

The new, freer – but more fragmented – marketplace increases the importance for grain to be tested for residues at each stage of the value chain.

In the Australian corner

Australia is highly reliant on grain protectants and fumigants, but the continued market acceptance of these products does not occur without a fight

THE GRAINS INDUSTRY needs to use grain protectants and fumigants to ensure that grain can be safely stored and presented to customers in a clean, uninfested condition. Due to its climate, Australia has a greater reliance than most of its trading competitors on the use of these products in the storage of grain.

To help ensure the risks associated with the use of pesticides in the food chain are minimised, Codex Maximum Residue Limits (MRL) have been established for many pesticides by the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues and recommended to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for inclusion in the Codex Alimentarius as international standards.

Due to its greater reliance on these pesticides Australia has been instrumental in ensuring MRL have been established for the chemicals most important to the export market. Some export markets will only accept grain with residue levels lower than the Codex MRL, but these standards provide a platform for negotiation. Many markets do accept the Codex MRL.

The GRDC identified the need for closer consultation and representation on regulatory matters and engaged Bill Murray to help establish appropriate linkages to ensure the GRDC is better able to prioritise its research activities in relation to grain storage.

Mr Murray chairs the National Working Party on Grain Protection (NWPGP) and represents the Australian grains industry in the delegation to the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues.

This GRDC investment is designed to ensure that industry registration requirements are identified and defined, adequately presented to regulatory/registration authorities, and the required action by researchers is prioritised.

Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC)

The Codex Alimentarius Commission operates under the United Nations Joint Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization (FAO/WHO) Food Standards Program. Its objectives are protecting the health of consumers, ensuring fair practices in food trade and promoting coordination of food standards work undertaken by international agencies.

The value of Australian representation at the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues is clearly demonstrated by the recent outcome which ensured that Codex MRL were maintained for chlorpyrifos-methyl, dichlorvos, fenitrothion (see page 8), methoprene and pirimiphos-methyl. These five chemicals are very important for the safe storage of grains in Australia and the loss of Codex MRL for these compounds would have posed significant difficulties for grain storage in Australia as well as adversely affected exports.

While pesticides come up for re-approval on rotation, the threat to revoke the previously mentioned MRL arose unexpectedly. By having direct representation on the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues, Australia was informed

and able to respond quickly and effectively.

Part of this ability to respond with appropriate information in a timely fashion is facilitated by the two-way flow of information between the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues and industry, which in Australia occurs through the NWPGP.

The wide representation on the NWPGP (Figure 1) allows the working party to consider issues relating to insect-infestation trends, pesticide residues, research, marketing requirements, commercial issues and MRL.

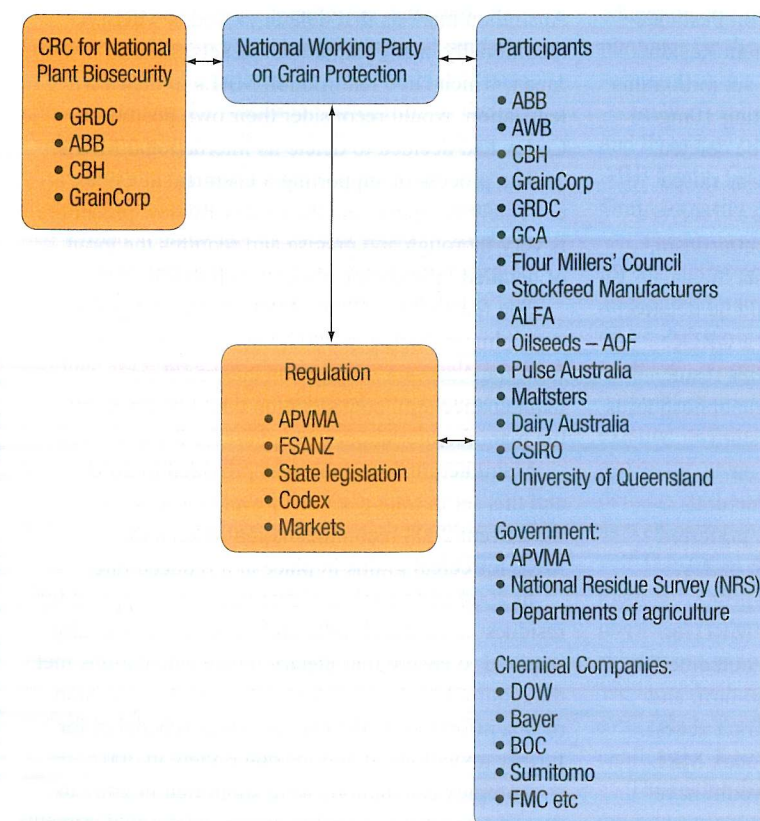
Speaking with one voice both at a national and international level is vital. The results being achieved by the current grains industry infrastructure in relation to grain hygiene suggest the regulators are hearing and listening to Australia's arguments. □

GRDC Research Code WJM00003

More information: Bill Murray, consultant, W J Murray Consulting Services, 03 9763 8396, wjmurray@bigpond.net.au

The Australian grains industry produces 30 to 40 million tonnes of grain each year. Approximately 65 per cent of this is exported at an export value of \$6 billion per year. Australia has secured 15 to 18 per cent of the world export market. Due to its climate Australia has a greater reliance on the use of grain fumigants and protectants than most of its trading competitors

FIGURE 1 NATIONAL WORKING PARTY ON GRAIN PROTECTION COMPOSITION AND RELATIONSHIPS



NATIONAL RESIDUE SURVEY

The National Residue Survey (NRS) operates as a government-based independent arbiter able to demonstrate that Australian grain meets domestic and international residue standards.

NRS is a voluntary program and is subscribed to by the major grain storers and exporters including AWB, ABB, CBH and GrainCorp. It is funded by a 0.015 per cent farm-gate levy on the value of the majority of grain crops.

Every bulk shipment of grain exported is tested via the NRS and the majority of container and bag exporters have now agreed to be involved.

"The clean, hygienic condition of Australian grains has been promoted and developed through extensive market development over many years," Bill Murray says, "and it is important that this 'brand' image is not jeopardised in a fragmented marketplace."

Producers of milled products, malt, stockfeeds, oat processors, oilseed crushers and feedlots test grain through the NRS.

Mr Murray believes that in the new, freer but more fragmented marketplace the importance of grain being tested by NRS at each stage of the value chain is even greater.

Markets are becoming increasingly fussy, some analysing for residues down to three decimal places (for example, 0.001). There have been several instances in the past two years where a major market has complained vigorously about the presence of very low levels of pesticide in an Australian commodity. In those situations the market did not have a Maximum Residue Limits (MRL) established for that particular commodity/pesticide combination.

Between 2000 and 2006, 22,752 bulk export samples were tested and 99.98 per cent had residues below Australian MRL – we cannot afford to tarnish this excellent record. Participation in the NRS provides a valuable snapshot of the pesticide residue condition of Australian grain, and allows grain exporters to validate their QA systems against NRS results.

NRS data are also used to support new and continued regulatory reviews of important crop and post-harvest chemicals. With so few new post-harvest protectants and fumigation options in development, it is extremely important to supply supporting data and ensure that international MRLs are not lost. The NRS is an operational section of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

More information:
www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/nrs

"THE CLEAN, HYGIENIC CONDITION OF AUSTRALIAN GRAINS HAS BEEN PROMOTED AND DEVELOPED THROUGH EXTENSIVE MARKET DEVELOPMENT OVER MANY YEARS."

– BILL MURRAY