Almond R&D Forum Presentations:

<https://growing.australionalmonds.com.au/2017-research-forum/2017-almond-rd-forum-presentations/> 135 Nov 2017, 135 opens.

- Controlling Gazanias in the Riverland:

<https://www.wineaustralia.com/getmedia/4cf73905-38c6-4809-9057-b9c2690d2cba/201611-Controlling-Gazanias-in-the-Riverland.pdf> March 2017, 369 opens.

Activity 5: Press Releases & Media Interviews

The ABA are often approached by media to make comment on various topics and issues. The purpose of these is to provide accurate and timely information to all almond industry stakeholders and interested parties. With water being a topic of large scale interest, particularly in recent times, the ABA has been proactive in disseminating information to media outlets on the topic. The ABA's development and adoption of a Water Policy and recommendation for a moratorium on water licences has received wide coverage.

Activity 6: Almond Industry Website

The ABA grower portal on www.australionalmonds.com.au undertook a complete re-design and revision in 2016. As part of ongoing improvements, changes have been made on an as needs basis to include sections/menus and content areas that become of importance. The revised site has allowed feedback and questions on blog posts written by Industry Development Staff, easily accessible industry fact sheets and technical information as well as publications of industry interest for sale and download. Review of content is conducted bi-annually by ABA staff, board and selected industry participants. Website statistics are continuously monitored and evaluated to garner information on topics of relevance and interest to industry and the broader community. By far, the page with the highest amount of traffic is the Australian Almonds – Almond Insights with 4221 views since September 2018. This page is updated once a year with updated facts and figures.

The "Processors and Marketers" page also receives quite a lot of traffic with 1142 views since September 2018 whilst "Pests and Disease" is the most popular topic in Growing Almonds.

It has been identified that some areas of the website are still quite difficult to access with more than three clicks required. The ABA team are working to develop a better "map" to make accessing information quicker and easier for users.

Activity 7: Almond Industry Videos and Social Media

The utilisation of online platforms has allowed the ABA to monitor total views of all posted videos. It is worth noting that the "Australian Almonds – Harvest Update 2017" video went "viral" with 8.5K views. On average, the majority of the ABA's industry videos received 100-800 views.

The ABA Facebook page has remained steady in terms of likes and followers. It is primarily aimed at growers, but has generated interest from industry participants, researchers and the general public. The ABA continually evaluate the content / communications posted via these platforms, being mindful that some data may compromise the competitiveness of Australian growers by sharing with overseas counterparts. Due to numbers interacting with the Facebook page being relatively low at this time, the ABA has been able to manually evaluate individual posts and reach based on daily notifications of comments / shares / likes etc.

In future it may necessitate forming a "private" Facebook group for Australian growers only, which would detail and share upcoming events, growing practices, R&D and training materials in order to maintain that competitive edge for Australian growers and businesses. It will also give our growers confidence that ABA is able to provide valuable information electronically on different mediums, whilst encouraging them to share information as an industry. The Facebook page has perhaps been under utilised and moving forward may become a more popular method of information sharing as a younger demographic begin to enter the industry.

Activity 8: Communications Programme

The Communications Programme has been particularly effective in delivering Hort Innovation project reports to almond levy payer's on an as completed basis, and project updates are reported within In A Nutshell and in the Annual Report on Almond Research. Continual monitoring of website page views and downloads, email monitoring of link opens and informal feedback is used to monitor reach of information to levy payers.

The ABA Communications Strategy is conducted and reviewed by a communications committee which includes ABA staff, almond growers, Board members as well as an independent member to ensure the ABA has a formal method for regular, formal evaluation of the program which encapsulates activities to address all sectors of the industry. In summary, this process has confirmed that the Almond Industry Communications Programme is extremely effective in delivering a vast and varied amount of information to individuals across the entire industry chain.

Recommendations

- **Australian Almonds Website**

The Australian Almonds website now contains key documents including project milestone and final reports, Annual Reports, industry statistics information, newsletters, fact sheets and press releases at the time they are available. Blog style articles allow growers and users to comment and give feedback and have sharing capabilities. This site is to be updated at least twice per month containing current activities, crop outlook, fact sheets and articles. It has been identified that some areas of the website are still quite difficult to access with more than three clicks required. The ABA team are working to develop a better “map” to make accessing information quicker and easier for users.

- **Industry Magazine ‘In A Nutshell’**

Continue this publication in future as a digital publication as this has been well accepted by the grower community and wider readership.

- **Research Projects & Outcomes**

Introduce scheduled regular communication with researchers, particularly new project leaders, to ensure they are aware of the reach that the communication platforms that the ABA operates has in extending their findings.

- **Communications Methods**

Extend where practicable feedback systems to ensure stakeholders can provide information and ideas for new articles and valuable information that would benefit them. Investigate the greater use of social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter. The use of video has proven successful and will be increasingly used in future. Virtual reality is also an area to be explored further.

Refereed scientific publications

None to report.

References

None to list.

Intellectual property, commercialisation and confidentiality

No project IP, project outputs, commercialisation or confidentiality issues to report.

Acknowledgements

The ABA has worked collaboratively with the Hort Innovation staff in implementing the project and the feedback provided is valued. The contribution of those that have provided the knowledge that forms the information distributed by the almond industry communication program is acknowledged. The sources of this knowledge is varied and widespread with contributions from the growing, research and business communities both domestically and internationally.

The time and effort provided by industry members participating on the ABA committees in monitoring the project and providing guidance to ensure its continuous improvement is appreciated.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Program Logic

Appendix 2 – Monitoring & Evaluation Plan

Appendix 3 - Communications Stakeholder & Engagement Plan

Appendix 4 – Example of Calendar of Events 2019

PRIORITIES	INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		IMPACT
		Strategies	Participation	Short Term accomplishment	Medium term accomplishment	Longer term accomplishment
<p>Objective 4: Provide a Supportive Operating Environment (Skills & Communication) Support industry development through enhancement of the operating environment (i.e. leadership, skills development, partnerships, communication, extension, R&D resources).</p> <p>Strategy 4.1 Enhance skills and capacity to support current and future industry needs</p> <p>Strategy 4.2 Develop and deliver effective R&D programs that support the Strategic Plan</p> <p>Strategy 4.3 Support adoption of R&D outcomes by effective extension</p> <p>Strategy 4.4 Facilitate the two-way flow of information through the value chain</p>	<p>Hort Innovation funding</p> <p>Findings from R&D projects</p> <p>ABA market development team</p> <p>ABA management and administration</p> <p>ABA Communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • website • grower database • email database • Grower Forums • 'In A Nutshell' e-zine • Best Practice Fact Sheets • Video communications • Email blasts • Press Releases • Media Interviews • Social Media • Annual Report • Almond Insights • Seasonal updates & export reports <p>Communities of practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hort Innovation • Researchers • Laboratories • Growers / levy payers • Processors / marketers • Exporters • Retailers • Importers • Govt regulators • Govt negotiators • RTO's • Nurseries • Media • IPM experts • NRS program • Agrichemical companies • Transport 	<p>Coordinate and hold regular meetings with network of Industry Development Professionals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders 	<p>Identification of new and emerging issues and priorities</p>	<p>Identify solutions and R&D projects</p> <p>Set strategic direction for the almond industry</p>	<p>Industry capacity is enhanced through increased skills, development and investment</p>
		<p>Publish and provide input and collaboration on ABA publications and communications</p> <p>Provide media comment and press releases to matters of industry importance and seasonal activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hort innovation • Researchers • Laboratories • Processors / marketers • RTO's • Nurseries • IPM experts • NRS program • Agrichemical companies • Media outlets 	<p>Extension & of R&D outcomes</p> <p>All stakeholders across the value chain are informed and engaged</p> <p>Relationships with Australian media outlets and journalists nurtured, enhanced and developed</p>	<p>High level uptake of R&D outcomes by industry</p> <p>Australian and international media outlets positively reporting on Australian almond industry regularly</p>	<p>Industry capacity is enhanced through increased skills, development and investment</p> <p>Profile and capacity of Australian Almond industry is well known nationally and globally</p>
		<p>Provide input to enable publishing and dissemination of seasonal updates and export reports on a regular basis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growers / levy payers • Processors / marketers • Exporters • Importers 	<p>Enhanced forward planning ability</p>	<p>Decision making across all areas of the almond supply chain are supported through access to timely & relevant information</p>	<p>Proportion of stakeholders and value chain participants accessing ABA publications and communications increases</p>
		<p>Conduct grower workshops/forums in the major almond growing regions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hort innovation • Researchers • Laboratories • Growers / levy payers • Processors / marketers • Exporters • IPM experts • NRS program • Agrichemical companies • Media 	<p>Development and information exchange of R&D outcomes solutions and priorities to address regional issues</p>	<p>All stakeholders across the value chain are informed and engaged</p> <p>High level uptake of R&D outcomes by industry</p>	<p>Industry capacity is enhanced through increased skills, development and investment</p>
		<p>Provide input/present/attend industry Research & Development forums and Conferences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hort innovation • Researchers • Laboratories • Growers / levy payers • Processors / marketers • Exporters • Retailers • Importers • Govt regulators • Govt negotiators • RTO's • Nurseries • Media • IPM experts • NRS program • Agrichemical companies • Transport 	<p>R&D results reported to industry</p>	<p>All stakeholders across the value chain are informed and engaged</p> <p>High level uptake of R&D outcomes by industry</p> <p>Investment in Australian almond industry increases</p>	<p>Industry capacity is enhanced through increased skills, development and investment</p>
		<p>Contribute to the development of the almond industry strategic R&D plan (2017 -2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All stakeholders 	<p>Identification of new and emerging issues and priorities</p>	<p>Prioritisation of industry issues</p> <p>Identification of R&D solutions</p>	<p>Industry has a strong R&D plan</p> <p>R&D projects commissioned achieve outputs</p>

Activity: 'In A Nutshell' e-zine						
Output	Quarterly e-zine distributed to stakeholders	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	To Whom
Intermediate Outcome	Industry and other identified targets are well-informed on all matters relevant to industry R&D programs as well as ABA operations and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Primary Secondary Statutory & Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email monitoring metrics Website traffic metrics Social media metrics Biennial grower surveys Direct, Formal and Informal 	Quarterly, Mid Term Review	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	Industry capacity is enhanced through increased skills, development and investment					

Activity: Almond Industry Field Days						
Output	Annual Almond Industry Grower Field Day	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	To Whom
Intermediate Outcome	Development and information exchange of R&D outcomes, solutions & priorities to address regional issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Primary Secondary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendee evaluations Direct, Formal and Informal 	Annually	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	Industry capacity is enhanced through increased skills, development and investment					

Activity: Best Practice Fact Sheets						
Output	Almond industry Best Practice Fact Sheets distributed	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	To Whom
Intermediate Outcome	Proportion of stakeholders and value chain participants accessing ABA publications and communications increases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Primary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email monitoring metrics Website traffic metrics Social media metrics Biennial grower surveys Direct, Formal and Informal 	Quarterly, Mid Term Review	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	High level uptake of R&D outcomes by industry					

Activity: Industry eNews						
Output	Monthly eNews snapshot of almond industry relevant information	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	To Whom
Intermediate Outcome	Industry and other identified targets are well-informed on all matters relevant to global and national almond industry as well as ABA operations and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Primary Secondary Statutory & Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email monitoring metrics Website traffic metrics Social media metrics Biennial grower surveys Direct, Formal and Informal 	Monthly, ongoing	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	All stakeholders in across the value chain are informed and engaged					

Activity: Press Releases & Media Interviews						
Output	Provide media information and comment on activities and seasonal updates including R&D outcomes and extension information	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	Method
Intermediate Outcome	Development of regular information exchange of almond industry events and updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal Primary Secondary Statutory & Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website traffic metrics Social media metrics Media Monitoring Direct, Formal and Informal 	Monthly	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	Increase of almond related news stories appearing on media channels across Australia and internationally.					

Activity: Almond Industry Website						
Output	Dynamic national website containing regularly updated information on current activities and best practice information	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	Method
Intermediate Outcome	Decision making across all areas of the almond supply chain are supported through access to timely & relevant information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Website traffic metrics Social media metrics Direct, Formal and informal 	Quarterly	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	Proportion of stakeholders and value chain participants accessing ABA website and communications increases					

Activity: Almond Industry Videos and Social Media						
Output	Dissemination of timely information relevant to industry via social media channels including video production	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	Method
Intermediate Outcome	Regular and immediate information exchange of almond industry events and updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media metrics Direct, Formal and informal 	Quarterly	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	Proportion of stakeholders and value chain participants accessing ABA social media channels increases					

Activity: Communications Program						
Output	Support industry development through enhancement of the operating environment	Target Audience/s	Monitoring Method/s	Reporting Cycle	Responsibility	Method
Intermediate Outcome	Deliver effective communications that are valued highly by stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email monitoring metrics Website traffic metrics Social media metrics Biennial grower surveys Media monitoring Direct, Formal and Informal 	Quarterly	Communications Manager	ABA, HIA (Milestones)
End of Program Outcome	ABA is the mainstay of the almond industry's information sources and statistics					



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ALMOND BOARD OF AUSTRALIA

COMMUNICATIONS & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

PROJECT AL16000

Australian Almond Industry Communications Programme

OUR MISSION:

As the Australian almond industry's peak body, the ABA facilitates further growth of the industry, seeks to maximise its profitability and ensure its sustainability, by providing a platform for industry members to collectively respond to industry wide issues, invest in research and marketing, share knowledge, and interact with government and other stakeholders.



AUSTRALIAN ALMONDS

www.australionalmonds.com.au



Summary

The Almond Board of Australia (ABA) is the lead organisation providing industry communications to the Australian almond industry. It is the peak industry body and as such, represents the interests of all almond grower / levypayers across all growing regions in Australia. The ABA has extensive experience in exploiting a range of communication tools dedicated to empowering and informing growers / levypayers and participants within the supply chain so that they can make better business decisions.

This report provides details of the Review and Strategy as it relates to activities that are funded by Hort Innovation Ltd under Project AL16000 'Australian Almond Industry Communications Programme'. The Communications project is an integral part of the broader industry development program aimed at implementing the almond industry's strategic plan.

The industry's communication program plays a critical role in ensuring world's best production systems and management strategies are put in place to maximise the competitiveness of the Australian almond industry. The industry must also compete against the Californian almond industry, which in 2015 was worth more than the entire Australian horticultural industry. The Almond Board of Australia is charged with representing 99% of Australian production and is responsible for implementing the industry strategic plan covering many facets of production, processing and market development. Communicating the actions required to implement the industry's strategic plan is crucial if the industry is to continue to work in the cohesive manner that has been the hallmark of its successful development to date. Horticulture Innovation Australia Limited's research program aims to deliver in part the knowledge and technologies required for the ABA to implement the industry strategic plan, but information is also be sourced from researchers, suppliers and industry participants around the world to ensure Australian industry members are well placed to make strong business decisions.

Almond Board communications activities align closely to the CEO and Industry Development staff roles, who undertake liaison with multinational corporates to small producers in providing business case information through to orchard demonstrations. This close team co-operation combined with the knowledge sharing of industry participants and researchers lies at the heart of the almond industry's high-level performance in this area.

The ABA is well positioned to undertake industry communications as it has developed a skilled, dedicated staff base, allowing almost all publications to be produced in-house. A thorough understanding of the almond industry R&D strategic plan that the ABA is responsible for implementing gives ABA staff a holistic approach to this program. The quality of publications and communications has been widely recognised and commended for many years and the experience of the Communications Manager is extremely significant in seeking continuous improvement and ensuring activities that have been found wanting in the past are not repeated.

The rapid growth of the Australian almond industry and high level of corporate investment has significantly increased the participation of professional managers who have high-level communication needs. The ABA strives to provide a range of communication avenues, tools and publications to enable access to knowledge in the most timely and suitable way. As a leader in communicating almond industry research, new technologies and methodologies, the ABA ensures that information is available to all members of industry and that information is uniformly shared.

Communication within the almond industry is critical if growers are to adjust and adapt to the increasingly dynamic physical and economic environments that they face now and into the future. Growers and supply chain participants need a range of communication inputs to remain well informed as to outcomes of research and development, trends in domestic and international markets, trade requirements, biosecurity, climate change and environmental issues, chemical regulation, labour issues and government policy changes.

Purpose

The communications project is an initiative to enhance the communication of research and technological information to industry. It is designed to facilitate the communication links between participant groups and to develop the knowledge brokerage skills of individual participants. As part of this process the ABA has looked at other national and international models of successful communications programs so we can evaluate ours and make changes as required improving our own communications strategy.

Industry communication is ranked as a high priority in the Hort Innovation Strategic Plan and within the Australian Almond Industry Strategic R&D Plan 2011 – 2016 including achieving the following outputs:

- Maintenance of a comprehensive, up to date database of contact details for industry participants for distribution of communication material including biosecurity incursion actions, planting information and other industry correspondence.
- A quarterly industry E-Zine that includes updates on Hort Innovation funded research projects.
- An up to date industry website encompassing articles on chemical permits, biosecurity updates and copies of Hort Innovation report summaries.
- Distribution of Hort Innovation Final Report summaries to Australian almond levypayers.
- Publication and distribution of the almond industry's Strategic Plan and R&D Investment Plans.
- Media releases promoting key research findings and events.
- Website and blog including industry best practice supported with video clips of research outcomes and field day presentations.

The messages for Australian almond industry communications can be classified into five areas:

1. Where industry levy dollars are spent: New projects that are starting, expected benefits for industry in relation to levy investment, milestones and project outcomes/results.
2. Adopting Change: Key results from industry projects in Australia and overseas, related impact on industry participants and how they should manage adoption of any new or key technology in their day to day business.
3. Industry data & initiatives: Outcomes of industry data collection activities including plantings, production and sizing, imports and exports, consumption and world trends in almonds.
4. Topical Industry Issues: Key issues that impact on industry and their consequences, or actions required by industry participants.
5. General industry information: Issues such as industry events, environmental and natural resource management, biosecurity, market opportunities, food policy, almond industry and ABA activities and achievements and international industry issues.

Background & Objectives

The project follows on from Hort Innovation Ltd projects AL0814 & AL11005, focusing on providing a broad range of timely information to all Australian almond industry stakeholders and interested parties. Industry communications remains a high priority as per Objective 4 "Provide a supportive operating environment (skills and communication)" detailed in the Almond Industry Strategic Research and Development Plan 2011-16.

The objective of this project is to provide an effective communication programme to enable industry participants to improve their knowledge, leading to enhanced business enterprises better able to compete in a sustainable manner. While the project's communication objectives have a primary focus on producers, the project aims to communicate across the entire supply chain.

The Australian almond industry is a very dynamic one; wherein the communication programme continues to play a vital role in industry adopting world's best technology, positively supporting industry levypayers and Hort Innovation, research organisations, and enabling participants of industry to make better business decisions in the following areas:

- Orchard design
- Water management
- Plant nutrition
- Production cost management through input efficiency
- Pest and disease control
- Soil health
- New varieties
- Pollination
- Extreme weather events
- Product quality and food safety issues
- Biosecurity

The scope of this document is to prepare a Communications Strategy and Action Plan for the ABA for the life of project AL16000. This includes:

- Communications plan for key audiences
- The content/messages/activities for each audience
- The channels/tools required
- Inclusion of electronic and social media as appropriate
- Priorities across audiences, content and channels
- Nominations of resources required including staffing and infrastructure – in-house resource and external
- An action plan and timeline for implementation

Key Audiences & Communications Channels

Audiences

A fundamental consideration in undertaking the development of the Communications Strategy is an assessment of the needs of the target audiences of almond industry communications. These audiences were assessed to include:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Internal Audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ABA Staff, Board Members & Committees <p>2 Primary audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All almond growers (levypayers) ○ Supply chain participants ○ Industry Investors <p>3 Secondary audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agronomists ○ Researchers ○ Input suppliers ○ Consumers / community ○ Media | <p>4 Statutory & Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Horticulture Innovation Australia ○ Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry ○ Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry ○ Ministers such as Trade, Regional Development, Water, Natural Resources ○ Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; ○ State departments of primary industries ○ Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service ○ National Residue Survey |
|---|---|

The almond industry's 'Primary audiences' can be further delineated into three tiers; each has different needs. These can anecdotally be defined as:

- **Tier 1** – Progressive organisations who run their orchards on a business model – generally larger corporate operations that employ a number of people. They have invested on farm and run sophisticated operations, seeking best practice and extension information from around the world.
- **Tier 2** – Growers who are good horticulturalists and have technical know-how, and are fair to good business managers. This group has generally held back from major investment on farm in recent years. They have the potential to become Tier 1 growers given the right extension information and encouragement to invest.
- **Tier 3** – Traditional growers who supply almonds to almond processing and marketing companies; they are generally lacking connections to the supply chain. This group is disconnected and disinterested. They have the least chance of survival in a 'new world environment'. Many are older generation growers who have no succession plans in place or are planning to potentially leave the industry within the next ten to fifteen years.

There are regular messages which are critical to the success of the almond industry, these messages will be woven into the communications activities defined by this plan and consist of the following:

- Where are levy dollars spent? - Industry Levy - new projects that are starting, expected benefits for industry in relation to levy investment, project outcomes
- Changes that producers should be adopting in your business as a result of project outcomes – communicate key results from industry projects and related impacts on industry participants
- Benefits of industry data and industry initiative to collect relevant industry data - outline benefits to industry and mechanism that will be used to collect data
- Topical Industry Issues – communicate major issues that are impacting on industry and consequences / actions required by industry participants
- Communicate general industry information - communicate issues such as industry events, industry statistics and information sources, environmental and natural resource management, biosecurity, consumer trends, market opportunities, food policy, almond industry and ABA activities / achievements and international industry issues
- Promote the Australian almond industry and the credential of the industry with broader community / consumers and government

During the life of the Almond Industry Communications Programme the background and value of the Australian Almond Industry needs to be understood by a wide range of stakeholders. These stakeholders play a vital role in maintaining a commercially sustainable almond industry.

The table below identifies the information that the defined list of ABA target audiences needs to receive through the ABA communications program.

Target Audience	Media/Delivery Channels
Internal	All ABA communications activities
Primary	In a Nutshell newsletter, emails, website, meetings with ABA staff, regional grower meetings, workshops, field days, media releases, social media, best practice fact sheets
Secondary	In a Nutshell newsletter, emails, website, meetings with ABA staff, relevant workshops and field days, media releases, social media
Statutory & Government	In a Nutshell newsletter, emails, website, relevant meetings with key staff, media releases, social media

There is the need for a holistic approach to be taken for communications and extension within the Australian almond Industry and its stakeholders both internally and externally. The almond industry takes a proactive approach to meet the needs of its growers and stakeholders, both in Australia and overseas.

Key factors for this to occur are:

- ABA website to be regularly updated for public usage and grower usage and is contains key documents from the ABA and HIA;
- Encourage more growers utilise the website; look to have 80% usage by growers by 2018
- Ensure that all material is available in a number of formats such as electronic, printed and in plain speak
- Set up feedback systems to ensure all stakeholders can provide information and ideas for new publications and ideas for the benefit of the industry into the future
- Continue to provide traditional extension services such as field days and workshops but also ensure these can be accessed through new technologies available and through the NBN (i.e. live feed video, recorded clips uploaded to website)
- Meetings of the Committees and Regional Forums provide the opportunity for the ABA Chair, Directors and staff to present to growers and other value chain participants and receive feedback on issues.

Industry Forums and Field Days

The ABA has continuous contact with growers on a day to day basis on specific issues. The CEO, Industry Development Manager and IDO's undertake most of this communication with growers whilst the Market Development Manager liaises closely with the industry marketers.

The ABA's value chain Committees meet quarterly to address the industry's major risks and opportunities. There are over twenty meetings scheduled during 2017 and they each provide an opportunity for interaction with many of the industry's most influential members.

The Regional Grower Meetings are held annually in each of the four major producing districts. These events attract strong attendance and presentations are made by the Chairman, CEO and Industry Development Manager covering all aspects of the implementation of the industry strategic plan from plant improvement to promotion. The forums allow for group interaction and provides valuable feedback on regional concerns.

The Almond Conference is held every second year and provides a forum at which all of industry is invited. On alternate years, an R&D Forum and Field Day will be conducted. This is to be resourced under a separate project.

All these events provide the ABA with ample opportunity for direct communication with the industry's producers and stakeholders and are the most valuable communication channel for influencing better orchard practices and addressing key issues.

Recommendations:

- Ensure there is a relevant theme to field days that will 'hook' growers to attend
- Promote field day dates well in advance
- Consider filming a section of one Grower Meeting for those who aren't able to attend to be shared digitally
- Capture and table those issues in a final session of the program, to ensure growers agree on what they want the ABA to focus on
- Facilitate interactive feedback where participants are asked: What stood out? What did you learn? What can you put into practice?

Fact sheets

The almond industry has a clearly defined accessible area of fact sheets within its website grower pages. Presently fact sheets, like all technical documents tend to be comprehensive and detailed in nature. There is an argument for a more succinct version to capture the essence of the fact sheets to capture a growers interest before they study more reasoned advice.

There are many topics that fact sheets could cover including; biosecurity; climate change, environmental issues; financial analysis from a grower perspective; and chemical regulation and these will be a focus of extension staff employed in AL16001.

Recommendations:

- Content plan developed in January each year to determine fact sheet topics and seasonal information updates.
- Drive distribution and engagement with growers by utilising comment ability on blog replication of fact sheets
- Create series of short and concise factsheets on key topics
- Broaden the scope of information

eNews

An eNews update / snapshot of recent events, projects, current media articles and ABA activities will be implemented in early 2017 for dissemination to growers and industry contacts lists. This communication method is seen a useful tool to provide a brief overview of the state of the industry and its activities on a regular basis.

Concerns that relate to the introduction of an eNews update include:

- Sent at monthly intervals for the first 12-month period until a review of communications is conducted to gauge readership and recipient feedback
- A clear content policy must be developed

Recommendations:

- Content to include news and events and major items of industry significance
- Items limited to a single paragraph of information with an image appropriate to the subject matter
- Link to articles below the introductory paragraph section via hyperlink embedded in text
- Have between four and six succinct, relevant topics each newsletter

In determining who receives this email communique, it should be noted that once information is sent to a grower, it is therefore public, so the eNews shouldn't contain confidential information that is not for general distribution.

In A Nutshell E-Zine

In A Nutshell is the preferred channel of communication for growers and stakeholders within the Australian almond industry. Growers like the publication and it is often the only communication they read and take notice of. The transition to an online publication in 2015 has been received well, with growers able to access the publication at their own leisure on multiple digital platforms.

Concerns and opportunities that relate *In A Nutshell* include:

- There is a lack of human interest stories. Grower profile stories should be introduced
- There is an opportunity for more peer to peer learning opportunities
- Researchers to provide more articles on projects

It is important for *In A Nutshell* to remain a key source of information for growers and participants within the value chain so that they can make better business decisions. Specifically, *In A Nutshell* should remain as a key channel for the dissemination of:

- Technical know-how to reinforce the messages and learning points arising from the Industry Development program
- Outputs from Research and Development such as articles from domestic and international R&D
- Information about the business, regulatory and physical environment in which growers / levypayers and the supply chain operate including trends in domestic and international markets, trade requirements, biosecurity, climate change and environmental issues, chemical regulation, labour issues and government policy changes.

Recommendations:

- Almond grower and industry stakeholder profiles to be included in at least one edition per year, including younger growers, women in the almond industry and industry leaders. These could be distributed to the wider media.
- Articles relating to new technology to be sourced and included as they become available
- Inclusion of quarterly statistical information in each edition
- Inclusion of regional reports on season status and outlook in each edition
- More updates relating to current Hort Innovation projects
- As an agenda item at the end of Board and Committee meetings identify if any messaging would be worthwhile to convey to growers
- Nurturing young farmers to provide content, widening their development as future leaders for the ABA

ABA grower website

Grower specific pages of the ABA website have the benefit of being immediate and current. The latest information can quickly be uploaded and it is possible to provide an opportunity for feedback, giving visitors to the site the ability to ask questions, make comment and to receive a response via email – thereby encouraging two-way communication.

There is much debate to the extent to which Australian farmers exploit websites as a tool for gaining information about how to improve their farming practices, developments and trends in their business and their operating environment. Many older farmers are thought to be web and internet shy. Nevertheless, younger and more progressive growers do access web sites and the internet frequently and it has become an increasingly important business tool.

Consequently, the ABA website should be the single most important channel for growers and industry to gather practical, technical information to help them farm better; gain access to experts who advise on on-farm topics; gain insights of best practice both nationally and internationally; to read what the ABA and Hort Innovation is doing; and to network with other growers to share ideas.

To date, the website does not have high traffic flow to the grower pages and this is of concern. Growers report that there isn't enough current R&D information to warrant repeat visits and Older farmers said they weren't comfortable with their level of expertise to navigate.

There are some weaknesses inherent in the current grower section of the website, including:

- Immediacy of information is not loaded quickly enough
- No opportunity for interaction on best practices or issues
- No grower profiles or 'people' presence
- No articles or posts on the ABA's day to day activities
- There is no media section listing recent coverage clips, articles and links etc

Recommendations:

- Modify the grower section of the website so that it becomes the 'go to' web destination for growers and the supply chain
- More immediate information sharing from industry activities
- More stories about industry participants
- Better information about Hort Innovation
- Addition of an updated News Centre / Media section
- Podcasts of orchard walks / farm practice videos on specific topics
- Discussion groups which anyone can drop into and make a comment, including the experts and specialists such as agronomists and agriculture consultants

It is important to encourage better utilisation of the website by growers as an ongoing strategy.

Social Media

The ABA has Facebook, YouTube and Twitter accounts that are underutilised. These should be a tool to reach the wider almond community, plus media and other interested people. Younger growers prefer this medium so they may receive bite size updates as opposed to the longer eNews and other communication tools. In general, it's a low cost and low involvement activity that will help inform growers of R&D outcomes while also being a useful advocacy tool. The key to success of social media communications is regular and targeted Tweeting, and regular Facebook updates.

Several rural journalists follow the ABA on social media channels as a source of relevant almond industry information.

Recommendations:

- **Social media**
 - Developing a regular schedule of tweets and Facebook posts – at least twice per week
 - Tweeting and Facebook posts 'as it happens' at grower events and field days
 - Multiple communicators – Industry Development staff and Communications staff to update the channels
 - Develop a "Social Media Users' Guide" to outline rules on posting updates and replies for all staff with social media access
 - Utilising the Facebook Live feature at events to reach a wider audience that are unable to attend events
 - Quarterly review to be conducted of social media metrics to inform future content development.
- **YouTube Videos**
 - Engage local digital creation firm to edit video for YouTube content.

ABA Media Relations & Press Releases

The ABA has a policy of engaging the media in a tactical fashion and not succumbing to self promotion for the sake of it as it can be very time consuming, serves little purpose and can work against important messaging being highlighted.

The current use of press releases to stimulate media activity works well. The ABA Chairman and Chief Executive Officer are the official industry spokespeople to ensure the messages conveyed are consistent, relevant and accurate. The ABA Chair and CEO have built trusted relationships with local print and radio media however these are difficult to maintain due to the constant turnover in some media positions.

The ABA responds quickly to media requests and the available briefing information in the form of the Almond Insights booklet, statistics and issues papers are valuable in providing accurate backgrounding for interviews.

The type of media activity undertaken outside of the normal matters is done so at the direction of the ABA Board. The Board is mindful that media activity can impact heavily on the time of the Chair and CEO. Press releases also contain the contact details for the ABA Grower Directors who are available for comment to provide a local view on matters.

The ABA prefers not to use media interviews to extend research information preferring to use more controlled communication tools such as press releases, field days, fact sheets, magazine articles and in future a greater focus on video.

Recommendations:

- Provide media training to Regional Grower Representatives
- At Board meetings, identify any matters to bring to the media's attention

Review of communications infrastructure / processes and future requirements

Grower database & Email Database

The ABA maintains a comprehensive database of industry participants facilitated by communication with processor/marketer members and supply chain advisory committees who provide feedback on communications and industry information needs. The ABA database is key to an effective communications program and is also critical should implementation of the Biosecurity Management Plan be required.

The grower and email databases are an important tool to ensure effective engagement with growers and stakeholders, including the full industry supply chain, agronomists, government and other service providers. They contain relevant contact information gleaned from industry field days and events, conferences, personal communication, grower surveys and website sign up areas. The ABA's Communications Manager maintains both databases.

These databases are used to distribute all ABA communications and invitations to various events. However, these databases are under utilised. One problematic issue is that currently each ABA staff member has their own email groups that are not accessible by other staff members, rather than using the ABA Communications Manager to manage and distribute communications using master email groups for (for example) growers, government contacts, service providers, agronomists etc. This makes it difficult to ensure targeted communications consistently reach the right person every single time, and updates to contact information may not be passed on.

Generally, details are added to the database when a person subscribes to communications through the ABA website, attends an ABA event, or contacts the ABA personally. At this point in time there are in excess of 1,000 people in the database, approximately 150 of whom are R&D Levypayers, making up approximately 98% of known industry growers. The ABA database is updated at least biennially from major communications activities which are conducted. The grower database and email database are regularly cross checked and updated and master email distribution groups created and maintained.

It should be a priority to ensure that all ABA communications are sent from a central source, to organised and segmented lists. The ABA Communications Manager should be the administrator and conduit for communications relayed to target audiences and stakeholders, therefore eliminating issues concerning relevance of lists and misdirection of communication.

Planned/recommended enhancements: This database is continually updated by ABA Staff from contact with industry participants and database members via conferences, forums, field days and membership updates. Review of the database is conducted three times per year by phone, email and following industry events to ensure contact and subscription details for each person listed are accurate.

Photo library

The ABA has a comprehensive photo library that is available via Dropbox to anyone requesting images. This image library enhances the ABA's ability to pitch stories and ensure prominent placement in newspapers and media stories. It also helps TV news tell their story too.

Recommendations:

- Existing images need to be re-collated into the ABA website and consideration needs to be given as to whether the ABA should commission a photo shoot of people within the industry for use within stories to give a personal and human touch
- The revised website page of images should enable people to view a thumbnail image, but must request permission and access to a high-resolution image from the Communications Manager directly via email

DVD's / videos

Video is a powerful way to impart information and provide short, useful detail to assist farmers on a range of best practices and research outcomes.

Recommendations:

- Placing and embedding video clips on the website allowing growers to access them in their own time
- Topics should be targeted for each grower segment and aligned with Fact Sheets and *In A Nutshell* articles where possible
- Specific videos and industry DVD's should be created on seasonal or relevant industry topics as necessary from industry field days and events, conferences and forums and other issues of importance
- All industry videos should be distributed by eBlast, hosted on YouTube and embedded in ABA webpage articles

Media contact list

Having an accurate and in-depth media contact list is important but difficult to maintain given the many changes in media positions. Currently, the ABA's media contact list is fair in its comprehensiveness but strong with regard to key media contacts in the regions. The almond industry should, as a priority, update the current media contact list across print, radio and TV and prioritise according to levels of importance.

- Tier 1 – Regional TV, radio and print
- Tier 2 – Metro daily print, radio and TV; business media
- Tier 3 – Fringe agricultural publications

Media monitoring service

The ABA has engaged Meltwater to collect and provide monitoring for traditional and social media clips that mention the almond industry within Australia, the USA and the rest of the world. The portal is monitored by the ABA Communications Manager and reports of media release uptake and monitoring clips will be distributed to the ABA Board and CEO.

Clips that are identified as immediately newsworthy are distributed through the ABA Facebook page and Twitter feed. Any issues of significant industry importance are reported directly to the CEO, Market Development Program Manager, and Industry Development Manager to review for action that may need to be taken.

This monitoring service will help to form the basis of the monthly eNews communications sent to stakeholders. The Communications Manager will review clips each morning and assess the content to determine what is of most interest and forward to Industry Development staff for cross-checking. A summary will then be drafted regarding the each of the clips, highlighting the key articles and outline any follow up actions that may be required by industry.

Situation Analysis

The current Strategic R&D Plan for the Australian almond industry highlights that: Australia has a worldwide reputation as a supplier of quality almonds. Few countries can efficiently produce the high-quality almonds that Australia provides. This gives Australia a powerful competitive position as an international supplier.

As the Peak Industry Body (PIB) for the almond industry, ABA's roles are to:

- Provide recommendations on behalf of industry to Hort Innovation Ltd regarding the expenditure of almond levies
- Communicate back to growers the outcomes from Hort Innovation Ltd and industry investment
- Provide services to almond growers / levypayers and the supply chain to improve their business decision making and enhance their day to day operations. This includes:
 - A provision of extension and industry development services
 - Dissemination of regulatory and policy changes eg chemical, environmental and labour
 - Dissemination of key messages and learning points from levy funded research and extension.
- Represent the interests of almond growers to policy-makers and regulators across Government

As the almond industry moves forward, there is a need for strong coordination at farm level, through the supply chain, with other aligned horticulture industries in Australia, with Federal Government and state government research organisations and potentially with overseas industries where there are tangible benefits to be gained.

The ABA has demonstrated its commitment to playing a lead role in facilitating change within the industry. Effective communication, engagement and coordination of efforts is important to maintain strong collaboration in Australia's almond industry.

As outlined in the Summary to this project:

"Communication within the almond industry is critical if growers are to adjust and adapt to the increasingly dynamic physical and economic environments that they face now and into the future. Growers and supply chain participants need a range of communication inputs to remain well informed as to outcomes of research and development, trends in domestic and international markets, trade requirements, biosecurity, climate change and environmental issues, chemical regulation, labour issues and government policy changes."

The ABA is best placed to aggregate and communicate relevant information, to provide necessary services to growers and the value chain to empower them to make the sound business decisions.

Issues and Opportunities

The ABA has many strengths. It has a clear operating plan that dictates its roles, activities and outputs; it undertakes a number of programs which add value to industry; it has demonstrated it can be proactive and contemporary; it has committed, skilled and experienced staff, strong financial resources; and it has a good reputation among growers and other stakeholders, including all levels of Government.

The communications program can be improved to be sharper, more timely and more contemporary.

In summary, this review identified communications issues, gaps and opportunities that should be addressed:

- The communication program requires more attention to content production and its timeliness. The Communications Manager is reliant on others to produce content and the scheduling needs to be better managed. The timeliness of publications can be an issue.
- The communications program is diverse, taking on new communication channels without a strong feel for their effectiveness in terms of reward for effort. There is a tendency to devote effort to new channels without assessing the resources required to ensure the activities will be adequately undertaken.
- Growers and technical staff have varying degrees of desire to take in what is often complex research findings and although some are assured by the comprehensive nature of some reports others seek information in short and easily digestible forms. This diversity within the grower audience means for some the current technical communications are too difficult to navigate, too lengthy and time consuming. There is an opportunity for video and multimedia to fill the need of those wanting the simple short version that is readily absorbed.
- The ABA is seeking to develop a one-stop communications and information resource.

Communications Objectives

All ABA communications activities are designed to support the organisation’s key business objectives in the Strategic Research and Development Plan:

- Develop & maintain market opportunities (volume sold)
- Improved efficiency & sustainability (costs & risks)
- Increase product value (quality & price)
- Provide a supportive operating environment (skills & communication)

More specifically Communications activities align directly with:

Objective 4: Provide a supportive operating environment (skills and communication)

Support industry development through enhancement of the operating environment (i.e. leadership, skills development, partnerships, communication, extension, R&D resources).

Strategy	Actions	Outputs	Industry Outcomes
Strategy 4.1 Enhance skills & capacity to support current & future industry needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate & support initiatives to develop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young leaders • Research capacity • Skills base across the industry • Secondary & tertiary students following a career in horticulture • International study trips organised and industry involvement encouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships to support tertiary institutional research • Training programs for industry stakeholders • Career days, field days & information sessions to promote almonds & horticulture to students & teachers • International study trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry capacity is enhanced through increased skills development
Strategy 4.2 Develop & deliver effective R&D programs that support the Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise strategies & actions requiring R&D projects • Calculate projected funds from statutory levies & voluntary contribution funds • Identify strategic partners to better leverage funds • Implement the plan by appointing R&D providers for priority R&D projects • Monitor and evaluate implementation of the R&D Strategic Plan via a formal review • Monitor skills required for each of the strategic committees & address any gaps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Plan for the Australian Almond Industry • Project briefs for all priority strategies within each Objective • Processing sub-committee established • Evaluation Reviews of R&D Strategic Plan (Years 3 & 5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The industry has a strong R&D plan • The R&D projects commissioned achieve the Outputs.
Strategy 4.3 Support adoption of R&D outcomes by effective extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All R&D projects to include an adoption plan, budget & resource allocation for extension & technology transfer • ABA is to be written into all project applications to ensure active involvement in the extension process • Develop demand driven publications, products & services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension publications, products & services, including fact sheets, field days, workshops and training sessions • Project updates included in newsletters • Final project reports available on the ABA website • Regular survey of stakeholders to evaluate technology transfer • Analysis of technology transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level uptake of R&D outcomes by industry
Strategy 4.4 Facilitate the two-way flow of information through the value chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing collection and dissemination of industry statistics • Develop & implement a communication strategy • Fostering opportunities for value chain interaction including the Annual Almond Conference and Research & Development Forum • Evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publications disseminating industry statistics • Communication initiatives developed & delivered, including website updates and e-newsletters • Almond Conferences and Research & Development Forums • Annual communication effectiveness survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of stakeholders accessing the ABA’s website increases • All stakeholders across the value chain are informed & engaged • Decision making across all areas of the almond supply chain are supported through access to timely and relevant information • Industry statistics are up-to-date and readily available in a range of formats

Methodology

The strategy by which communications to the Australian almond industry and its stakeholders will be delivered will be multi-dimensional in that delivery methods will be linked, and target audiences will be able to access information from a range of sources. This communications and stakeholder engagement plan aims to improve on the service that the ABA provided in previous projects and that there is no degradation of services only enhancements.

The ABA has been working on industry communication activities since the association's inception, providing knowledge and experience essential for effective communication. The team is led by the ABA CEO and employs a Communications Manager, Jo Pippas, who oversees communication to stakeholders throughout the industry. Jo is the editor of the industry E-Zine *In A Nutshell*, coordinator and content manager of the industry website www.australianalmonds.com.au, and designer and manager of the Almond Industry Databases. Currently, all communications activities are carried out in-house and managed by the Communications Manager.

Different communication methods are suited to different people, and this project utilises a range of communication methods including print, digital and written media as outlined below. Communication methods are integrated so each contains links with others and encourages feedback and information sharing. It is essential that these communications are readily available to all participants and service providers in a variety of formats to suit the diverse nature of each audience.

With these objectives in mind, the communications project aims to achieve key outcomes including:

- Stakeholder engagement which includes grower forums
- Accurate databases of industry participants.
- *In A Nutshell* E-Zine distributed to industry contacts spanning the almond industry supply chain, including growers, processors, marketers, nurseries, beekeepers, chemical providers, research providers, investors, etc. This will also be accessible electronically via the Australian Almonds website.
- An effective and up-to-date website that provides a comprehensive information source for anyone seeking information relevant to the Australian almond industry enabling access to Hort Innovation project reports and other information tools that have been developed from the almond R&D program.
- eNews and updates providing almond crop and industry information circulated to contacts.
- Circulation of Hort Innovation Final Reports to almond levypayers and links to the Hort Innovation website.
- Publication of Industry Fact Sheets detailing best practice.
- Best practice/research program outcome YouTube videos created, uploaded and disseminated.
- Forums for industry participants on industry and research and development activities.
- A holistic approach to communication by providing multiple methods for delivery of information and the synergy between them.

The ABA will conduct a mid-term review of communications activities to assess the program and the effectiveness of communications. This evaluation will be distributed via individually preferred method of either email or hardcopy post. Survey questions will be designed to determine the quality, timeliness, frequency, format, distribution method and relevance of information provided to stakeholders. This process will also be supplemented by informal evaluation procedures. Findings from these assessments will be taken into account when planning each year's communications program. Surveys and input from ABA committees will continue to guide a program of continuous improvement in the associated communication outputs.

The Australian Almond Communications project builds on key areas identified in previous projects and results of industry surveys including the use of new information sources and those currently available to those involved in the industry, and barriers to the uptake of research and development outcomes. Industry participants rely on one or two sources for their information. The ABA continues to address issues of efficiency and effectiveness of information transfer to different stakeholders and how to make the most of the opportunities available using information technology.

Principles for engagement

The ABA uses five key principles to guide stakeholder engagement activities. The principles set the standards to which we aspire in building consistent, open and respectful relationships. The principles have been tested against and are consistent with current stakeholder engagement standards and practices across the public and private sectors, locally and internationally.

Purposeful

We begin every engagement with a clear understanding of what we want to achieve

- While our engagement will be driven by strategic priorities, we must be aware of our stakeholders' objectives, environment, expertise and level of influence.
- When we know why we need to engage and we agree on what success looks like, it is easier to conduct focused and meaningful engagement.
- By planning our communication and managing expectations, we aim to build lasting goodwill with stakeholders participating in the process and develop an understanding about their capacity to engage.

Inclusive

We identify relevant stakeholders and make it easy for them to engage

- We identify and enable the participation of those people and organisations who contribute to, influence, or are affected by our work. This includes those that may be harder to reach for reasons such as language, culture, age or mobility.
- We provide our stakeholders with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way

Timely

We involve stakeholders from the start and agree on when and how to engage

- We will clearly identify and explain the engagement process, and negotiate with stakeholders, where possible, as to timelines.
- This includes meeting schedules, and response times for information requests or feedback.

Transparent

We are open and honest in our engagement and set clear expectations

- We will provide information so stakeholders can participate in a meaningful way and will foster a culture of sharing ideas.
- We will clearly identify and explain the engagement process, the role of stakeholders in the engagement process, and communicate how their input will inform the project.

Respectful

We acknowledge and respect the expertise, perspective, and needs of stakeholders

- We understand that engagement is a two-way process. We take care to be open to alternative views and to listen as well as speak.
- We respect our stakeholders' expertise and appreciate the benefits of mutual learning.
- We recognise the different communication needs and preferences of stakeholders and endeavor to meet these wherever possible.

Process for engagement

The ABA's model for stakeholder engagement has been adapted from the international standard developed by the Institute of Social and Ethical Accountability (2005).

This five-step process is structure to support thorough planning, preparation, action and evaluation of every engagement activity. The process is a dynamic and ongoing cycle, which supports a comprehensive approach to engagement and will, over time, build an evidence based platform for continuous improvement.



Think	Develop an overall consideration of strategic objectives, how these relate to stakeholders and specific issues, and conduct an initial prioritisation of stakeholders and issues for further analysis.
Plan	Introduce different levels of engagement, and guide the analysis of existing relationships, available resources and organisational constraints. Learn more about specific stakeholder's representatives, and to decide on what kind of relationship to develop with these stakeholders.
Prepare	Address questions of internal and external competencies and capacities to engage, and ensure that all parties to an engagement can join and take part effectively.
Engage	Address and outline different engagement techniques, and – building on the previous steps – design an approach that suits the needs of the specific situation to reach your objectives.
Evaluate	Follow-up on the outputs of engagement, and ensure that stakeholders feel assured regarding the quality of efforts.

How this process is applied will be driven by the purpose, level and type of engagement undertaken. It is also important to note that the process will operate at the strategic and operational ends of stakeholder engagement activities and more than one step in the process at any time, with different stakeholders, depending on the nature of the engagement.

Communications Matrix

ID	Event	Description	Medium (Channel)	Audience	R&D Objective	Frequency
1	Program Planning Meeting	Meeting involving all team members, to discuss the work in-progress / recently completed / coming up for the calendar year.	Face to Face	1	4.4	Annually
2	Grower Forums	Forums for industry participants to be informed and contribute on a range of issues covering industry risks and opportunities. Undertaken in the four major producing regions at least once annually. These focus on issues of industry importance as well as provide researchers with the opportunity to present their projects. Growers and stakeholders also have access to the CEO, Market Development Manager and three Industry Development staff on a day to day basis.	Face to Face/Video Updates, Email, Website	1,2,3	4.1, 4.3, 4.4	Annually in each growing region
3	In A Nutshell Newsletter	E-zine for almond growers and interested stakeholders throughout Australia and any interested international party. Highlights key information relevant to industry, spanning research and development, market development, industry issues and events.	Email, Social Media, Website	1,2,3,4	4.1, 4.3, 4.4	Quarterly
4	Best Practice Fact Sheets	Industry and seasonally relevant Best Practice Fact Sheets	Email, Social Media, Website	1,2,3	4.1, 4.3, 4.4	Quarterly
5	YouTube	Research project outcomes and other videos and articles of industry relevance providing linkages to industry stakeholders as well as the broader supply chain and horticultural community	Email, Social Media, Website	1,2,3,4	4.1, 4.3, 4.4	Bi-annually
6	Industry E-Blasts	Updated industry information and media articles of industry interest circulated to contacts	Email	1,2,3	4.4	Monthly
7	Press Releases & Media Interviews	Media information and comment on specific activities based on R&D outcomes, extension information, seasonally relevant information	Email, Social Media, Website, News Media	1,2,3,4	4.3, 4.4	As necessary
8	ABA grower website	Readily available industry technical information as well as publications of industry interest for sale and download	Digitally	1,2,3,4	4.3, 4.4	Continuously
9	Social Media – Twitter & Facebook	Sharing and promotion of articles of industry relevance providing linkages to industry stakeholders as well as the broader supply chain and horticultural community	Digitally	1,2,3,4,	4.3, 4.4	Continuously

Communications Responsibilities

Key:

A = Accountable for communication event, takes part in meetings

C = Provides information and content for communications material/event

E = Evaluates and approves communications material

P = Publishes information/communications material

M = Monitors communications process and provides feedback

Event ID	CEO	IDM	IDO's	Comms Manager
1	A/C/E	A/E	E	A/C/M
2	A/E/P/M	A/E/P/M	E	A/C/P/M
3	A/C/E/P	A/C/E	C	A/C/P/M
4	E	A/E	C	A/E/P/M
5	E	A/E	A/C/E	A/E/P/M
6	C	C	C	A/C/E/P/M
7	A/E/C/P/M	C		A/C/P/M
8	C/E	C/E	C/E	A/C/E/P/M
9	C	C	C	A/C/E/P/M

Monitoring, Feedback & Evaluation

Monitoring, feedback and evaluation a key to measure the ongoing effectiveness of communications. By monitoring and responding to feedback regularly, communications can continue to address the needs and concerns of key stakeholders.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will include:

- **Direct feedback** – face to face communications will provide an opportunity for the audience to give feedback directly on communications activities identified in the communication matrix
- **Formal feedback** – formal communication will be conducted via communications evaluation surveys conducted via email, online and telephone.
- **Informal feedback** – informal feedback will be obtained via word of mouth through ABA Staff and Committee members.
- **Email Campaign Monitoring** – monitoring of accumulated data and data on individual emails including list subscribers, unsubscribes, open rates, forward rates, bounce rate, click and conversion rates.
- **Website Metrics (Google Analytics)** – Quantitative website data such as number of visits, page views, unique views, return rate, time spent and bounce rate.
- **Social Media Monitoring** (All social media channels) – Third party and inbuilt monitoring including mentions, likes, reach, engagements, views, click-through rate, comments, shares, re-tweets, impressions and reactions.
- **Attendee evaluations** – Quantitative data collection of feedback from those participating in events including questions on logistics, satisfaction and relevance of information presented
- **Media Monitoring** – Uptake of ABA created press releases and quantitative data including reach, influence, coverage patterns, share of voice and sentiment.

The ABA will establish benchmarks and subsequently measure progress by building in to annual grower surveys quantitative and qualitative questions about the following:

- Frequency of visits to website and purpose
- Industry Field Days, Regional Grower meetings and Forums
- Publications eg *In A Nutshell* E-Zine, fact sheets, social media posts
- Access, quality and delivery of R&D, extension and general information
- Visibility of information disseminated via traditional media

Specific evaluation criteria have been developed for each of the core communications activities. They are;

- Use of the ABA website will be monitored on a regular basis and a more in depth evaluation will be conducted as part of a stakeholder survey as part of a mid-term review.
- Meltwater media monitoring evaluation will be conducted throughout the life of the project to assess media uptake of almond industry stories. The take-up of media releases will be noted and included in reports to the ABA Board and Hort Innovation.
- Regional Grower meetings will be evaluated through personal communications, feedback surveys and judgements on the level of engagement of the people involved.
- Evaluation of fact sheets will be by monitoring the level of access of the information on the ABA website.
- The ABA also operates closely with growers and receives direct feedback from these sources.

Measures of Success & Industry Adoption

The resources funded by the project will assist Australian almond growers / levypayers, processors and marketers and other industry stakeholders - to be better informed and consequently, to be able to make better business decisions. The communications project supports the capacity building initiatives within Strategic Investment plan and the Industry Development initiatives of the R&D Strategic plan. Industry adoption is critical to the program.

The success of communications activities will be measured by:

- Does the communication activity create an acceptance of change and a greater understanding of the information provided?
- Does the communication increase awareness of the goals of the ABA?
- Is the communicated information relevant?
- Does the information support ABA and Hort Innovation objectives?
- Are we effectively managing stakeholder and target audience expectations?
- Are we encouraging and responding to feedback?
- Is the frequency of communication appropriate to the level of the intended audience?
- To what extent are the new service delivery options being used?

These measurements will be assessed against the following objectives, with the following outcomes:

Assist Australian almond growers produce high quality almonds at competitive prices through superior information to growers and supply chain on technology transfer, economic and physical environment, product quality and innovation, export market information, government regulation. (75%)

- Improve dissemination of information on R&D outcomes back to growers and the supply chain.
- Drive a program of activity that ensures growers remain well informed about market data, industry and regulatory matters, which help improve their business decision making ability
- Properly segment growers and stakeholder database; develop useful interactive database
- Improve on feedback provided by growers and the supply chain to help inform future R&D projects
- Establish peer-to-peer communications
- Become a one-stop shop resource for growers
- Develop and implement a strong media strategy to support information to growers and the supply chain
- All communication to be timely, relevant, short, sharp, crisp and newsy with clear value to audience

Build a strong reputation for the quality and innovation of Australian almonds. (5%)

- Increase awareness of how the Research & Development levy is spent so growers feel supported

Create Government and community support for the almond industry; represent the interests of growers and supply chain members to Government to reduce or minimise negative impacts, seek positive benefits and create a sustainable and profitable operating environment for almonds. (10%)

- Implement a stakeholder engagement program
- Ensure the Australian almond industry is recognised as a valuable component of the economy and a contributor to rural Australia
- Keep growers informed of what the ABA does on its behalf; internal advocacy
- Develop feedback channels so growers can guide the ABA on advocacy priorities

Build organisational capability and communications infrastructure to deliver on the first three objectives (10%)

- Develop core stories and key messages for the ABA's communications, to arch across all objectives
- Ensure consistency of brand image application
- Develop internal processes for dealing with issues
- Build communications resources within organisation/ outsource as necessary

Overarching adoption targets for the communications program are as follows:

- The majority (>75%) of almond levypayers should rate all industry development activities highly and positively when their feedback is sought or reviewed
- Prompted and unprompted awareness of the *In A Nutshell* E-Zine to remain at or improve upon the mark as it was in the previous grower survey
- 40% of almond levy payer's rate at least one of these publications as a valuable tool for assisting with decision making in their business
- The ABA becomes the mainstay of almond industry information and statistics

Next Steps

This review and strategy will provide the basis upon which a plan can be developed to deliver effective and timely information and know-how to meet grower needs into the future (next three to five years). Effectively, this engagement plan is to ensure that priorities and content as well as tools, activities and infrastructure provide the best possible industry outcomes for the money invested in communications.

The ABA remains committed to providing new and enhanced communication tools and resources to the almond industry. While we recognise that previous mechanisms for receiving constructive feedback have been limited, the ABA now has the capacity to deliver the improvements included in this plan as well as other methods that may be identified in future communications program reviews.

This Engagement Plan will provide the ABA with a direction so that it can develop a way forward. The ABA has a small team to progress the new communications program focused on meeting the diverse communication needs of growers and industry stakeholders.

The new program is targeted for commencement from January 2017.

