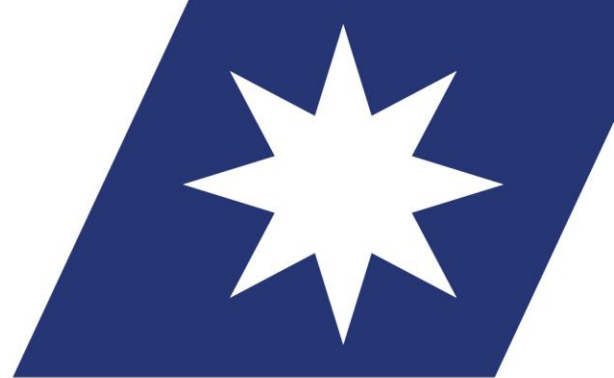


BOB KATTER

Katter's Australian Party

Federal Member for Kennedy



MEDIA RELEASE

6 February 2020

Banana farms at mercy of feral pigs in the Panama fight

KAP Federal Member for Kennedy Bob Katter and KAP State Member for Hill Shane Knuth have united in a campaign to pursue both State and Federal Governments for immediate funding to support the farmers fight against the exploding feral pig population in North Queensland as a fourth property is found to be positive for Panama Disease (TR4) in Tully.

Both the state and federal members have been fighting for funds since the disease reached the eastern side of Australia in 2015 to support the cull and containment of the pigs which are thought to be contributing to the spread of the contaminated soil.

“This is an industry worth \$600 million to the Australian economy. Without serious State and Federal Government input, this outbreak will get worse.

“There are 25 million pigs running around North Queensland and quite soon that number will explode to 30 million! The pollution that is seen to flow onto the Barrier Reef it is almost certainly because of the pigs coming down out of the national parks and yet there is absolutely no program to restrain their growth let alone reduce their numbers.

“It will take a combination of efforts to make a dint in the pig numbers whether it is aerial shooting, ground shooting, pig dogging, fencing or trapping and the aerial funding allocated as part of a wider TR4 surveillance program is due to dry up in June next year.

“You can't trap 25 million pigs but a simple return to heavily controlled gun licensing to allow the young blokes in these country areas to go shooting on a weekend, will be able to make a few quid out of it and have a bit of fun at the same time.”

Mr Katter said that Australia's biosecurity was failing at the borders which allow foreign diseases in and that in the case of the black sigatoka outbreak the industry had moved swiftly to quarantine the relevant area and eradicate the disease, which it had been said could not be eradicated.

“I'll be seeking discussions with the industry leaders on the case of eradication in the coming weeks.

“The Australian Banana Growers Council (ABGC), who has been incredibly proactive and successful in the TR4 eradication program to date, also took a very aggressive position that we should do everything humanly possible to eradicate Black Sigatoka – and we did.

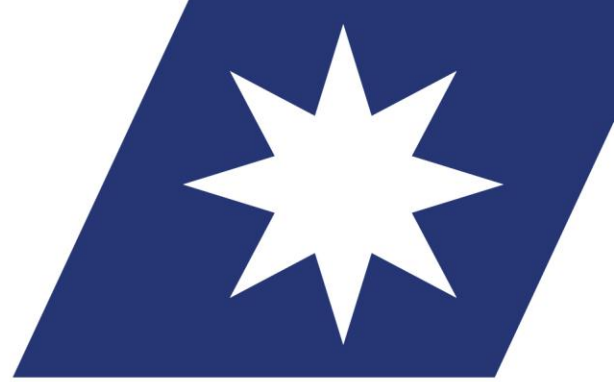
“I've said it once, twice, I've said it a thousand times! If you import fruit, vegetables or raw produce, you will introduce diseases into our country.”

Mr Knuth said it was disappointing to hear another case of Panama (TR4) has been detected.

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"I have always had great faith in local growers to know how to handle this situation and continue to work well with Bio Security Queensland, however much more needs to be done to stop the spread of TR4.

"No matter what bio security controls are in place, if you don't control the feral pig population you will have a high risk of the continual spread of TR4."

Mr Knuth pointed out that significantly more funds need to be allocated to ensure the safety of our banana crops and to assist growers in implementation of additional measures required to safeguard their properties against TR4.

"Extra funds must be allocated to an aerial feral pig shooting program to reduce the number of feral pigs coming out of state land onto neighbouring properties and spreading TR4.

Mr Knuth has met with industry experts and farmers and has previously lobbied for extra funding for an aerial pig shooting program. Mr Knuth is now calling on the state government to deliver this funding.

"Bananas are a \$600million industry with 94% of production in Far North Queensland. I don't think it's too much to ask for additional funding to help reduce the spread of TR4 through an aerial feral pig shooting program."

Mr Katter reminded people that Panama Disease does not pose a risk to the health of people who eat the fruit.

—ENDS—