



MEDIA RELEASE

THE ATSE CRAWFORD FUND
Supporting International Agricultural Research

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BIOSECURITY ESSENTIAL TO REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY

Quarantine officers, researchers and agricultural field staff from Papua New Guinea have been invited to Melbourne this week to improve their biosecurity skills and knowledge.

The six visitors, from a mix of Papua New Guinean government and industry organisations, will be attending a two week long workshop to improve their understanding of how the Australian biosecurity system works and gain specific skills in plant pest detection and diagnosis.

The workshop is the result of a partnership between ATSE Crawford Fund, the Cooperative Research Centre for National Plant Biosecurity (CRCNPB) and Plant Health Australia, and hosted by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

"By sharing our own knowledge on biosecurity practices with our neighbours and helping them protect their agricultural industries and food supply, we are also protecting Australian farmers, by increasing the likelihood of key pests and diseases being identified and dealt with before reaching Australia," said Dr Tony Gregson.

Dr Gregson is Chairman of the Boards of the Crawford Fund's Victoria Program, Plant Health Australia, Bioversity International, and the Molecular Plant Breeding CRC. Dr Gregson has also recently been invited to join an ATSE Crawford Fund taskforce investigating the impacts of world food prices and food shortages. He opened the workshop on Tuesday, 17 June.

Dr Gregson went on to say, "At a time when there is a lot of media coverage about the threats to agriculture from climate change and the perilous state of food security in many parts of the world, this workshop will help protect food crops in Papua New Guinea, which will have a flow on effect to the wider region."

"This workshop also demonstrates the benefits of partnering across government and the private sector to deliver solutions. High levels of government and industry cooperation have been a crucial part of Australia's recipe for success in managing pest and disease threats and maintaining an outstanding plant health status internationally. There is growing interest around the world in Australia's approach to biosecurity and I am delighted that the ATSE Crawford Fund, Plant Health Australia and the Cooperative Research Centre for National Plant Biosecurity have been able to find a way to share some of our knowledge and experience with our nearest northern neighbour."

"I see distinct benefits for Australia too. By working with countries like Papua New Guinea and sharing information, nationally and globally, we are better able to minimise the risk of pest incursions and the potentially devastating effect they can have on Australia's \$20.8 billion agricultural industry."

Victorian DPI's strong science capabilities in plant pest and disease biosecurity will be on display at the workshop to be held at their Knoxfield research centre.

Victorian DPI Research Scientist, Dr Dolf De Boer said the workshop builds on DPI's ongoing relationship with PNG established through an Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) Project to assist PNG in the management of potato late blight, as well as the Peru-based International Potato Centre to recuperate PNG's potato seed base.

"It is fitting that this workshop is being held during the UN International Year of the Potato, as Potato Late Blight nearly caused the collapse of the potato industry in PNG in 2003 and is a top priority threat to the Australian industry," Dr De Boer said.

"Late blight disease, of the Irish famine fame, has re-emerged with the spread of new aggressive and destructive strains around the world. The new strains are a biosecurity threat to Australian potato production and our presence in PNG is to assist their industry manage this threat and to also learn more about this disease to improve Australian biosecurity efforts to keeping it out," Dr De Boer said.

"This workshop is about providing mutual benefits for both Australia and PNG on issues of biosecurity."

The ATSE Crawford Fund also held an International Master Class in Plant Biosecurity in the last two weeks in Malaysia. The Crawford Fund was established in 1987 to promote and support international agricultural research and development activities in which Australian research organisations and companies are active participants.

The CRCNPB aims to increase awareness, knowledge and skills of plant biosecurity issues in neighbouring countries and is funding the workshop as part of its education and training program.

Plant Health Australia works in partnership with industry, governments, researchers and other organisations to coordinate and improve biosecurity policy and practice across Australia.

FOR MORE INFORMATION/INTERVIEWS/PHOTOS:

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The ATSE Crawford Fund is an NGO that works to raise awareness of the benefits to developing countries and to Australia from international agricultural research (IAR) and development. It is named after Sir John Crawford, a key architect of Australia's Post-War growth and a passionate supporter of IAR.