

Changes to Biosecurity Act and Legislation within the Queensland sugarcane industry

Changes to biosecurity legislation in Queensland have implications for the current sugarcane quarantine areas and the movement of sugarcane.

By James Ogden-Brown

The sugarcane industry has a long history of working with Plant Health Australia (PHA), State and Federal governments to prevent the spread of serious pests and diseases, and to manage incursions or outbreaks.

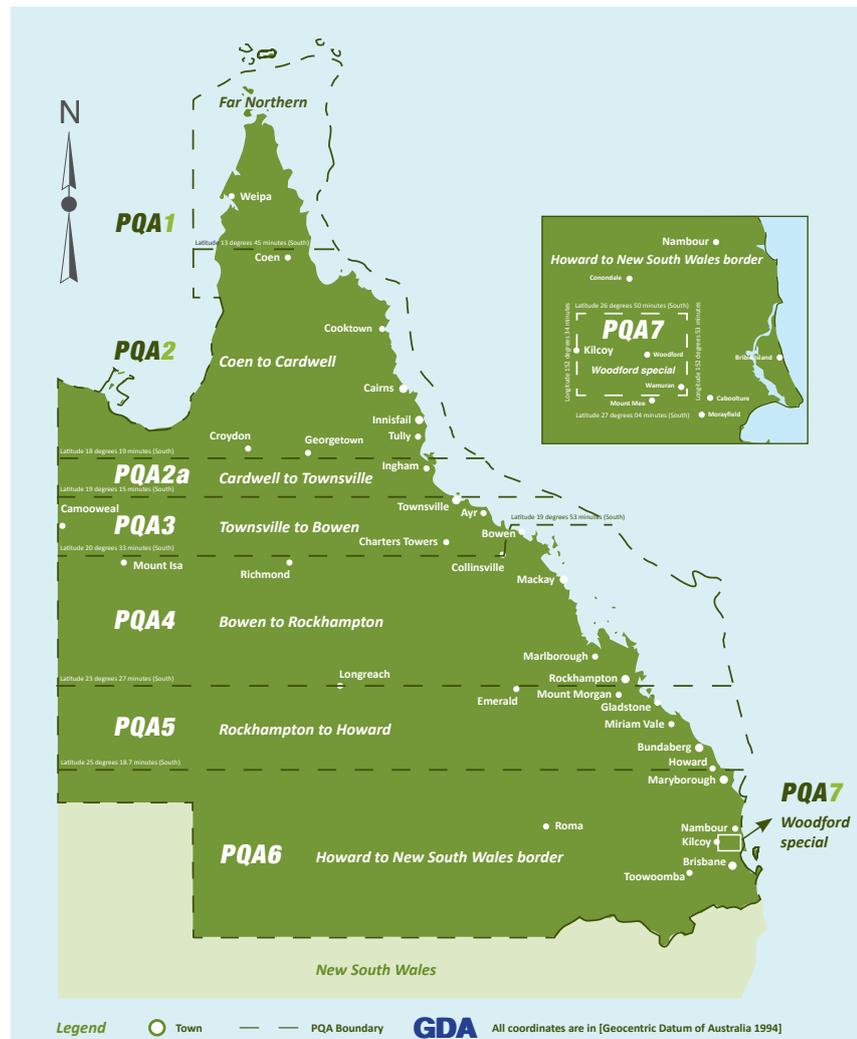
For Queensland, the legislation that supports the sugarcane industry is the *Plant Protection Act 1989*, the *Plant Protection Regulation 2002* and the *Plant Protection (Approved Sugarcane Varieties) Regulation 2003*. Both the Act and the regulations will be replaced with the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and the *Biosecurity Regulations 2016*. Both will commence on 1 July 2016.

Under the Act, individuals and organisations whose activities pose a biosecurity risk will have greater legal responsibility for managing them.

This general biosecurity obligation means they must take all reasonable steps to ensure they do not spread a pest, disease or contaminant.

Some of the current regulatory provisions will not be continued and instead producers will have more freedom to manage their own biosecurity risks without having to follow prescriptive requirements that may not be necessary in their specific circumstances.

However, those regulatory provisions that relate to the pest quarantine areas will remain, but with minor changes to the boundaries and the name which will be "Biosecurity Zones". Individuals or organisations will be required under the regulation to obtain an authority before moving plant material or appliances (machinery) between Biosecurity Zones.



Pest Quarantine Area Boundaries

Some of these boundaries will be combined and moved in the new regulation.

Movement of sugarcane plant material or machinery between Pest Quarantine Areas (PQAs) (Biosecurity Zones)

Be aware that now, and with the future legislation, before moving plant material, soil or machinery which has been in contact with sugarcane between PQAs or the new Biosecurity Zones an approval must be obtained from an authorised person. The inspector will require the following information:

- The full contact details of who is sending the material and the originating PQA.
- The full contact details of who is receiving the material and the destination PQA.
- Which variety or varieties are being moved?
- What part of the plant is being moved? What it will be used for?

Moving plant material approvals must be obtained from Biosecurity Queensland on 132 523. Machinery approvals can be obtained from your local accredited productivity services officer or Biosecurity Queensland.

When approvals are issued they come with conditions which must be adhered to before movement can take place.

When quarantine boundaries work well

Fiji leaf gall disease caused extensive damage and disruption in the Central and Southern region in the 1970s and early 1980s (see Image 1 – in the foreground are Fiji leaf gall diseased plants).

By managing the movement of plant material from infested regions to the northern regions, the Queensland Government and the sugarcane industry has been able to maintain the Fiji leaf gall-free status of the major sugarcane regions north of Proserpine.

This has allowed these northern regions to avoid any direct losses and to have a wider choice of varieties, including some Fiji leaf gall susceptible varieties.

In the Central and Southern regions, the Fiji leaf gall control programs and quarantine restrictions have been so successful that the disease has not been recorded for more than 20 years.

The control programs have involved the approved variety regulations to ensure growers only plant Fiji leaf gall resistant varieties and management of plant movements from areas that are still infested such as Broadwater and Harwood mill areas in New South Wales.

Sentinel plantings (planting plots of a susceptible variety) will commence in the Southern regions of Bundaberg, Isis, Maryborough and Nambour to monitor for Fiji leaf gall.

This will allow the current risk from this very serious disease to be assessed so that the industry can make informed decisions on management of the risk into the future.



Exotic pests and diseases

The largest biosecurity threat to our industry are exotic pests such as insect borers (*Sesamia* stalk borer, *Scirpophage* top borer) (see Image 2 and 3). Failure to isolate and eradicate an incursion would be devastating to the industry if these borers crossed our borders.

We only have to look at the effect these pests have had on our neighbour's industry. Ramu Agri-Industries in Papua New Guinea now produces half the tonnes of sugar per hectare that we do here and most of this loss has been caused by borers.

PHA, with the assistance of SRA, CANEGROWERS, the Australian Sugar Milling Council, and Biosecurity Queensland and Sunshine Sugar (NSW) have completed a review of the Industry Biosecurity Plan. This is a document that is used by federal and state governments to prepare for and assist in an emergency response if there is an exotic pest incursion.

PHA is also working with these organisations to produce a Biosecurity Growers' Manual, which will assist industry in understanding the new legislation.

Protecting our industry

The protection of our industry can only happen if all participants do the right thing.

- Ensure that machinery is cleaned to the required standard.
- Plant material moved between PQAs will have restrictions on its movement.
- Ensure approvals are applied for and are in place before any appliances or plant material is moved.
- **Report any suspicious pest or disease to your local productivity services group or the PHA Hotline on 1800 084 881.**
- **Report any illegal movement of plant material or machinery between PQAs to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.**

