

MEDIA STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE ROBSON FAMILY

In March 2015, Panama Disease was discovered on the Robson family's banana farm in the Tully Valley. Panama Disease is a soil born fungus that is extremely virulent and is spread through the transfer of soil from property to property. The transfer of a few grains of soil on a tyre, on a pig's foot, or in water run-off, is all that is required to spread the disease.

The Robson's farm was initially closed down for 8 weeks. Since the Robson family were given approval to recommence operations, they have continued to produce bananas on their property subject to extremely strict quarantine requirements designed to prevent the transfer of soil off the property. These measures are in some respects, unavoidably intrusive. For example, the Robson's farm entrance is monitored by Biosecurity Queensland 7 days a week. To date, these quarantine measures have been very effective and this farm remains the only property in North Queensland, where Panama disease has been detected.

The Robsons' banana farm supports Bevan and Jenny Robson and their adult children: Heidi, Casey, Shaye and Kirk and their respective families. They all work together to run the farm to support 3 generations of the Robson family. Through hard work, managing a huge debt and spending very little on themselves over 30 years, Bevan and Jenny had a dream of acquiring sufficient land to provide a future in the banana industry for their 4 children and their families. Despite their crop being wiped out twice by cyclones in recent years, they were looking forward to the 2015 new year with burgeoning production and rare good prices. They thought they had achieved their dream and were looking forward to retirement. With Panama Disease, the dream has turned into a nightmare!

With the passage of time, the possibility increases that this may be an isolated infection. However, whilst the Robsons' property is used for banana production, no matter how diligent they are with their quarantine measures, there is always the small possibility that the disease could be spread from the property through factors outside their control (for example in flood run-off or on the feet of birds).

As a result, there has been discussion in recent times from many in the banana industry about the desire for the Robson family to cease operations on their farm. The extended Robson family recently made a decision to call a meeting of key banana industry figures, to hear their views.

The consensus of those who spoke at the meeting was that it would be worthwhile to attempt to raise funds from within the industry, to enable the ABGC to purchase the Robson's farm. Production on the farm would then cease and the risk of transmission of Panama disease from the farm would be greatly minimised.

As a result, the Robsons are now engaged in discussions with the ABGC about the possible terms of the sale of their property and the arrangements that would be required to make that happen.

Media statement ends.

7 January, 2016.

This statement has been prepared by Ian Conrad of Conrad Law, on behalf of the Robson family. For further information, please contact Ian Conrad – contact details below.

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