



# General Meeting

## **General meeting of Taro Growers Australia, 27 February 2006,**

held at the Centre for Wet Tropics Agriculture of the DPI&F, South Johnstone, and beginning at 7:00 PM

### **Present:**

R. Hourston, J. Doyle, P. Petiniaud, D. Chandlee, S. & C. Phillips, J. Daniells, I. Suaniu & guest.

### **Apologies:** None

### **Minutes:**

The Minutes of both the AGM and the General Meeting held on 29 October 2005 were read by the Secretary. MOTION that the minutes are an accurate report of those two meetings on 29 Oct 2005. Moved J. Doyle, seconded P. Petiniaud. PASSED.

### **Treasurer's Report:**

At the AGM we had a balance of \$236.91  
Debits were Dept of Fair Trading \$36.00  
and Secretarial costs \$38.50  
Receipts were \$300.00 from 2 new  
memberships and the rest subs  
At 27/2/06 the balance was \$462.91  
MOTION that the Treasurer's Report be  
accepted. Moved P. Petiniaud, seconded D.  
Chandlee. PASSED

### **General Business:**

Rod reported *Symphylid*-like arthropods in his taro. Newsletter suggestions: Put one out every month. List the current market prices (weekly) in main cities. Tom Tran might be willing to help for Sydney information. Could someone in Melbourne help, too?

*Cont. above*

John filled out the Biosecurity Australia stakeholder registration form for TGA. Thus we will be informed about any taro IRA's. John has written a letter (on Rod's behalf) to propose stopping importation of Japanese taro since the edible cormels amount to seed material. This action of his was discussed and approved. There was explanation that "seed" in a vegetatively propagated crop like taro means cormels (small outside corms). In Japanese taro, of course, these are actually the desired food product, so any importation is of reproductive "seeds". There are various reports about Japanese taro coming into several ports. There was also discussion of importation of "Bun long" taro from China.

IBPGR (International Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources—a UN-FAO body that keeps plant germ-plasm collections) backs this up—i.e. they have a taro germ-plasm import standard, which as expected says only clean, tissue-cultured material should be imported. Jeff D. asked what Growcom (formerly QFVG) is doing on this issue. Two growers present were Growcom members (John and Rod). They should be protecting their members. Jeff mentioned exporting into New Zealand.

### **Q. How is the RIRDC Project going?**

Jeff mentioned various aspects of it. The growers' survey is with another officer and analysis is nearly complete. The workshops which were promised haven't happened so far. Jeff got an extension for completion of the project (it was a two year project finishing at the coming midyear).

There is an ACIAR (foreign aid) project on

*cont pg 2*

*General meeting cont*

-Taro Pests being done for some Pacific Island countries. Although David Astridge (entomologist) and Lynton Vaudrey (plant pathologist) stand ready to analyse plant samples and insect specimens, unfortunately very few have been sent in within the life of this project. Members are encouraged to do so soon! The samples are needed to get an all round picture of taro pests and diseases before the project ends. Both officers are at the DPI&F South Johnstone. Lynton has been working on corm rots. Jeff has supplied some results of this with his newsletter report.

The Northern Territory taro fertilizer trials, which have been going on for some time, have now had some results. Only 13% variation in yield was shown in plots where there was 10 times difference in fertilizer levels. Members discussed how it's important to fertilise early, only.

***The Secretary resigned.***

Philippe proposed S. Phillips as the new Secretary, J. Doyle seconded. All present approved. *cont. above*

***Q. How about the machinery project?***

Craig Lemin, DPI&F officer, finished his RIRDC sponsored taro washer, but its' performance wasn't satisfactory. TGA should ask for a presentation from Craig. Steven Scopelitti's washer worked better. Cormel planting machines. A number of growers have made their own or modified other machines, eg tobacco planters. Harvesting machines are more difficult and various people have worked on the problem with mixed results. There was more discussion about washers. Steve's wouldn't take the very large corms.

MOTION that Sam Phillips becomes a signatory to the TGA account at the Bendigo Bank. Moved J. Doyle, seconded R. Hourston. PASSED.

Meeting ended 9:12 PM.

-- (signed) David K. Chandlee, Secretary

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## **TGA Website**

<http://www.tarogrowers.vze.com>

At the moment we're in the process of putting up a Taro Growers Australia Inc website.

On the site we can put all previous newsletters, reference material e.g grading standards, taro agents, library catalogues, perhaps photos of field days, DPI&F /RIRDC reports etc.

We could also have a forum or message board for the site, whereby users can post messages, ask questions and answer replies. The advantage is those unable to attend meetings can still have an input and user queries of varying degrees can be dealt with more effectively.

Also instead of emailing multiple large files, which takes absolutely forever (Email protocol is considerably slower than WWW), it could be uploaded once up to the site for everyone to then access as they wish.

The other benefit would be, if you manage to crash or delete your hard drive, you'd be able to at least, blissfully retrieve all those TGA files .....and nobody's the wiser!!!

Future consideration would be a 'Taro nutrition, Info and Recipe page' that members can use for marketing purposes.

We can have links to other sites with regards to taro related material.

We can also duplicate this to CD allowing a lot more material to be stored.

At present, (other than Larry Damage material) it's just a single page photo, on it's lonesome, not yet linked to Google or any other search engine. It's only accessed by those, like yourselves, that know the address. We'll have something more substantial up a little later.

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## Thanks to Philippe Petiniaud

On behalf of all members of TGA, we would like to offer our most sincere and deepest thanks to Philippe, who recently resigned as President.

Philippe has been the principal motivation behind the formation and progress of TGA. His encompassing ability, charisma, coupled by countless hours of sheer hard work, has made the group to what is today, being one of sharing, unity and development. Philippe brought taro growing out of the woodwork, and in this, he has successfully achieved very much, in improved standards and quality, in not only cultivation techniques, but in representation for members, for the association and the industry as a whole. There wouldn't be one of us that hasn't been touched by Philippe's charm and dedication. ...Many, many thanks to you from us all, Philippe !!!

*Philippe is still actively engaged within the association, offering his services as an advisory role*

## Thanks to David K. Chandlee

We would also like to thank David Chandlee, for the work he has done during his post as secretary of TGA. He has been there since the creation of the group and done an exceptional and professional job in the formulating and editing of the Taro Topics newsletter, most of which he has assembled and distributed, without the benefits of his own modern technology. Many of us may not realize that amount of work that is needed to accomplish this!!!

While he remains a participating member of TGA, we wish David well in his pursuit of further interests.

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## Notes from Jeff Daniells DPI&F

Mike Hughes, DPI&F Kairi has joined the team of the taro project 'Taro industry development: the first step'. Analysis of the survey results is now nearing completion.

We have hosted a visit from QUT staff involved in the ACIAR TaroPest project which involves the development of web-based diagnostic software. Their project is with Fiji and Papua New Guinea (alpha test sites). We are anticipating getting copies of the software developed to evaluate with Australian growers in the near future (beta test site).

Before running a workshop on taro diseases it is important that the exact cause(s) of the relatively important corm rot problems be determined so that appropriate advice can be given. Disease samples received by DPI&F for identification are listed in Appendix B. A range of fungi and bacteria have been isolated. Their status as pathogens is currently being determined in the glasshouse with possible preplant

application of fungicides being evaluated. Some preliminary results are that inoculations with *Rhizoctonia* and *Fusarium* both led to about 50% of corms developing rots. Preplant dusting of the planting piece with mancozeb was of no benefit whilst dusting with Benlate® reduced corm rot to 10% in soil infested.

A taro fertilizer requirement trial has been completed in the Northern Territory by DBIRD staff including Mark Traynor. The trial investigated the response in yield to varying fertilizer rates from 20% to 200% of normal industry practice. There was only a 13% yield difference over the wide range of rates trialled. Highest yields of marketable corms were obtained at the 1005 rate but the 60% rate was sufficient to attain 95% of maximum yield. The lowest fertilizer rate still obtained 89% of maximum yield. It should be possible to greatly reduce rates of fertilization without much effect on yield but greatly reducing potential losses of nutrients such as N and P to the environment. A demonstration planting has now been established in the NT with the 60% rate applied as fertigation. Leaf

*Notes from Jeff Daniells DPI&F cont.*

nutrient levels are being monitored monthly along with weekly petiole analysis.

Planting material for new plantings is usually obtained from old plantings following harvest with no particular selection of better performing plants and so forth. Growers may be inadvertently proliferating those plants that produce the most suckers (for planting material) rather than those that yield best. It was agreed at the October 2005 TGA meeting to establish field monitoring sites to investigate the potential of making improved taro selections. This has commenced on 2 growers properties in NQ and compares the growth of 2 Bun Long selections. If selections with larger corms can be identified there is the potential to greatly improve efficiencies of production which is crucial to taro industry growth. Selection of planting material in this way may also

identify other desirable traits including resistance to corm rots and so forth.

Apparently 20 t containers of Bun Long taro are being imported by Grand Asia Produce into Melbourne from China in good condition. This is a major quarantine risk particularly for taro leaf blight which is endemic in China, can be spread in diseased corms and FAO/IPGRI state that “strict quarantine measures should be observed to prevent further spread of this disease and movement of taro between countries should be limited to sterile, pathogen-tested plantlets growing in tissue culture medium”.

Last November New Zealand TV featured the interception of taro beetle in NZ from taro imported from Fiji. What is the status of Fijian taro arriving in Australia?

**Appendix 2**

DISEASE	LOCALITY	REMARKS
Corm Rot	Babinda	Erwinia sp.
Leaf Spot	Garadunga	Isos: Phoma sp.
Leaf & Petiole Spot	Murray Upper	Isos: Phoma sp., Colletotrichum sp., Penicillium sp., Colletotrichum gleosporoides
Leaf Spot	Babinda	Isos: Colletotrichum gleosporoides, Phoma sp.,
Corm Rot	Yarrabin Rd	Erwinia sp, Sclerotium rolfsii
Basal Corm Rot	Yarrabin Rd	Erwinia sp, Sclerotium rolfsii
Corm Rot	Babinda	Isos: a) ‘Soft Bottom’ – bacteria only b) Basal Corm Rot – bacteria only c) Basal Internal Corm Rot – bacteria only, heavy with nematodes
Leaf Necrosis	Mission Beach	Suspect drought damage, some aphids, Leptosphaerulina sp.
Corm Rot	Babinda	Isos: Fusarium solani, Rhizopus sp., bacteria
Internal Corm Rot	Babinda	Dry rot at centre of corm. Isos: Rhizopus sp., bacteria
Leaf Spot	Babinda	Isos: Phoma sp. (100%)
Internal Corm Rot	Deeral	Root developing internally following Root Rot – Pythium sp., Fusarium sp.
Leaf Spot	El Arish	Isos: Phoma colocasiae observed
Leaf Spot	East Feluga	Phoma colocasiae
Corm Rot	Murray Upper	3 <sup>rd</sup> crop of Taro on same ground. Erwinia sp. assoc’d
Leaf Spot	Giru	Alternaria alternata
Dry Corm Rot	Bilyana	Isos: Young lesions at edge of corm. Fusarium solani
Early Corm Rot	Bilyana	Isos: Young lesions, internal possible entry via roots. Menispora sp, Cercosporidium henningsii assoc’d
Heart Rot	Granadilla Rd	Isos: Bacteria only
Tuber Rot	El Arish	Root at base of tuber. Fusarium solani isolated, bacteria, Rhizoctonia solani, Penicillium sp.
Shot Hole	Murray Upper	Phoma sp.

## Feature Article - Taro Fert Trials

The results of these trials were covered briefly by the General Business & Jeff Daniells report. Understandably, details given were rather a notable summary, but not giving you the full picture of where what comes from, how and why. It is up to us to utilize and expand on this information.

Fertilizer applications for taro have been somewhat sketchy affairs..... other than John Doyle kindly supplying his formula to interested members, it's been an open field by where many I guess have transpired their own concoctions. Published information is relatively scarce, basically referring to methods used by subsistence agriculture rather than intensive or semi-intensive cultivation.

As it is a preliminary report it cannot unfortunately be published in its entirety yet.

However, we'll go through some of the details that may interest you. The trial was conducted with Mark Traynor of DPIFM, in the Northern Territory, at Sok Ly's property.

Bun Long suckers were used as planting material, planted 60cm apart, 24 plants per bed or row, 4 rows per block with 2 blocks containing the 8 rows. 8 fertilizer rates were then applied over the 8 rows, each row receiving a random nominated dose. On each side of the row was a buffer row (giving 12 rows total) see **Table 1**, and buffer plants were at each end of the rows.

The buffer rows and plants received the same as the adjacent row. Irrigation is supplied via spray jets, using tensiometers to monitor moisture. Soil was prepared and pH was set to 6.5 using lime. Planting occurred towards the end of May 2004.

Harvesting occurred at 210 days after planting. (approx.7 months)

**Table 1: Row Placements**

Buffer Row (Rate 2)	They started from a base rate of 500kg Nitrogen (N), 200kg Phosphorus (P), 1200kg Potassium (K) per hectare. From here selected variations of this rate in percentages, both under and above were selected as in <b>Table 2</b>
Row 1 Rate 2	
Row 2 Rate 5	
Row 3 Rate 8	
Row 4 Rate 1	
Buffer Row (Rate 1)	The fertilizer was applied over 6 months in equally divided applications each month after planting. These were applied as sidedressings using muriate of potash, urea and superphosphate. We'll divert here a little dribble, for the benefit those who are unsure on how you would supply the amounts of say N:500kg P:200kg. K:1200kg per hectare. If you grab a 50kg bag of a general purpose fertilizer, we'll use Nitrophoska for an example. This has a NPK ratio of around 12:5:14 . This can also be viewed as 12% of Nitrogen (N), 5% of Phosphorus (P) and 14% of Potassium (K).
<b>ROADWAY</b>	
Buffer Row (Rate 6)	
Row 5 Rate 6	
Row 6 Rate 4	
Row 7 Rate 3	
Row 8 Rate 7	
Buffer Row (Rate 7)	

**Table 2: Rates**

	Rate	N.P.K in Kg per Hectare		
		N	P	K
1	20%	100	40	240
2	40%	200	80	480
3	60%	300	120	720
4	80%	400	160	960
5	100% (Base Rate)	500	200	1200
6	120%	600	240	1440
7	160%	800	320	1920
8	200%	1000	400	2400

Converting these percentages into weight, we find that this bag would contain 6kg of Nitrogen (N), 2.5kg of Phosphorus (P) and 7kg of Potassium (K).

So to get near the levels N:500kg P:200kg K:1200kg per hectare, we'd need something like 100 x 50kg bags (5 tonne) that would give us N:600kg P:250kg K:700kg per hectare.

Ok... naturally, you'd factor in the additive NPK amounts of Urea, Potash, DAP, MAP or whatever they have used, (or you may use ) as side dressings (or fertigation), but you get an idea of the quantity and calculations involved...

Of course .....you'd have to be particularly dedicated..... to see the need to plant a hectare of taro in one hit. Let alone dump some 5 tonne of fertilizer on top of that !!!

We know a hectare = 10,000sq metres = 2.5 acres.

To look at needs in relativity .... we can say for e.g 6 X 100 metre rows, at 1.6 metre centres gives us a cultivated width of close to 10 metres, and a total cultivated land area of 1000 sq metres. Now, with double plantings at 60 cm spacings, would give us a grand total of 2000 plants. (single plant rows about 1,000)

The point here is... that, one tenth of a hectare, (about one quarter of an acre) is more appropriately the land areas and plant density you're bound to be dealing with.

With this in mind ... this 1000 sq metre area, is one tenth of the kg/hectare ratio... e.g 500 kg becomes 50 kg (divide by 10).

Thus the base rate of N:500kg P:200kg K:1200kg per hectare becomes N: 50kg P:20kg K: 120kg per 1000sq metres. With all that in mind, by using your fingers, any slight deviations, for your own applications, can now easily be calculated .....!!

*As a quick note, consider doing a soil test first and adjust accordingly before using any of these trial rates. We hope to do a soil test review for you later.*

The **Table 3** shows the market yield of each fertilizer rate. Grading was done as per TGA standards. As you can see there is less than 4% variation of crop harvested using 60% of fertilizer rate. Further to that, doubling (200%) the fertilizer rate produced even less taro than if you only used a fifth (20%) of the base rate. The base rate for maximum yield was pretty well accurate.(though not quite recommended from these results cost/yield wise)

In the report, were line graphs of Table 3. From this it was easy to determine maximum yield of about 35 tonne/hectare was achieved at 105% rate. (which looks an impressive trial yield)

From the Table 3 we can also see:

The small taro yields remain more or less constant throughout the entire rate range.

The medium taro yields show slight increase (approx.1.5 tonne/hectare,) in yield between 80-120% rate.

The large taro yields show a more marked increase (approx.3.5 tonne/hectare) in yield between 80-120% rate.

We can assume that they have included the marketable suckers as well, otherwise we'd be led to.

**Table 3: Results**

N:P:K: kg/ha	Treatment	Marketable means tonne/hectare 10,000 plants/hectare				% of maximum market yield
		small	medium	large	total	
100:40:240	20	5.16	9.79	16.12	31.07	89.36
200:80:480	40	4.96	10.26	17.37	32.59	93.74
300:120:720	60	4.81	10.60	18.30	33.71	96.97
400:160:960	80	4.70	10.82	18.92	34.44	99.06
500:200:1200	100 (base rate)	4.63	10.91	19.23	34.77	100.00
600:240:1440	120	4.61	10.87	19.22	34.70	99.80
800:320:1920	160	4.69	10.41	18.26	33.36	95.95
1000:400:2400	200	4.94	9.45	16.04	30.43	87.52

believe you're always going to get an regular amount of parent corm 'smalls' regardless of fertilizer rate

Obviously and interestingly, pumping heaps of fertilizer is going to give disappointing results.

If we take John Doyles fertilizer program at around N:276kg P:74 kg K: 264kg per hectare, we find he has pretty much well hit within the recommended rates, being around the 40% of the trial base rate.

The yields from their Bilyana crops are around 40-42 tonne/hectare.\* (approx. 20,000 plants/hectare) In comparison the NT trails are 32-33 tonne/ hectare at this 40% rate (approx.10,000 plants/hectare). This being about 25% difference in yield.

One thing to consider, is each NT trial rate result was taken from the yields of 24 plants, which were greatly multiplied to get the tonne/hectare ratio. So one or two unwilling plants, for whatever reason may greatly effect this. Though the overall yield range for the 8 rates do appear in a relatively constant pattern.

However, we are diverting slightly from the issue, What is apparent, is that the Bilyana taro is grown from around 40% of the 20% -200% trial rate range, very much at lower end.

Therefore, we can definitely say that *large taro does not come from using excessive amounts of chemical/NPK based fertilizer.*

The comment made from the trial report says:  
" *This data indicates that fertilizer is not a strong determinate of marketable yield in 'Bun Long ' taro.'*"  
This observation is obviously corroborated by the Bilyana yields.

We may of course may derive from all this that there are other factors, perhaps taro is more willing to take up nutrients in an amino acid form (from soil microbes, enzymes, proteins etc ) more readily than it does from salts. One grower, using organic methods has produced yields of up to 5 kg per taro. The yields from Bilyana (up to 5-7kg) taro use mulching and green cropping methods which improve soil microbe activity. Two growers in Babinda have had good yields (around 3kg) from soil that has had bagass and mill mud applications. The report doesn't indicate whether mulches or green cropping was used prior to the trial.

Also the factors of irrigation/ sucker material/ weather conditions, management techniques are open issues (Weed/pest control was dealt with appropriately in the trial) Jeff Daniells comments on sucker material selection and initiated trials, may prove to the next very viable consideration.

*\*An interesting conversation with Rod Hourston, of Bilyana revealed that it was possible to use the same fertilizer rate, but yields can vary greatly from crop to crop, season to season. While they do get 5-7kg taro , crops, their tonne/hectare yield given here, is the average over a long period. Also, as many of us saw in the field days, they didn't harvest their 1kg suckers or 'smalls' which could easily account for well over 5tonne/hectare .*

*A further interesting note is, last year 2005, yields were reported generally higher from some growers, the local figures given here, were derived from last year. Consequently taking comparisons too seriously, between NT trials and here, though attractive, would be entirely erroneous.*

*Taro fert cont*

However as an extension of this trial, the future tests in this program, are going to involve applications used through fertigation., using their base rate of 60%. It'll be interesting to see how this soluble form effects yields.

### **Leaf Samples**

Leaf samples were also taken and analyzed. Each month, 10 days after fertilizer application, 3 leaf samples (second youngest open leaf) were taken from the same selected plants in each treatment row. The NPK analysis was recorded. The report contains graphs of the NPK percentages present in the leaf. Variations between the samples of fertilizer -

applications didn't really differ greater than 0.5 % for nitrogen and potassium, 0.02 % phosphorus. The comment made, but not included in the graphs, was "..... in the high applications of fertilizer , leaf samples held a high level of nitrogen in all growth stages including corm development. The result noted that more dry matter was concentrated at the plant tops rather than going into corm growth. "

From what evidence is produced so far it can be assumed that there are more factors than the use of fertilizers alone to be able to produce high yields. This informative and practical NT trial will prove most valuable in your fertilizer assessments.

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## **ACIAR Taro Pest Diagnostic Web-based software**

As Jeff mentioned in his DPI&F report the ACIAR project is in the process of developing diagnostic software for a website dealing with pests and diseases of taro for Fiji and Papua & New Guinea.

ACIAR project description is here

<http://www.aciar.gov.au/web.nsf/doc/ACIA-68K3JT>

Jeff showed us some samples at the meeting and it was quite awesome. There was something like... pages on *cluster caterpillars*. Very detailed descriptions of what goes on being a ....pestilent cluster caterpillar... and numerous high quality photos showing egg sacs to development and plant damage etc. Included is a zoom function to look closer at the pictures, without losing quality of -

image. With such detail, that Jeff described the quality as " .....you can count the hairs ....on the back leg ...of a spider" Multiple pictures of the same disease allowing you a very good indication of what to look for. This really beats any other dubious, pixilated, single picture description you'd often come across. The whole lot has an impeccable attention to detail in a surprisingly understandable format. The focus of the site is for taro grown in these island areas, but with imports the way they are, this would give us a valuable headstart on what possible threats may look like in our crops.... heavens forbid!!!!.

We'll keep you posted on developments.

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## **Next Newsletter**

We hope to do future articles on building your own planter, irrigation, cultivation, washers, grading taro, soil test details (a comparison of test details ) etc.

The next feature we'll look at is marketing in terms of presentation. If you have any ideas or wish to participate in future newsletters by doing the odd article or whatever, please let me know. We'd welcome anything, a handy hint you've discovered, a recipe, a few lines, a page, a gripe, a moan

something you want to buy or sell (suckers , machinery etc), photos of that dog you've trained to wash & pack taro....!!

You can remain anonymous if you wish, or tag it with your name. It would be good to get something too, from members in New South Wales, SE Queensland areas and the Northern Territory, even a few lines addressing issues that may effect you, or things that can be relayed to us and others in your area through the newsletter. Contact details page 11.

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## Computer Tuition

There was interest in computer tuition with regards to using email and Internet access. Jeff Daniells has done some follow-up, which is included. With regards to the above, even if we can arrange an hour session amongst ourselves, during a meeting with a computer and documented tuition covering the basics. Follow-up on this would be good, if we could get everybody or most with email and Internet

capability. This would greatly reduce administration costs, and provide a far more quality information resource. Most libraries offer free internet use for those without home or friends computers. There are free e-mail services you can use on the internet, and coupled with these free internet library / resource/ mates computers .....You're on the win !!!!

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## Library Information Resource

Books and DVD's are available through our librarian Erica. She can be contacted directly on her mobile 0427 027 129 to arrange borrowings. It was decided at the last meeting that there be a 2 month borrowing period. Also too, if need be, that the borrower to supply packaging and postage for dispatch and return of these items .

There is large amount of material ( some 47 items) and the last thing we'd want is this information gathering cobwebs... and access being limited to only those who are local .

As postage is considerable for those living in outlying areas, it would be good to catalogue each of these items , with brief description of contents, the size and weight, and maybe a picture or two.

The idea being that borrowers have some indication of what they're getting, rather than paying postage on something that is irrelevant to their needs. Also postal packing is size and weight related to cost, so this way borrowers may maximize on this by acquiring more than one item.

We'd hope to have this catalogue accessible on the TGA website and also on CD.

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## Cyclone Larry

As you are aware, it is possible for you to lodge a claim for losses incurred during the encounter with cyclone Larry. We've included info & forms with the newsletter for those of you with addresses in affected areas. Those with email should've got theirs already. If you've been missed you can download the details from the site <http://www.tarogrowers.vze.com> For those who have lodged claims, it would be interesting to hear any feedback to how matters have been handled. Criteria keeps changing over the past few weeks, restrictions that were in place appear to have been relaxed.

Understandably, the powers-that-be, were probably initially unsure of the amount of claims to expect and not wanting to exceed allowable budgets, turned down genuine claims that didn't fit their criteria. Possibly now, they've found they've not met allowable budgets, thus now accepting a broader range of genuine claims. If you tried unsuccessfully regarding losses earlier, it may be worth giving it another shot.

We'll put up the forms on the website for Tropical Fruit Tree Losses from the RTEGA/DPI&F in case you have or *had* rather, fruit trees as well.

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## Chinese Imports

Further to the discussion in general business, John has composed a well researched and written letter that has been included. Also is Philip's original copy to the AQIS if you didn't receive one earlier.

Reports are 20 tonnes of Bun Long taro landed in Melbourne and Sydney markets. Growers prices dropped approx. \$1.00 kg in Melbourne. Indications have been the quality is good, to '...it looks good, but rots are found when cut' (from Sydney)

Sydney agent has reported imported sales are from \$1.50- \$2.00 kg, fresh Australian taro \$2.50-\$3.00 kg.

Up to date it has taken 4-5 weeks to clear markets of this 20 tonne dump.



**This photo came from a Sydney agent who puts 'Aussie Grown' stickers on local taro. Good to see the agents promoting locally grown against the imports!!!!**

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## Member Subscriptions

We've included the Members Subscriptions List with the newsletter. It was felt that costs of postage used sending out Invoices to members as reminders was not particularly budget effective. Subs are something easily overlooked and if you have a blank space under the 2005/06 column. We'd greatly appreciate your attention.

Any queries or you wish to be removed from the members list, please contact the Treasurer, John at Ph 4066 5687, e-mail [doylej@znet.net.au](mailto:doylej@znet.net.au) or mail your remittance made out to "Taro Growers Australia Inc" to John Doyle, P.O.Box 83, Cardwell 4849

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## Computer training Jeff Daniells

There was interest at the last TGA meeting about computer & internet training. I have made some enquiries and found out that provided the training is certificate 4 or above it can be supported by Farmbis (weblink attached at <http://farmbis.qraa.qld.gov.au/> - just go to the drop-down menus to see what courses, which include computers, can be supported) - usually Farmbis will pay half the cost and you can still claim a tax deduction on the remainder!

For the real introductory stuff taro growers will need to approach TAFE- computer courses which are tax deductible. If anyone wants further information about Farmbis (want to talk to someone) ring Ian Durham at Townsville DPI&F - either 47222511 or for the price of a local call ring the Call Centre (132523) and ask to be put through to Ian.

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## Next Meeting: 13th May

The next meeting is a field day, set for 1.00pm Saturday 13th May at Ken Lakes packing shed adjacent to the BP servo at the northern approach to Tully. Don't forget any pest or diseased samples for the DPI&F guys....and.. er.. maybe your 7kg plants, could be ...it's a new disease/virus ...that makes them so big!!!

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(please put TGA somewhere in subject line)

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## Tropical Root Crops Symposium - Jeff Daniells

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### 14th Triennial Symposium of The International Society for Tropical Root Crops

THEME: **Roots and Tubers for Sustainable Development: Issues and Strategies 20 - 26**

November 2006

**Central Tuber Crops Research Institute** Thiruvananthapuram Kerala, India

#### Objectives

The objectives of the Symposium are:

- to provide a common forum for scientists and practitioners from various backgrounds to share their knowledge and experience in all fields of research and development;
- to identify gaps in knowledge and priority areas for future research and development;
- to identify opportunities for commercialization, scaling-up and scaling-out of research findings;
- to develop recommendations that will help in decision-making and appropriate policy interventions;
- to identify the strategies for strengthening! public and private collaborative activities aimed at sustainable development and poverty alleviation; and
- to assess the contribution of root and tuber crops to sustainable development.

#### Expected Output

- Updated knowledge on root and tuber crop research and technologies
- Potential areas of research, development and commercialization identified
- Strategies identified for public and private collaborative activities for poverty alleviation and sustainable development in rural areas
- Knowledge and experiences shared
- Recommendations to assist national and international policy makers.

To download conference announcement, pre-registration and abstract form please visit the website:

<http://www.ctcri.org/ISTRC.htm>

TARO GROWERS AUSTRALIA INC.

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Incorporation No. IA30774

Louise van Meurs  
General Manager  
Plant Biosecurity  
Biosecurity Australia

This letter is in response to previous correspondence between Philippe Petiniaud and yourself regarding biosecurity and the importing of taro.

At our AGM of TGA Inc on the 29/10/05 Philippe resigned as president and Rodney Hourston was elected to the position. Mr. Hourston has requested me to follow up that correspondence and submit the Stakeholders Registration Form, which is being faxed to 02 6272 3678.

The letter from Philippe outlined some of the concerns of TGA Inc regarding the import of taro from the Pacific and China and urges that the import of all taro corms be suspended until the review process is completed.

I wish to further raise the question of importing the small corm Japanese taro (*Colocasia esculenta var antiquorum*) from China.

The AQIS Import Conditions Database states:

“C: Seed

***Colocasia* spp. Seed are prohibited entry into Australia due to disease concerns.**

Applications to import *Colocasia* spp. seed will not be approved.”

The small corm Japanese taro currently being imported from China is both edible and the seed material for propagation.

NORADA HORTFact HF2002si explains how the Japanese taro is propagated.

Due to the presence of the disease Taro Leaf Blight in China, TGA Inc questions the continuing import of the material.

We look forward to your early response.

Thanking you

Yours Sincerely

John Doyle  
Treasurer Taro Growers Australia Inc.

## TARO GROWERS AUSTRALIA INC.

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E-mail: [petiniaud@austarnet.com.au](mailto:petiniaud@austarnet.com.au)

Incorporation Number IA30774

Dr. Rob McGahy  
AQIS

Dear Dr. McGahy

Taro Growers Australia (TGA) was formed in January 2002, to bring Australian taro growers together to further the development of the Australian taro industry. Currently there are 52 members of the association with Australian annual production estimated at 1000t and worth about \$3.5 million. Fresh taro corms are also imported, mainly from Fiji. Recently fresh taro corms have been imported from mainland China.

Some of our members have seen the imported corms from these countries and were surprised to see that some corms had not been properly 'topped' and still possessed the apical growing point as well as prominent side 'eyes' on the corm both of which would allow easy propagation. Some corms from Fiji still had soil on them. Both of these features are in breach of the AQIS Icon standard for the importation of fresh taro corms to Australia. Insufficient enforcement of the standard will greatly increase the risk of entry of exotic pests and diseases of taro to Australia which could jeopardize the viability of our industry.

Our second major concern is that some of the countries where taro is being imported from have quarantinable pests and diseases of taro which are not adequately addressed by the current AQIS standard. We understand that Biosecurity Australia is currently reviewing the importation protocol but they have no idea when it will be completed. To date stakeholders such as TGA have yet to be contacted for input.

The very serious disease, taro leaf blight, is widespread in mainland China and can be spread via fresh taro corms. Frankly we are amazed that fresh taro corms are permitted to be imported from any country with taro leaf blight including China, Samoa etc. and highlights our concern about the inadequacy of the current standard.

Serious quarantinable virus diseases of taro are present in Fiji, China and elsewhere which can be readily spread if any plants are propagated from imported corms. The current standard does not adequately address the risks associated with such propagation because it is almost impossible to remove all the 'eyes' from corms from which plants can be propagated.

The major taro pest, taro beetle, is present in Fiji and elsewhere and can be spread via fresh taro corms. However, it doesn't even rate a mention in the standard.

We are very concerned that while the review is in progress (for who knows how long) that the importation of fresh taro corms into Australia continues despite the major risks of importing exotic pests and diseases. We believe that the appropriate approach by AQIS and Biosecurity Australia should be to err on the side of caution and suspend the importation of all fresh taro corms until such time that the review is satisfactorily completed and revised guidelines (if importation is permitted) are implemented.

Could you please forward this email to the appropriate contact person in Biosecurity Australia for their attention also. We look forward to your early response to our concerns.  
Thanking you  
Yours Sincerely

Philippe Petiniaud  
President Taro Growers Australia Inc.