



# Far North Queensland Growers Submission

## Assessment of Alternative Measures for the Importation of Fresh Cavendish Bananas from the Philippines

Response to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Issues Paper

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### Introduction

Far North Queensland Growers (FNQ Growers) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's **Assessment of Alternative Measures for the Importation of Fresh Cavendish Bananas from the Philippines – Issues Paper**.

Established more than 70 years ago, FNQ Growers is the peak regional advocacy body representing commercial fruit and vegetable growers from Rollingstone in the south to Lakeland in the north and west to Georgetown. As a grower-led organisation, FNQ Growers advocates for productive, profitable and sustainable horticulture through collaboration with growers, industry, researchers and all levels of government.

FNQ Growers supports a rigorous, transparent and science-based Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis (BIRA) that maintains Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP). While recognising Australia's international obligations to consider market access requests from trading partners, FNQ Growers does not support the introduction of alternative import measures for fresh Cavendish bananas unless it can be unequivocally demonstrated, through robust scientific evidence, that Australia's existing level of biosecurity protection will be fully maintained.

This submission complements, rather than duplicates, the technical and scientific work being undertaken by the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) and the Banana Imports Committee. It provides a Far North Queensland perspective, recognising the importance of the banana industry to regional employment, economic prosperity, community resilience, food security and the long-term sustainability of Australia's banana industry.

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## Supporting National Industry Advocacy

FNQ Growers acknowledges the significant work undertaken by the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) and the Banana Imports Committee throughout this assessment.

We recognise the extensive scientific expertise, technical knowledge and industry consultation coordinated by ABGC and support its leadership in representing Australia's banana industry.

FNQ Growers also supports ABGC's position that Australia's banana industry should not be exposed to unnecessary biosecurity risk where Australia's existing Appropriate Level of Protection cannot be assured.

Accordingly, this submission focuses on the regional significance of Australia's banana industry and the practical implications that any future biosecurity breach could have for Far North Queensland growers, businesses and communities.

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## Importance of the Banana Industry to Far North Queensland

The Australian banana industry is one of the nation's most significant horticultural industries and remains a cornerstone of Far North Queensland's regional economy.

Approximately **94 per cent of Australia's bananas are produced in Far North Queensland**, with major production centred in the Cassowary Coast (Tully and Innisfail), the Atherton Tablelands and Lakeland.

The industry supports growers, packing facilities, freight operators, contractors, agronomists, input suppliers, retailers and many other businesses throughout the supply chain.

The **2024 Mareeba and Atherton Tablelands Horticulture Profile** reports horticultural production exceeding **\$748 million**, representing a 42 per cent increase since 2019. Bananas alone contributed approximately **\$169 million** in Gross Value of Production across more than **2,000 hectares** of production.



Nationally, the Australian banana industry produces more than **400,000 tonnes of bananas annually**, contributes more than **\$1.3 billion** to the Australian economy and supports approximately **18,000 full-time and part-time jobs** across production, packing, freight, wholesaling, retail and associated industries.

Unlike many horticultural commodities, bananas are produced year-round, providing ongoing employment and supporting permanent regional businesses throughout northern Australia.

**Can the Department outline the likely long-term impacts on regional businesses, employment and local economies if lower-cost banana imports are granted access to the Australian market? If the Department is unable to do so, can ABARES undertake modelling to assess these impacts?**

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## **Regional Employment, Food Security and Community Resilience**

Bananas are the largest horticultural employer in Far North Queensland.

The recently completed **Far North Queensland Agricultural Workforce Data Report** estimates agriculture employs approximately **11,000 people during quieter periods**, increasing to more than **15,000 workers during peak production**, with horticulture representing the region's largest agricultural employer.

The banana industry relies upon local workers together with approved workforce programs including the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme, the Far North Queensland Designated Area Migration Agreement (FNQ DAMA) and the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) program.

Australia has a strong, sustainable banana industry that already produces more than enough fruit to meet domestic demand.

The industry underpins the economic viability of regional communities, supporting local businesses, schools, transport networks, community organisations and essential services.



FNQ Growers therefore sees no demonstrated supply shortage that justifies accepting additional biosecurity risk through alternative import pathways.

**Given the banana industry's significant contribution to employment in Far North Queensland, can the Department outline how any decline in industry participation in the above-mentioned workforce programs would affect state and national economic outcomes, as well as Australia's broader commitments to Pacific development initiatives such as the PALM Scheme?**

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## Long-Term Investment by Growers

Far North Queensland's banana industry has been built over generations.

Across Australia, approximately **540 family farming businesses** have collectively invested decades of capital, innovation and expertise into producing high-quality Australian bananas.

Many businesses operating throughout Far North Queensland represent second, third and fourth-generation farming families that continue to invest in sophisticated irrigation systems, packing facilities, cold storage, automation, workforce development, quality assurance systems and environmental stewardship.

These long-term investments are underpinned by confidence in Australia's world-leading biosecurity system and the long-term sustainability of Australian banana production.

**Can the Department confirm that it will take into consideration the substantial long-term investments made by governments and Australian banana farming families to establish and maintain Australia's world-leading biosecurity system? If not, will ABARES include these investments as part of its assessment?**



## Industry Commitment to Biosecurity

Australia's banana industry has demonstrated a strong and ongoing commitment to biosecurity.

The experience of Panama Tropical Race 4 fundamentally changed commercial banana production practices across Far North Queensland. In response, growers have invested millions of dollars in biosecurity infrastructure, surveillance and hygiene systems designed to reduce the risk of pest and disease spread.

Across the industry, commercial banana farms routinely implement measures including:

- Controlled property access
- Visitor registration systems
- Vehicle wash-down facilities
- Hygiene stations and footbaths
- Staff biosecurity induction and training
- Controlled machinery movements
- Surveillance and monitoring programs
- Comprehensive on-farm hygiene protocols

In addition to individual business investment, growers actively participate in industry-led biosecurity initiatives including the ABGC Grower Support Program, the Banana Biosecurity Code of Practice, grower education programs and ongoing surveillance activities.

These measures demonstrate the industry's firsthand understanding of the consequences of biosecurity incursions and its ongoing commitment to protecting Australian production.

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## Maintaining Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection

FNQ Growers recognises that the purpose of this assessment is to determine whether alternative import measures can achieve Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection.



Given the importance of Australia's banana industry, FNQ Growers believes any proposed alternative import measures should only be adopted where robust scientific evidence clearly demonstrates that Australia's existing level of biosecurity protection will be maintained.

The Australian banana industry has invested millions of dollars over many decades to protect Australia's biosecurity. Those investments, together with substantial government investment in surveillance, research, emergency preparedness and industry support, should not be placed at avoidable risk.

The consequences of a significant biosecurity breach extend well beyond individual farming businesses.

They have the potential to affect:

- Regional employment
- Farming families
- Local economies
- Freight and logistics networks
- Supporting industries
- Long-term grower investment
- Community resilience
- Australia's domestic food security

Protecting Australia's banana industry protects far more than agricultural production. It protects regional communities, Australia's food sovereignty and one of the nation's most significant horticultural industries.

**Given Australia's very high biosecurity standards and Appropriate Level of Protection (ALOP), can the Department outline how banana farms and export consignments from the Philippines would be independently validated as consistently meeting Australia's ALOP requirements?**



## Conclusion

FNQ Growers appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important assessment.

Australia's banana industry represents far more than agricultural production. It supports regional economies, provides thousands of jobs, underpins community resilience and reflects generations of investment by Australian farming families committed to producing safe, high-quality food under world-leading biosecurity standards.

FNQ Growers supports the Department's commitment to a transparent and evidence-based Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis. However, FNQ Growers respectfully submits that any decision to introduce alternative import measures should only proceed where it can be conclusively demonstrated that Australia's existing Appropriate Level of Protection will be fully maintained.

There is no demonstrated supply shortage that justifies accepting additional biosecurity risk.

Accordingly, FNQ Growers supports retaining Australia's current level of biosecurity protection unless an equivalent or greater level of protection can be clearly demonstrated through robust scientific evidence.

We thank the Department for its continued engagement with industry throughout this process and look forward to contributing further as the Biosecurity Import Risk Analysis progresses.