



## **Final Report**

### **Banana Industry Congress 2017**

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Australian Banana Growers Council

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## Summary

The Australian Banana Industry Congress 2017 was the major event for Australia's banana industry for 2017. The event is convened biennially by the ABGC, the peak body representing the industry.

The first national congress was held in 1995 after it was determined the banana industry required a national forum to gather key stakeholders and discuss pertinent issues.

With the themes of resilience, innovation and sustainability, Congress 2017 focused on growing the capacity of the national industry by arming growers with the latest research and insights from those core themes, in addition to marketing updates and social events that celebrated the industry.

The event was spearheaded by project managers, the ABGC, with the voluntary help of a program committee and then separately, a retail tour committee.

The ABGC used the services of event planners, MCI to aid with logistics and operational values.

In keeping with the theme of innovation, the event was opened by a video featuring banana growers who spoke about what the key themes of Sustainability, Resilience and Innovation meant to them, as well as insights into why they were passionate about the banana industry.

Multi-media productions also featured later in the Congress, including a short video from the most recent Nuffield Scholar, Matt Abbott on his learning from the scholarship.

Elsewhere in the Congress program, international science speakers focused on the latest developments in Panama TR4 research and varietal trials focusing on disease resistance. These highly esteemed researchers, Dr Frederik Bakry (France) and Professor Randy Ploetz (US) then debated in a panel with Australian science leaders, forming a veritable power house of expertise on stage.

In a newly introduced aspect, our Science Speed Talks, featuring Australian 'up and coming' researchers was a great success; giving delegates an opportunity to learn about the current research being done domestically on TR4 and plant health. The short, sharp session was highly rated by those who attended and has been seen as really effective way to present oft-complex science research in an easily-digestible manner.

As part of the resilience aspect, other speakers within the program looked at how growers could better balance well-being and positivity amid challenge.

Similarly, market focused speakers looked at future developments in technology, potential areas of opportunity and the development of an individual growth mindset to be prepared for opportunity.

Panel sessions enabled delegates to actively access speakers through Q&A sessions, and where possible, such as the celebrity chef session with Peter Kuruvitas, audience participation was encouraged via active engagement and on-stage banter between growers, the chef and the audience at large.

More broadly, the Congress had a sense of social celebration, and has consistently proven a valuable tool for

growers to socialize in a changing culture, where on-farm biosecurity limits the former relaxed community feel between farms.

The first night of Congress coincided with the State-of-Origin game, where some 200 people gathered to watch together at the Congress venue, Sheraton on the Park.

Social networking was also held within the exhibition space, where 34 exhibitors from around the country had invested in attending the event.

Comedian Anh Do, thrilled a capacity crowd at the Congress Banana Ball, which was again seen as a highlight of the event. His personal story on resilience again, fitting perfectly into the key themes of Congress 2017.

In terms of the full assessment of Congress 2017, it is impossible not to note the many activities and positive opportunities provided to the many banana growers and service staff, including scientists and marketing specialists who attended. From the initial few days in Sydney spent by the Next Gen group of banana growers who travelled to Sydney earlier to research other industries and their technology, to the many opportunities given to growers within Congress to network with speakers and speak to world leading speakers with unprecedented access, Congress 2017 held a broad based opportunity to empower the individual and the farm business.

## Keywords

Innovation, inspiration, education, research, resilience, sustainability, science, research, bananas.

## Introduction

The Australian Banana Growers' Council Inc (ABGC) is the banana industry's national industry development organisation. It was formed in 1961 to represent the interests of Australia's commercial banana growers. In more recent years it also runs some industry development projects, including a biennial Congress, the first of which was held in 1995.

Since the introduction of the national banana industry levy for marketing and research and development (R&D) in 2008, some of the ABGC's funding for the biennial banana industry Congress has been matched by the Commonwealth Government, via Horticulture Innovation.

The 2017 Banana Industry Congress again attracted some matching funds from Hort Innovation, for which the ABGC is grateful. The largest contributor to revenue for this Congress was sponsorship and the second largest contributor was delegate registration fees. We are also grateful for generosity of sponsors, exhibitors and the support of our delegates

The ABGC's Congress Management Committee was assisted in the organisation of the 2017 Congress by Emma Tooth, from the event managers, MCI Australasia. The event also had a Congress Program Committee which was critical in developing the Congress Program.

Work started on the June 2017 Congress soon after the completion of the preceding Congress, two years earlier in Melbourne mid-2015.

The Congress was held at the Sheraton on the Park, in Sydney, with a similar program to the successful formula of the 2015 event. This included a more interactive program, a large retail tour, fewer speakers but more time for discussion and a partners' program.

## Methodology

The Congress consisted of a four-day program of events, providing broad and innovative insights into research, development and market forces. Commencing on the Wednesday afternoon with opening registration and an early evening trade exhibition launch, the program continued with plenary sessions from Thursday to Saturday afternoon.

### Exhibition

- A trade exhibit was held over the three, featuring 34 exhibitors at exhibition booths that were adjacent to the main plenary room.
- It was of major importance that ample opportunities were provided for delegates to network in the exhibition area.
- Science researchers were also able to exhibit poster board information on their research within the exhibition space.

### Plenary

- Plenary sessions included speakers on banana industry issues (such as TR4, biosecurity, production, supply chain, marketing and retailing etc) as well as business development and thought provoking speakers.
- The program included a keynote address each day (three keynotes), presentations and panel discussions. Audience questions and interaction was encouraged, and was highly popular via the Congress app.

### Social

- Social events were scheduled on three nights including a State of Origin night on the first night, banana bar networking and partner program events.
- The Banana Industry Ball was a major highlight of the 2017 event and included the ABGC Awards of Honour.



## Outputs

Some 355 participants attended the Banana Industry Congress 2017, enjoying 19 invited speakers, science speed talks, two retail tours, well populated exhibition offerings and a program which sought to empower and educate.

Keynote presentations, feature stories and detailed image galleries were created to cover Congress 2017 and featured in the September issue of the Australian Banana Magazine, distributed to a circulation of 1200 people around Australia.

This followed extensive marketing of the Congress via the April Banana Magazine which profiled every speaker. Both magazines can be found here: <https://abgc.org.au/news/australian-bananas-magazine/>

### **Communications and Marketing**

The Management Committee opted to brand the Congress with the following logo, to focus the three days on “Sustainability, Resilience, Innovation.”



The Banana Industry Congress 2017 information was hosted on the website [www.bananacongress.org.au](http://www.bananacongress.org.au). The website served as the key communication and marketing tool. Information provided via this site included the program, speaker lists, registration (linked to MCI), accommodation, venue information and sponsorship & exhibition details; all of which provided delegates with the information needed to attend the Congress. An app was also developed so delegates could access event information on electronic devices.

The comprehensive and interactive site featured the following main selection:

- Detailed information regarding the ABGC and its objectives
- Detailed information about Sheraton on the Park
- Detailed program information and updates
- Venue details
- Registration information and online registration

- Accommodation
- Sponsorship and Exhibition
- Social program
- Contact information

Bulk email news on the Congress (i.e. e-zines) were developed and distributed at regular intervals to promote and announce milestones in the Congress:

- Welcome & Save the Dates
- Expression of interest and Sponsorship & Exhibition opportunities
- Accommodation updates
- Registration open & sponsor article
- Early bird closing in 2 weeks
- Final program, social program, registration
- Post congress – Thank you, survey

#### **Radio advertising:**

- Limited marketing was undertaken via local radio in Tully, Mareeba and Innisfail during the final month preceding the Congress.

#### **Delegate Collateral**

The Congress satchel bags were custom made. Delegates also received other sponsored items: lanyards, diary, coffee keeper and sponsors' inserts.

The following material was also produced as part of the conference:

- Registration brochure - both mailed and electronic versions
- Sponsorship & exhibition prospectus
- Onsite program book
- Event app
- Delegate name badge

#### **Scientific and General Media Coverage**

Media coverage was extensive and included the following outlets;

- ABC Rural radio
- Good Fruit and Vegetable Magazine
- The Innisfail Advocate newspaper
- The Cairns Post newspaper
- The Cassowary Coast Independent News newspaper
- 4KZ Radio
- Grant Broadcasters (regional radio network include Zinc FM and HOT FM)

North Queensland Register – Social pics from the Banana Ball

<http://www.goodfruitandvegetables.com.au/story/4752986/all-the-photos-from-the-australian-banana-gala-ball/?cs=4928><http://www.fruitnet.com/produceplus/article/172613/banana-industry-honours-doug-phillips>

North Queensland Register – Large feature previewing Congress

<http://www.northqueenslandregister.com.au/story/4698817/sydney-to-host-australian-banana-congress/>

Produce Plus article on Doug Phillips Congress Award

<http://www.fruitnet.com/produceplus/article/172613/banana-industry-honours-doug-phillips>

Queensland Country Life – Feature written from Prof Randy Ploetz Congress speech

<http://www.queenslandcountrylife.com.au/story/4808928/cultivars-the-main-artillery-in-tr4-fight/>

Fresh Plaza – Feature previewing Congress

<http://www.freshplaza.com/article/176251/Big-names-set-to-star-at-the-Australian-Banana-Industry-Congress>

Fresh Plaza – Catalytic Generators sponsors of Congress 2017

<http://www.freshplaza.com/article/176648/Catalytic-Generators-Australia-to-sponsor-Banana-Congress-2017>

Fresh Plaza – Preview of leading scientists to attend Congress

<http://www.freshplaza.com/article/176380/Leading-scientists-to-share-their-insights-at-Australian-Banana-Congress>

Fresh Plaza – banana researchers Congress

<http://www.freshplaza.com/article/177888/AU-Leading-the-way-in-Australian-banana-research>

Fresh Plaza – speaker line up

<http://www.freshplaza.com/sector/157/australia-new-zealand><http://www.freshplaza.com/sector/157/australia-new-zealand>

Good Fruit and Vegetables magazine uploaded regular videos from Congress onto their Facebook page. An example below;

<https://www.facebook.com/GoodFruitandVegetables/videos/1393548967347195/>

### **ABGC Facebook page – VIDEOS**

The ABGC produced a number of videos for Congress which were uploaded to its Facebook page and website.

An Opening Video had 7575 ‘views’ on Facebook and was ‘shared’ 88 times.

<https://www.facebook.com/242290795822836/videos/vb.242290795822836/1595942167124352/?type=2&theater>

A video to promote the Nuffield Scholarship shown at Congress received 1353 ‘views’.

<https://www.facebook.com/242290795822836/videos/vb.242290795822836/1598653843519851/?type=2&theater>

The ABGC also uploaded daily highlights packages from Congress. These received hundreds of ‘views’.

First Day Highlights Package (952 views)

<https://www.facebook.com/242290795822836/videos/vb.242290795822836/1596580933727142/?type=2&theater>

Second Day Highlights Package (851 views)

<https://www.facebook.com/242290795822836/videos/vb.242290795822836/1598080526910516/?type=2&theater>

Final Day of Congress – (399 views)

<https://www.facebook.com/242290795822836/videos/vb.242290795822836/1599054316813137/?type=2&theater>

## Outcomes

The main Banana Industry Congress 2017 outcomes were:

- Greater insight into current international and domestic TR4 science and research;
- Increased knowledge into Hort Innovation funded marketing programs for the banana industry;
- Challenged thinking in terms of positive mindset and opportunistic business growth;
- Opportunity for growers to get the latest updates in supply chain development and technology;
- Greater connection between growers and the service industry that supports the sector via the trade exhibition;
- A more cohesive industry in terms of the ability for growers to network with the scientists, researchers and marketing specialists who support them.

## Evaluation and discussion

Some 353 delegates attended a three-day program of events which included a welcome reception, State of Origin evening, three days of plenary sessions, the retail tour and Banana Ball.

### Program

The Program combined a variety of priority issues for the industry via interactive sessions. This worked well, as did the lower number of speakers compared to the 2013 Congress and the fact that the scientific (TR4) session was geared to growers, not to a scientific audience. There was some feedback however that there was too much science on the program, and that the third day of the program was not necessary.

Interactive panel discussions gave delegates ample opportunity to use the forum as their means to connect with the experts, and the question times allowed for each of these panel sessions was well utilized. Use of the app during these sessions was a particularly popular new addition to the Congress technology.

A wide range of feedback on the Congress was received. Growers who responded commented they learnt a lot, but saw future events as more efficient in a two-day forum.

Feedback was generally positive, though the venue was seen as expensive, and the location of future events was widely suggested as being better-held in a larger regional area or smaller city to cut down on costs for those wanting to attend.

Surveying also found the mix of speakers to be an educative and well balanced matrix, though some found the spread of exhibition space in the venue to be lacking in 'community.' Feedback was also given that the inclusion of the retail tour was redundant and should be reassessed as an inclusion for the next Congress. A full list of survey questions and responses can be found at **Appendix 3: BA16700 –Congress survey results FINAL REPORT.**

### Delegate comparison:

	2013	2015	2017
Total delegates	392	458	353
Growers and registered accompanying persons (included in paying delegate figure)	83	165	80

- Breakdown of attendees included 80 banana growers, 71 from the marketing sector, eight media, three policy makers, 72 representing research and development, 20 from the retail sector and 97 representing the supply chain.

- 34 exhibition booths were present at Congress, as well as scientific research papers. Exhibition space raised \$42,640.
- Media coverage of the event was significant and created positive momentum for both researchers, the ABGC and the industry at large.
- Surveys were sent out to delegates and sponsors via email shortly after the event; feedback was largely positive from delegates with particular mention of the strong suite of speakers. Of those offering constructive feedback, there was suggestion that Sydney was not the ideal location for Congress and that it would be better to hold it in Queensland.

That larger expense in flights and hotel fees (which increased partly because of State of Origin) was thought to be one of the key reasons that Congress was low on grower attendance. The event also coincided with the Tully Deb Ball which saw some Tully growers either not attend, or cut their attendance to just a few days.

- Subsequent surveying of a sample group of growers by the ABGC Board members at key industry events reiterated expense and location as two of the key reasons they did not attend.

#### Survey response on delegate satisfaction:

Please rate your overall Congress experience - ALL		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	9.30%	8
Highly satisfactory	32.56%	28
Satisfactory	33.72%	29
Average	15.12%	13
Poor	9.30%	8
N/A	0.00%	0
<b>answered question</b>		<b>86</b>

Please rate your overall Congress experience - GROWERS		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	0.0%	0
Highly satisfactory	29.4%	5
Satisfactory	47.1%	8
Average	5.9%	1
Poor	17.6%	3

How would you rate the congress topics and presentations overall? ALL		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	15.12%	13
Highly satisfactory	36.05%	31
Satisfactory	26.74%	23
Average	13.95%	12
Poor	4.65%	4
N/A	3.49%	3
<b>answered question</b>		<b>86</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>

#### Australian Banana Industry Congress 2017

How would you rate the congress topics and presentations overall? - GROWERS		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	5.9%	1
Highly satisfactory	47.1%	8
Satisfactory	23.5%	4
Average	5.9%	1
Poor	11.8%	2
N/A	5.9%	1

#### Additional analysis of delegate numbers:

- Key issues affecting numbers at the 2017 event included the fact that TR4 was new in June 2015, thus attracting growers to Congress in that year in larger numbers; and
- Finances were also seen as an issue in that many banana businesses are facing a challenging time with lower banana prices over the previous two years.

#### Comparison to 2015:

- Satisfaction levels between 2015/2017 were similarly high, though numbers were down, as mentioned above;
- The program committee stuck to the same successful formula for the programs in both years, though Melbourne was seen as a more popular location for Congress, than Sydney given the higher price of Sydney accommodation.



## Recommendations

1. The next Banana Industry Congress is to be in mid-2019, and as per the feedback from this year's delegates, should be held on the Gold Coast. This location is seen as central to both Queensland and NSW growers, whilst also having a variety of venues which could cater for the numbers and space required.
2. The program should be amended to a two-day event, rather than include the half-day on Saturday.
3. The program committee should maintain a strong scientific and marketing focus, as these sessions are the main reason for the Congress.
4. The management committee should not pursue the retail tour as a continued aspect of the Program.
5. The Management Committee (of ABGC directors and senior staff) should attend or read about other horticultural conferences in 2016 to take ideas from them and implement improvements to the Banana Congress.

## Acknowledgements

The main thanks for organising the Banana Industry Congress 2017 are due to Paula Doran (Communications Manager, ABGC). Her project management of Congress enabled the event to be held. She also played a pivotal role as MC of the event which enabled a rich and professional insight to lead from the helm.

The Congress was managed externally by conference organiser, MCI Australia: [www.mci-group.com/australia](http://www.mci-group.com/australia) The MCI team was Lynn Fairbrass (lead), Emma Tooth and Judy Kingston.

The Congress Management Committee: Ben Franklin (Chair and ABGC Director), Paula Doran (Communications Manager, ABGC), Paul Inderbitzin (ABGC Director), Jade Buchanan (ABGC Director) and Jim Pekin (ABGC Chief Executive Officer), Leanne Erakovic, (ABGC Executive Officer), Sonia Campbell (ABGC Senior Communications Officer).

The Congress Program Committee included: Elisa King (Hort Innovation) Jenny Crema (banana grower), Matt Abbott (banana grower), Ben Franklin, Paul Inderbitzin, Jade Buchanan, Paula Doran, Jim Pekin, Dr Rosie Godwin (ABGC), Richard Clayton (MacKay Marketing), Jenny Margetts (Plant and Food Research) and Matt Weinert (NSW DPI).

All communications for the Congress including media engagement was managed by Sonia Campbell.

All sponsors and exhibitors who supported the Congress.

All participants are acknowledged for attending and contributing to the atmosphere and the excellent discussions both in sessions and at the social events.

## Intellectual property/commercialisation

‘No commercial IP generated’

## Appendices

**Appendix 1** – BA16700 - Australian Banana Industry event program FINAL REPORT

**Appendix 2** – BA16700 - Statement of Receipts and Expenditures FINAL REPORT

**Appendix 3** – BA16700 –Congress survey results FINAL REPORT