

Final Report

The Australian banana industry communications program

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Delivery partner:

Australian Banana Growers' Council

Project code:

BA18001

Project:

The Australian banana industry communications program (BA18001)

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Public summary

The Banana Industry Communications Program (BA18001) built on the success of previous Hort-funded Banana Industry Communications projects, which the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) has been successfully delivering to the Australian Banana Industry since 2012.

Industry adoption and uptake hinges significantly on a well-respected source of information and the ABGC's Communications Program has established a long history of supplying reliable information to growers and industry more broadly.

The main objective of BA18001 was to facilitate and promote adoption of new and existing R&D; and communicate other industry development activities to Australian banana growers, through a variety of mediums.

The aim was to ensure the Australian banana industry remained sustainable, supported by profitable production, and supply chain businesses that consistently delivered a valued and quality product to consumers. This was to ensure optimal profitability and sustainability of the Australian banana industry, through innovation in pest resistance, technology, adoption of best management practices and by increasing demand in the domestic market. These are goals included in the Banana Industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2017-2021 and the Banana Industry SIP 2022-2026.

The Communications Program delivered comprehensive information to growers and other industry value chain stakeholders on R&D findings, BMP, emerging risks and opportunities, and fostered an environment that promoted continued innovation and improvement.

Project activities were targeted to; levy payers (Australian banana growers), other industry stakeholders and value chain members.

Specifically, this program assisted Hort Innovation and the Australia banana industry to deliver the following objectives;

- Increased industry understanding and adoption of best practice and emerging production and supply chain information in relation to R&D project outcomes and outputs.
- Provided knowledge transfer to the banana industry value chain through targeted communication channels on research findings, best practice, emerging risks and opportunities.
- Created a better-informed industry to increase farm productivity and banana quality across all business sizes of banana growers.
- Promoted Hort Innovation membership and engagement with the national R&D programs to all banana levy payers.
- Created and fostered positive perceptions about the banana industry and its economic and social contributions to the Australian economy, to the general wider community.

Outputs delivered under the Program's Logic Framework, a Communication's Strategy and an Annual Operating Plans included; publication of the triannual Australian Bananas Magazine, e-bulletins, SMS alerts, media relations and media releases, social media content, video content, mail-outs, the ABGC website and industry-focussed events.

Key outcomes of BA18001 included the continuous delivery of effective and timely communications activities that assisted banana levy payers and other stakeholders when making decisions about adoption of R&D and the supply of quality fruit. These outcomes directly align with the fundamental aim of the Banana SIP, to ensure the national banana industry remains sustainable and profitable.

In every milestone report for BA18001, the Communications Project either meet or exceed key deliverables.

It would be recommended that the new Communications Project (BA22000) continue to build on the success and strong framework delivered under BA18001 by the ABGC communications team.

Keywords

Australian Banana Growers' Council; Australian Bananas; Banana; communication; grower; supply chain; community; R&D; marketing

Introduction

Australian banana growers are some of the most innovative and resilient farmers in the world. However, for most of the duration of the Banana Industry Communications Program (2019-2022), growers nationally experienced some of the most unique and unprecedented set of challenges the industry has ever faced. (And they continue to endure these today)

The past two years has seen significant COVID related challenges - from worker shortages to consumer buying changes – compounded by farm gates prices consistently below the cost of production, severe weather events and significant increases to farm input costs including crippling inflation of fertilizers, chemicals and fuel.

These challenges dominated much of the Communications Program's outputs throughout the life of the project, however the Communications Team consistently met or exceeded its key deliverables under the Annual Operating Plan.

As previously stated, the main objective of the Banana Industry Communications Program was to continue to improve industry awareness and adoption of new and existing R&D; best management practices, emerging risks and issues (such as biosecurity), and communicate all industry developments to Australian banana growers, through a variety of mediums.

By doing this, the program aimed to assist in maintaining a profitable and sustainable Australian banana industry, that consistently delivered a valued and quality product to consumer, a major objective of the Banana Industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2017-2021 and the Banana Industry SIP 2022-2026.

The Program delivered comprehensive information to growers and other industry value chain stakeholders via e-bulletins, the *Australian Bananas Magazine*, the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) website, media releases, social media platforms, mail outs, SMS and responsive media collaboration. As well as communicating with the broader value chain, the project also engaged with the broader community to highlight significant issues affecting industry and promote positive industry-related news.

Project activities were targeted to; levy payers (growers), other industry stakeholders, including research partners and value chain members.

BA18001 was a continuation of the previous Australian Banana Industry Communications Program BA15005, as well as preceding Communication Programs, all successfully delivered by the ABGC. The ABGC is the industry development organisation for the Australian banana industry and has a solid history in delivering key HIA-invested projects. Currently these include;

- Banana Industry Communications Project (BA22000)
- Banana Industry R&D Co-ordination (BA20002)
- Biosecurity and sustainability in the banana industry (BA19005)
- TR4 Program Transition (TR4T)

- Banana Bunchy Top Virus (Phase 4) National surveillance and education (BA18000)
- Improving Knowledge & Farming Practices of NQ banana growers to achieve better water quality on the Great Barrier Reef (BMP11) - Multi-pest surveillance and grower education to manage banana pests and diseases (BA21003)

The ABGC provides all of its industry development services to all banana levy payers, including non-ABGC members. That is, all projects are delivered for the benefit of all growers.

The ABGC has a proven track record in delivering an effective and comprehensive Communications Program to the Australian Banana Industry since 2010.

The current ABGC communication's team consists of; Communications Manager Sonia Campbell and Senior Communications Officers Amy Spear and Lea Coghlan.

Over the life of BA18001, the Communications Team went to great lengths to deliver a range of communication tools under an overarching Communication Strategy to guide the Program. This strategy drove specific and measurable indicators of success (KPIs) against which the program was able to track and evaluate successes, including the Program's ability to achieve its set objectives.

All outputs delivered under the Program either met or greatly exceeded the project brief. Milestone reports were always successfully submitted, and Program budgets met. The team constantly reviewed its deliverables versus outcomes and tailored communications activities to maximise KPIs.

Methodology

This project (BA18001) delivered the "General Services" and "Research Services" (detailed in 3.4 and 3.5 of the RFP for BA18001); as well as "Industry Communication Services".

Resourcing

As stated above, the key resources that delivered the outputs of the Communications Program were Sonia Campbell, the Communications Manager (Project Leader) and Senior Communications Officers Amy Spear and Lea Coghlan.

The Industry Communication Services were delivered through the following methodology;

1. Planning
2. Develop, Produce and Distribute the Content
3. Measure, Monitor, Evaluate and Refine

A detailed Methodology summary is attached - **Appendix 1 – BA18001 Methodology Summary**

Results and discussion

A detailed Results and discussion summary are attached – **Appendix 2 – BA18001 Achievements/Results Analytics Summary**

Outputs

Table X. Output summary

Output	Description	Detail
<i>Australian Bananas Magazine</i>	Triannual Industry magazine produced and mailed to a database of banana growers and other industry stakeholders. The 'Australian Bananas' magazine focusses heavily on R&D, marketing and other issues of relevance to growers and supply chain.	Full-colour, 44–48-page national magazine was produced in hard copy three times per year and mailed nationally to 600 banana growers and 150 other industry participants. The magazine was also uploaded in digital format on the ABGC website and indexed to allow easy access to past content. These past editions can be found : HERE
E-bulletins	E-newsletter (e-bulletins) produced on a fortnightly basis (or when information needs to be conveyed to industry in a more timely manner). Communicates levy-funded R&D content of relevance to growers and other areas of relevance to growers (non-agripolitical).	Grower e-bulletins were distributed utilising existing links to industry, government, Hort Innovation, media etc and underpinned by an up-to-date email distribution list of approximately 950 subscribers - (developed and maintained by ABGC). The e-bulletins were also uploaded to the ABGC website and can be found HERE The Communication Project's Annual Operating Plan specifies the distribution of at least 12 grower e-bulletins to be distributed annually. A total of 132 e-bulletins were produced over the duration of the Program. Engagement rate of these e-

		bulletins can be found in Appendix 2 – BA18001 Achievements/Results Analytics Summary
SMS	SMS and direct phone calls played a major role in delivering fast and effective information to industry, especially when this information needed to be communicated in a timely manner	Feedback from growers has shown that SMS notifications (text messages) are by far the most effective tool in communicating directly to growers in a timely manner. The Communications Team used this system to notify growers of urgent industry updates such as new disease discoveries (such as new Panama TR4 detections), as well as important industry meetings and events.
Mailouts	Hardcopy mailouts to notify industry stakeholders of event invitations and other information produced and distributed to levy payers.	While most communications activities are digital the Communications Team used hardcopy mailouts to levy payers to promote various industry events, including the Banana Industry Congress, grower extension events, levy updates and when there was a serious biosecurity threat or other major issue (eg arrangements for recovery from significant cyclone or Panama TR4 events). This material was also loaded onto the industry website. Mail was typically sent to the current 950 registered subscribers on the ABGC's distribution list, including growers, supply chain and other industry stakeholders.
ABGC website	The industry website - abgc.org.au) - maintained as a source of all current and past research results and industry news, to improve industry knowledge and profitability.	The website was continually updated and maintained based on the deliverables produced in the communications program and other relevant information for banana growers. This involved the Communications Project team working in collaboration with the

Banana Industry's Strategy Manager and Research and Development Manager to ensure all content relating to Best Management Practice, biosecurity and latest R&D remained correct and up-to-date. The website was also used to maintain and promote other communication project outputs, including the Facebook page, videos, magazine, media releases and e-bulletins.

Website analytics has proven a strong and consistent levels of page 'views', 'sessions' and 'visitation duration'. These have increased exponentially at times where specific campaigns to heighten industry awareness and knowledge of issues have been driven.

Worker shortages and COVID were two of the most significant issues for growers in the life of BA18001. In order to keep well abreast of latest developments on both these issues the Communications Manager and Comms Officer attended various meetings and workshops, filtering any knowledge from these to growers via the website and all other communication channels including SMS, e-bulletins and the magazine.

A dedicated COVID 19 page can be found [HERE](#)

A dedicated Worker Shortage Issues/Banana Jobs page can be found [HERE](#)

For more detailed information on the successful engagement experienced on the ABGC website see Appendix 2 – **BA18001 Achievements/Results Analytics**

		Summary The Communications Team has almost completed a rebranding of the ABGC website to ensure it remains relevant, easy to navigate and an attractive portal for growers and other industry stakeholders to receive current industry news and information. The new-look website will have a Members'-only portal and will be installed with new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to improve interaction with growers and streamline communication processes.
Media relations and media releases	Media releases distributed to pro-actively promote industry news and announcements.	The Communications Team is constantly responding to media enquiries and distributing media releases where appropriate to; improve knowledge and understanding of the value of the Australian banana industry; the challenges industry face; advocate for industry; and engage with industry, industry stakeholders and the community more broadly. ABGC comms also help to promote latest R&D outcomes and investment, as well as field days, grower meetings and events such as the Australian Banana Industry Congress held every two years. The Program issued 52 media releases during the life of BA18001. These releases assisted in informing and educating Australian banana consumers, as well as supporting levy-funded R&D, biosecurity and marketing content.

Social media	Creative content, videos, industry updates and industry events uploaded to ABGC social channels including Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok and Twitter.	Social media was a major driver of communication to industry and the community more broadly. The Program's Social Media Strategy built on proven, effective deliverables, including a heavy focus on video content, particularly content which featured growers. Videos featuring growers were produced more heavily in this Project and gained remarkable reach. A 20 second video shot on a Lakeland banana farm featuring two workers explaining how to cut and hump a bunch of bananas was posted on the ABGC's Facebook page on October 13 and has had an organic reach of more than 43.5 million. It has had more than 57,000 reactions and 717 shares. This is by far the most popular video the ABGC has ever produced. Watch the video HERE The ABGC Facebook page published more than 550 posts over the duration of this project, increasing its page 'likes' from 1828 at the conclusion of the previous project to 5738 at the conclusion of BA18001. See Appendix 2 for more details on outputs
Attended grower focused events – Banana Growers' Association meetings, Congress, field days, Roadshows, Annual Banana Show exhibits, Annual General Meeting	All members of the Communication Team attended grower focused events such as Banana Growers' Association (BGA) meetings, the Australian Banana Industry Congress 2021, field days, Roadshows and annual Banana Show exhibits. The	Attending grower focussed events such as BGA meetings, roadshows and field days assisted the project team to stay across all industry issues by communicating face-to-face with growers and other industry stakeholders, including research partners.

	Communications Manager also attended quarterly ABGC Board meetings.	The Australian Banana Industry Congress, biennial industry Roadshows, Panama TR4 industry meetings and grower workshops are key events for banana levy payers. The biennial Congress is also a key platform for promoting R&D, marketing and biosecurity.
Video production	Video content produced for social media, Youtube and the ABGC website.	Video production has proven a powerful tool within the communications project, particularly throughout the duration of BA18001. One of the Communication Program's biggest challenges is ensuring growers in all growing regions nationally have equal access to latest R&D information. On-farm tours and field walks are a great opportunity to promote new variety trials and other scientific work being undertaken by banana researchers, however the majority of these tend to be held in Far North Queensland and the Northern Territory. As part of the National Banana Development and Extension Program (BA19004) the DAF Banana Extension staff held a field walk at the South Johnstone Research Facility. In order to give all Australian banana growers the opportunity to take part in this walk, one of the main presentations on the day was filmed and uploaded to YouTube and distributed to growers via SMS, e-bulletins, Facebook and the Australian Bananas Magazine. YouTube video HERE The Communication's Program developed extensive video

		content throughout the duration of BA18001 for ABGC's Facebook page and Youtube. It also uploaded content to Instagram and Tiktok, however to a lesser extent as these two platforms were still in the development phase. The project also promoted the suite of videos produced from the National Extension Project, other ABGC projects, other industry service providers and Hort Innovation Banana Marketing. In doing so the project helped also cross-promote by sharing these videos on the ABGC website, with links on other platforms such as e-bulletins and social media.
Media training	Media training delivered by the Communications Manager to potential banana grower leaders.	Media training was provided to more than 10 growers who the ABGC saw as future industry leaders that could potentially help spread industry messages on behalf of the ABGC.
Australian Banana Industry Congress 2021	The Communications Manager guided the planning, organising and hosting of the biennial event with the assistance of conference organiser – MCI – as well as a dedicated ABGC-led Management Committee and Program Committee.	The 2021 Australian Banana Industry Congress held in Cairns from May 12-14 was one of the most successful on record. A total of 470 delegates attended Congress over the three days - of that 140 were growers - far surpassing expectations when planning for this event began in 2019. In comparison to Congress on the Gold Coast in 2019, total registrations there were 370 – including 103 growers.

Outcomes

Table X. Outcome summary

Outcome	Alignment to fund outcome, strategy and KPI	Description	Evidence
Relevant and timely industry information is effectively communicated and extended which results in a higher degree of knowledge, and industry adoption and uptake.	This outcome aligns with the Banana Industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2017-2021 outcome 2 - Increased adoption of the industry's Best Management Practice (BMP) plan that improves industry sustainability, biosecurity and environmental stewardship; by communicating BMPs to the community and communicate industry benefits to the community.	The Communications Team consistently produces and distributes a range of communication materials to growers and other stakeholders to ensure the highest level of industry adoption and update and knowledge of industry issues in general. This is evidenced in the increased uptake of on-farm biosecurity practices, adoption of BMP and participation in grower focused events.	This outcome is evidenced in the high level of participation by growers in BMP and R&D related workshops held regularly by the ABGC and the National Banana Development and Extension Program (BA19004) , which are extensively promoted through the Communications Project. This outcome is also evidenced by the consistently growing level of industry adoption and uptake of Best Practice which the Communications Team has widely promoted in the Australian Bananas Magazine and e-bulletins. Website analytics have also provided evidence of a strong level of engagement with communications promoting best practice and the benefits it provides to a farming business
Information on relevant and timely grower meetings and activities is communicated resulting in a high degree of participation.	This outcome aligns to the Stakeholder Engagement Plan which specifies engagement with a range of industry stakeholders including individual growers, grower associations, research providers and research scientists, state and federal	As well as promoting ABGC organised events and activities, the Communications Team also maintains a high level of collaboration with supporting industry bodies, such as the	In the majority of cases grower meetings and activities are heavily promoted in ABGC e-bulletins. Analytics of this forum has provided evidence of a strong number of growers who open these e-bulletins and have clicked on links which prove further

	departments, regulatory authorities, banana supply chain businesses and members of the public	National Banana Development and Extension Program (BA19004) to promote meetings and activities that assist growers with knowledge and development. This is often achieved through cross promotional activities.	information on events and activities. A high level of participation from growers at most industry meetings and activities is also evidence of the effectiveness of the communications activity emanating from the Communications Program
Improved relationships between stakeholders, research agencies and regulatory authorities resulting in a wider and more comprehensive output of communications material	This outcome aligns to the Stakeholder Engagement Plan which specifies engagement with a range of industry stakeholders including individual growers, grower associations, research providers and research scientists, state and federal departments, regulatory authorities, banana supply chain businesses and members of the public	The Banana Industry Communications Team has built strong relationships with key industry stakeholders, including research agencies and regulatory authorities which results in regular communication outputs to industry.	The Communications Team has regular monthly meetings with the National Banana Development and Extension Program team members to discuss planned activities and proposed communication activities to promote these activities to industry. The Communications Manager also has a weekly meeting with Biosecurity Queensland's Senior Engagement Officer for the Panama TR4 Program to discuss biosecurity communications activities for banana growers in North Queensland, particularly as the ABGC transitions to take over full management of the TR4 Program from the State Government. The Communications Manager is based in North Queensland, so

			she regularly has face-to-face contact with local researchers, scientists and Biosecurity Queensland staff, which results in the development of content for e-bulletins, social media and the <i>Australian Bananas</i> magazine.
promote and facilitate adoption of new and existing R&D and communicate other industry development activities to Australian banana growers I	This outcome aligns with the Banana Industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2017-2021 outcome 2 - Increased adoption of the industry's Best Management Practice (BMP) plan that improves industry sustainability, biosecurity and environmental stewardship; by communicating BMPs to the community and communicate industry benefits to the community.	The promotion and facilitation of new and existing R&D and other industry development activities is evidenced in the continual increased update of BMP and general awareness of R&D project outcomes amongst growers.	The Communications Team worked closely with the ABGC's R&D Manager to keep up to date with R&D activities so they could be promoted and assist in facilitating adoption of new and existing R&D. This is mainly done through magazine articles, e-bulletins and videos. As previously stated, the Communications Manager is based in North Queensland and regularly had face-to-face contact with local researchers, scientists and Biosecurity Queensland staff, which resulted in the development of content for e-bulletins, social media and the <i>Australian Bananas</i> magazine. The Program's Communications Officer based in Brisbane also maintained close ties with researches and scientists in South East Queensland and northern NSW to stay across R&D activities emanating from

			research activities undertaken in these regions.
Increased understanding of the levy system and the role of Hort Innovation	This outcome aligns with the objective of both Banana Industry Strategic Investment Plans (SIP) 2017-2021 & 2022-2026 to improve industry capacity and increase R&D awareness and adoption through effective communications	The Communication Project works closely with Hort Innovations Marketing leads to regularly promote the levy system and the role of Hort. Branding guidelines, including funding acknowledgements, are always followed in all communications featuring Hort Innovation in all mediums.	Every edition of the <i>Australian Bananas Magazine</i> contains a table that explains the levy rate, which includes the Plant Health Australia (PHA) levy portion and the Hort Innovation levy component. Each magazine edition also includes a two-page marketing update, provided by Hort Innovation's Marketing Manager. All magazine articles, e-bulletin content, or social media uploads which feature a Hort funded project are also acknowledged through Hort Innovation branding, following their branding guidelines, including logos and levy funding statements.
Increased awareness and collaboration amongst R&D projects	This outcome aligns with the Banana Industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2017-2021 outcome 2 - Increased adoption of the industry's Best Management Practice (BMP) plan that improves industry sustainability, biosecurity and environmental stewardship; by communicating BMPs to the community and communicate industry benefits to the	The promotion and facilitation of new and existing R&D and other industry development activities is evidenced in the continual increased uptake of BMP and general awareness of R&D project outcomes amongst growers.	The Communications Team has regular monthly meetings with the ABGC's Best Practice team and the National Banana Development and Extension Program team members, as well as, the ABGC's R&D Manager and ABGC Strategy Manager to discuss current and proposed R&D activities. These were then cross promoted through BA18001 communications

community.

activities and that of the National Banana Development and Extension Program.

Again, website and e-bulletin analytics provided evidence of a strong level of engagement with communication project promoting these activities.

Monitoring and evaluation

Table X. Key Evaluation Questions

Key Evaluation Question	Project performance	Continuous improvement opportunities
To what extent has the project achieved its expected outcomes?	All outputs delivered under the Program consistently either met or exceeded its key deliverables under the Annual Operating Plan. Milestone reports were always successfully submitted, and Program budgets met. The Communications Team received regular positive feedback from industry (Australia wide) over the effectiveness of the Communications Project in keeping the Australian Banana industry engaged, informed and supported.	The Communications Team constantly evaluates ways to improve its reach to its target audiences and will continue to do so into the future. Continued emphasis should be placed on ensuring all communication databases remain up to date and relevant.
How relevant was the project to the needs of intended beneficiaries?	Industry adoption and uptake hinges greatly on a well-respected source of information and the ABGC's Communications Program has established a long history of supplying reliable information to growers and industry more broadly. Industry adoption of the project's deliverables have been measured by a growth of engagement on the ABGC website and social media platforms, through media	The Communication Program will need to continue to engage with all industry stakeholders to ensure the project outputs remain relevant and industry communication needs continue to be met.

	uptake and by building the distribution numbers of the magazine, e-bulletins and SMS databases. All of the above has resulted in positive changes to growers' on-farm practices, an industry equipped with knowledge of key industry issues, as well as latest supply chain, R&D, marketing and extension activities.	
How well have the intended beneficiaries been engaged in the project?	The ABGC's e-bulletins achieved a consistently excellent open rate throughout the project. Average open rate in Australia in 2022 was 20.6% according to Campaign Monitor. The ABGC's e-bulletin was consistently above 40%. Subscriber numbers have sat between 900-1000 people, remaining above 950 since May 2022. Similarly, the ABGC Facebook page increased its likes, from 1828 at the conclusion of the previous project to 5738 at the conclusion of BA18001 - an increase of 3910 likes. Subscriptions to the Australian Bananas Magazine, e-bulletins and SMS databases are easily accessible and extensively promoted.	Whilst the Program's e-bulletin open rate is excellent, there is always room for more improvement, which could involve investigating why some users are not engaging in this medium. Social media content will need to continue to be consistent and relevant in order to retain followers. A revamped website, due to be launched in early 2023, should also assist with users' ability to navigate the site and find relevant content.
What efforts did the project make to improve efficiency	The Communications Program went to great lengths to improve efficiency and achieve value for money. A greater emphasis was placed on attracting more advertisers to the Australian Bananas magazine to cover the cost of designing and printing this publication. The program also made a	The Communications Program will continue to create as many in-house videos as possible, saving on outsourcing. Travel will also be kept to a minimum, with many meetings now routinely held on-line.

relatively small outlay to purchase a Go Pro (video recorder) which gave them the ability to create more in-house video content, reducing the need to outsource these productions to professional video companies.

Recommendations

While the ABGC Communications Team consistently exceeds its key deliverables outlined in the Banana Industry Communications Program AOP, it constantly strives to improve its effectiveness in protecting and promoting the national banana industry.

Recommendations are;

- Complete redesign of the ABGC website (currently in progress) which will include a Members' portal and a more easy-to-navigate overall site.
- Continue to review and update of all ABGC databases to ensure maximum reach in key performance platforms including Australian Bananas Magazine, e-bulletins and SMS. .
- Regular auditing of the ABGC website analytics data to establish the most searched pages on the site and tailor web updates to optimize web usage.
- The new Communications Project BA22000 continue to build on the strength of previous Projects, which have consistently met or exceeded KPIs.

Intellectual property

No project IP or commercialisation to report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – BA18001 Methodology Summary

Appendix 2 – BA18001 Achievements/Results Analytics Summary

BA18001 – Australian Banana Industry Communications Program methodology

The Communications Program's Communication Services were delivered through the following methodology:

1. Planning
2. Develop, Produce and Distribute the Content
3. Measure, Monitor, Evaluate and Refine

Planning

Planning was required to develop, co-ordinate and implement a holistic, professional and responsive communications strategy that addressed the aims and objectives of the Communications Program and supported the levy-funded R&D and marketing programs.

An overarching 'Communications Strategy' was developed with clear links to specific and measurable communication objectives (indicators of success). This enunciated the purpose and interconnection of each communication tool (output) and how success would be evaluated.

This enabled effective tracking and measurement of the Program against articulated communication objectives. This planning was undertaken by the Program Team and assessed by a Project Reference Group (PRG).

The Communications Strategy was modelled on the previous Communications Program strategy (BA15005). The overarching strategy guided the implementation of the Program, stipulating specific and measurable indicators of success (KPIs), allowing the Program Team to track and evaluate its success, including the Program's ability to achieve its set of objectives.

The KPIs encapsulated the whole of Program performance, including the performance of the Communications Team. The PRG examined key issues, desired outcomes and outputs for the Program and also for identification and prioritisation of current and emerging issues.

The strategic framework ensured that content was delivered across all mediums and that levy payers had immediate and easy access to accurate, up-to-date information on all relevant activity and in a format that was user-friendly.

It showed cost effectiveness, responsiveness and transparency of Program activities and outputs by the Program remained at the centre of the latest news and developments in industry; by continuing to provide avenues for all levy payers (not just ABGC members) to access information; and by extending the reach of outputs through cross-promotion (particularly for digital channels).

Annual Operating Plans were developed under the strategic framework (Communications Strategy) and provided detail of the planned communication activities, including a calendar of

events. Importantly these annual plans identified tools, resources, tactics and timings, as well as tasks to be completed in set time frames.

Develop, Produce and Distribute the Content – This Program developed content in broad alignment with the Banana Industry Strategic Industry Investment Plan. This process also involved d the PRG – to guide content for future features and sections of the various platforms, eg magazine, website, e-bulletins, mainstream media, social media and videos.

Multi-platformed communications were focussed on assisting levy payers to make informed decisions. Distribution was via an integrated portfolio of communications platforms and based on target market segmentation.

This was the main function of the Program – containing three key elements:

- i) The writing (ie researching, consulting, interviewing, writing, photographing and editing) by the Communications Manager and two part-time Senior Communications ~~officers~~ Officers of news and features for the various platforms; magazine, website, Facebook, twitter, media releases/media correspondence, e-bulletin, SMS and videos.
- ii) The co-ordination by the Communications Manager of written (and other) material which she and the Communications Officers sourced from external parties in various formats for inclusion in the designated platforms.
- iii) The production of various outputs; eg in the case of the magazine, the Communications Manager sub-edited all articles, produced a layout, checked proofs from the graphic designer, signed-off on final copy and distributed accordingly.

The Communications Manager constantly strived to bring about improvements to the effectiveness of outputs of the Communications Program. These efforts included:

- Improving the reach and effectiveness of existing Program outputs, including the Australian Bananas Magazine, the Banana Growers' e-bulletin, the ABGC website, Facebook, Twitter and on-line videos.
- Strived towards even greater strategic and proactive media relations on industry issues.
- Built on the Program's social media presence (particularly engagement), including greater 'grower focussed' and 'grower-generated' content. This was done by working with growers and the National Extension project BA16007 and BA19004 to generate and share content.
- Enhancing the success of the banana industry's national extension project, based in North Queensland, including events, SMS alerts, BMP, posters and factsheets.
- Ensured alignment between the KPIs of the extension and communications programs.
- Ensured all communications activities were embedded with the ABGC to maintain contact with growers. The ABGC has North Queensland-based industry projects that assisted with additional growers and other key stakeholder contacts. With the Communications Manager based at the South Johnstone Research Station, she had and continues to have daily interaction with key stakeholders such as scientists and researchers from

Queensland DAF, Biosecurity Queensland and other government agencies that play key roles in the banana's industry's future.

- Leveraged outputs to improve integration, reach and maximisation of the return on investment.

Measure, Monitor, Evaluate and Refine

This is detailed in the Monitoring and Evaluation section of the Final Milestone report for BA18001.

General Services

The Project Leader:

- Was the single point of contact responsible for delivering the services
- Was responsible for the Program and have leadership and involvement in each output
- Oversaw the financial component of the Program
- Was accountable to the Hort Innovation contract manager and research manager for the provision of services and deliverables in accordance with the services plan and agreement for services, ensuring the methodology processes, procedures and documentation were robust, transparent and capable of withstanding independent scrutiny
- Brought issues that required consideration and/or decision by Hort Innovation to the Hort Innovation contract manager's attention as they arose.
- Took all necessary action to effectively resolve issues in a timely manner
- Undertook Program monitoring and evaluation activities (following the M&E plan)
- Provided feedback and other information to Hort Innovation on issues and opportunities facing industry
- Supported Hort Innovation in achieving its Objectives and Strategies as required
- Supported Hort Innovation in achieving the industry's R&D and Marketing Objectives and Strategies
- Supported Hort Innovation membership processes
- Applied Hort Innovation acknowledgement and branding on Program outputs as per the Hort Innovation Publications Guide
- Prepared six monthly milestone reports and this final report
- Communicated^d all events funded by R&D project activities, including, extension events such as Banana Roadshows, R&D workshops and the Banana Industry Congress to the banana industry and to Hort Innovation Communications/Events team prior to the event.

Appendix 2 – BA18001 Achievements/Results Analytics Summary

E-newsletters

- **Open Rate:** emails opened ÷ (emails sent – bounces)
- **Click-through Rate:** clicks ÷ (emails sent – bounces), essentially the percentage of people who clicked at least one time
- **Click to Open Rate:** clicks ÷ emails opened
- **Hard Bounce Rate:** Email that could not be delivered for permanent reasons
- **Unsubscribe Rate:** the amount of readers that choose to unsubscribe from future engagement

Figures are calculated from specific EDM events from Milestone Reports throughout the project, to provide an overarching view.

- The ABGC's e-bulletin has achieved a consistently excellent open rate throughout the project. Average open rate in Australia in 2022 was 20.6% according to Campaign Monitor. The ABGC's e-bulletin is consistently above 40%.
- Subscriber numbers have sat between 900-1000 people, remaining above 950 since May 2022.

Reporting period	Average open rate (%)	Average click-through rate (%)	Average click-to-open rate (%)	Average hard bounce rate (%)	Average unsubscribe rate (%)
Milestone 102	42.22	16.69	0.17	0.89	0.11
Milestone 103	42	23.18	0.23	1.02	0.11
Milestone 104	44.33	19.17	0.40	0.39	0.06
Milestone 105	55.91	31.27	0.34	0.43	0
Milestone 106	42.59	8.02	18.8	0.13	0.19
Milestone 107	45.24	10.4	23.01	0.71	0.3
Final Milestone	43.01	9.22	0.09	0.83	0.21 (2 people)

WEBSITE

By reviewing google analytics, which is compiled for each Milestone report for the Program, uptake of the program outputs has been measured through engagement levels on the website, YouTube and our social media channels.

These analytics have proven that a strong and consistent level of page 'views', 'sessions' and 'visitation duration' existed over the duration of the Program. These have increased exponentially at times where specific campaigns to heighten industry awareness and knowledge of issues have been driven.

- **Sessions:** number of visits to the website
- **Users:** number of people who visited the website
- **Unique visitors:** number of unique visits to the website
- **Returning Visitors:** People who return to the page
- **Bounce rate:** % of people who left the website after viewing one page
- **Pages/Session:** average number of pages viewed in a session
- **Top pages:** the best performing page on the website
- **Key words:** top search words on the website
- **Average visit duration:** average amount of time views remained on the website
- **Top 3 referrals:** top places that traffic is being directed from
- **Traffic sources:** 4 broad categories that list where traffic is coming from: Direct, Organic search, Referral and Social.

Project lifespan:

Website	Time Period	Sessions	Users	Returning visitors (%)	Bounce rate (%)	Pages /Session	Top pages	Key words	Average visit duration (minutes)	Top 3 referrals	Traffic sources (%)
www.abgc.org.au	Jul 2019 – Oct 2022	169,033	130,152	11.2%	77.77%	1.62	www.abgc.org.au/history-of-bananas www.abgc.org.au www.abgc.org.au/our-industry/key-facts		1.30	Facebook (mobile & desktop) www.business.qld.gov.au baidu.com	Google/organic (65.38%) Direct/none (24.34%) Facebook - mobile (3.55%)

							www.abgc.org.au/bananajobs				
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Year by year breakdown:

Website	Time Period	Sessions	Users	Unique visitors (%)	Returning visitors (%)	Bounce rate (%)	Pages /Session	Top pages	Key words	Average visit duration (mins)	Top 3 referrals	Traffic sources (%)
www.abgc.org.au	Jul 2019– Jul 2020	51029	39280		11.5	76.49	1.74	www.abgc.org.au/history-of-bananas www.abgc.org.au www.abgc.org.au/our-industry/key-facts		1.43	Facebook (mobile) Baidu.com Trafficbot.club	Google/organic (64.39) Direct/none (26.59) Bing/organic (2.54)
www.abgc.org.au	Jul 2020 – Jul 2021	57141	43715		11.6	77.95	1.58	www.abgc.org.au/our-industry/history-of-bananas www.abgc.org.au www.abgc.org.au/bananajobs		1.26	Facebook (mobile & desktop) www.business.qld.gov.au baidu.com	Google/organic (63.92) Direct/none (22.44) Facebook – mobile (7.76%)
www.abgc.org.au	Jul 2021 – Oct 2022	61120	46767		11.6	78.66	1.55	www.abgc.org.au/our-industry/history-of-bananas www.abgc.org.au www.abgc.org.au/our-industry/bananajobs		1.22	Facebook www.business.qld.gov.au classroom.google.com	Google/organic (67.34) Direct/none (24.26) Bing/organic (2.28)

Facebook

- **Fan reach:** number of fans of the 'page'
- **Organic reach:** number of people, who have seen a given post
- **Paid reach:** reach gained through promotional boosting of material
- **Engagement:** Number of people who clicked anywhere in the post = $\frac{\text{Engaged users}}{\text{Reached Users}} \times 100$
- **Negative feedback:** includes unlike and hiding a post/all posts
- The ABGC Facebook page has published more than 550 posts over the duration of this project. Individual examples of this content are below.
- The page has increased its likes, from 1828 at the conclusion of the previous project to 5738 at the conclusion of BA18001. This is an increase of 3910 likes.

Date	Post content	Organic reach	Paid reach	Engagement	Negative feedback	Reactions and Shares
August 21, 2019	Video produced by the ABGC Communications Program of the 2019 Australian Banana Packing Championships at the Innisfail Show. Video HERE	10,953	-	218		79 shares, 32 shares
December 6, 2019	East Coast bushfires – video details the stories of four banana growers affected by historic blazes on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. Also promoted the launch of an ABGC-led Banana Growers' Bushfire Appeal.	48,314	27953	1064		360 reactions, 301 shares

	Video produced by the Communications Program HERE					
22 September, 2020	Lakeland banana farmer Peter Inderbitzin explains why the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) are so vital to the state's banana industry, particularly in remote areas where he farms in southern Cape York. Video produced by the Communications Program HERE	16,736	5133	433	1	146 reactions, 60 shares
26 November, 2020	A video of two students encouraging other young people to take up work on banana farms. The video was produced to help overcome worker shortages in the industry. View video HERE	154,338	4451	2540	17	1200 reactions, 382 shares
13 October, 2021	A 21-second video posted on the ABGC Facebook page on October 13, 2021, showed two seasonal workers cutting and humping a banana bunch on a farm in Lakeland. It has had more than 43 million views, more than 70,000 reactions and 835 shares.	43,573,043		58,500		52,000 likes, 717 shares

	Video produced by the Communications Program HERE					
15 October, 2021	Jobs promotion video produced by the Communications Program to try and overcome worker shortages brought about by COVID. View video HERE	13,500				284 Reactions, comments, and shares
1 May, 2022	National Banana Day video produced by the Communications Program HERE	22,751		1,389		140 likes 26 shares
9 March, 2022	Bananas on a Budget recipe video produced by the Communications Program as part of the #BananasOnABudget campaign HERE	9,310		1346		101 likes 32 shares 9 comments
28 April, 2022	Community thank you post for those who supported #nana4afarmer campaign Video produced by the Communications Program HERE	10,315	695	337		127 reactions, 53 shares

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YouTube

Since July 2019, the ABGC YouTube channel has published 38 videos. The YouTube channel is a successful collaboration between a number of ABGC projects. Analytics are based on examples of individual videos, in these cases, produced solely by the Communications team.

Video title	Views	Average percentage viewed (%)	Average view duration	Traffic Source
2019 Australian Banana Packing Championship (21 August, 2019)	1392	45.7	1.25	YouTube Search External Suggested Videos
Hard working young Aussies helping to address worker shortages on banana farms (14 February, 2021)	1561	61.2	1.36	External Suggested Videos YouTube Search

New banana variety trial at the South Johnstone Research Station, Far North Queensland (9 September, 2021)	1019	16.4	5.55	External Suggested Videos YouTube Search
#nana4afarmer - Australian Banana Growers' campaign	96	67.1	0.29	Channel Page External Browse Videos

Other Social Media platforms

Note: Throughout the course of this project, the ABGC Communications Team has shifted focus to align with social media trends. As such, our priorities shifted from Twitter and Facebook, to Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Our reporting below reflects this.

Twitter

The ABGC account now has 408 followers and an average engagement rate of 0.858%. Examples of top tweets before switch to Instagram/TikTok focus:

- 22 November 2019: Banana Growers' Bushfire Appeal: A Go Fund Me campaign that aims to raise much needed funds to assist #bananagrowers in NSW and QLD recover from bushfires that have devastated their farms <https://bit.ly/2ObZI9D> #nswfires #qldfires
Impressions: 1438 Engagements: 16
- 27 February 2020: Panama TR4 confirmed on a fourth Tully Valley banana farm. Read more: <LINK>
Impressions: 628 Engagements: 33

- 12 March 2020: Banana growers: learn how the Panama TR4 Program will be managed in the future. Attend a grower meeting at Tully, Innisfail and Mareeba in early April. <https://bit.ly/2IGVD9X>

Impressions: 1126 Engagements: 16

- September 7 2021: New video from Banana Bunchy Top Project (video)

Impressions: 651 Engagements: 17

Instagram

In the interests of achieving the best outcome for growers, the ABGC Communications Team has trialed two different Instagram accounts throughout this project, with different names and targets.

The current account, @_aussie.banana.growers, has 159 followers and is steadily growing.

TikTok

The ABGC Communications Team is in the process of increasing our TikTok presence, in line with current social media trends. The audience captures both our current, next generation growers and those interested in industry, including consumers.

The account, @aussie.banana.growers, has 84 followers with videos reaching up to 2046 views.

Program Highlights

The ABGC has a proven track record in delivering an effective and comprehensive Communications Program to the Australian Banana Industry since 2010.

Over the life of BA18001, all outputs delivered under the Program have either met or greatly exceeded the project brief. Milestone reports have always been successfully submitted and Program budgets met. The Communications Team has always gone to great lengths to review its deliverables versus outcomes and tailor communications activities to maximise KPIs.

Each milestone report detailed deliverables and evidence of outputs meeting or exceeding those set out in the Annual Operating Plan.

Through this project – and previous ABGC-led Banana Industry Communication Projects – banana growers and other key industry stakeholders have received up-to-date information about industry issues, events and research via various mediums. Outputs designed to increase grower awareness, knowledge and reach have been measured in a number of ways.

RESPONDING TO COVID

Shortly after the outset of the global COVID pandemic – which was unprecedented in nature – the Communications Program established a dedicated COVID-19 page on the ABGC website, as a direct portal for all new and current COVID information. These updates assisted growers to continue to navigate their businesses through the pandemic, including dealing with WH&S changes and other workforce issues. View the COVID Page [HERE](#)

Initially the page focused on assisting growers to continue to operate their businesses through the early stages of the pandemic by widely promoting and distributing a downloadable *Guide for Banana Growers on COVID-19*. View the downloadable guide [HERE](#)

Of note:

- On 28 April, 2020, when the comprehensive *COVID-19 Guide for Banana Growers* was launched, 87 people clicked on the link to this guide from the e-bulletin distributed on the same day.
- The ABGC website: From 28 April to 5 May (one month after launching the COVID Guide on the website) the site had had 12,037 page views, from 5056 users. Of those 4843 were classified 'new users' (86%) and 150 people viewed the COVID Guide.

The ABGC received substantial feedback from growers, as well as other horticulture industries, that the COVID Guide and general COVID updates and information distributed by the ABGC throughout the pandemic, had been both comprehensive and extremely helpful to growers as they navigated the ever-evolving challenges that the pandemic presented.

To help address crucial worker shortages, the Communications Team established a national 'Banana Job Vacancies' page on the Australian Banana Growers' Council website. This dedicated, noticeboard-style page assisted growers to advertise and source local workers in key growing regions, while the ABGC continued to work with government to re-establish seasonal worker programs. View the page [HERE](#)

In the 14 days after launching the new 'Jobs Board' on November 23, the website had 4600 page views, from 2690 users. Of those 2533 were classified 'new users' (86.9%).

The Jobs Campaign was heavily targeted towards school leavers and university students, and promoted widely on social media, including various employment platforms. As part of this drive, a short video featuring two senior high school students from Tully explaining what it was like to work on a banana farm was uploaded onto the ABGC Facebook page and reached more than 87,792 people including 84,212 'organic' and 4451 'paid'. The post has since had more than 70,000 views, more than 280 shares and registered 11,343 engagements.

View video [HERE](#)



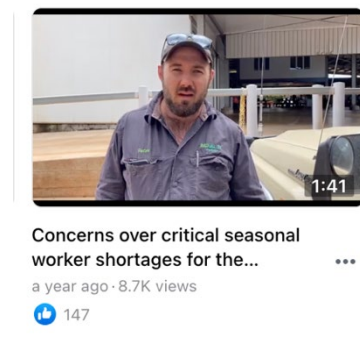
Picture above: A screenshot of the video that was posted on the ABGC Facebook page.

In the three months following the posting of the 'Working on a banana farm' video, visitors to the Banana Jobs page remained consistent with almost 1500 visits during that period and was the second most visited page on the site. The average time spent on the page was over 5 mins.

VIDEOS/SOCIAL MEDIA

The Communications Team also worked closely with the ABGC Board and Senior Management to ensure concerns about COVID worker shortages in the industry were relayed effectively to relevant authorities. This included producing a number of videos with affected growers and shared on social media and YouTube. Three of these videos had a collective reach of 26,047 people and generated a total of 5232 engagements.

Watch one of these videos [HERE](#)



Picture above: A screenshot of one of the worker shortage videos that was uploaded to the ABGC Facebook page.

Videos have proven to be one of our most effective communication tools with growers, other industry stakeholders and the community more broadly.

A 21-second video posted on our Facebook page on October 13, 2021, showing two seasonal workers cutting and humping a banana bunch on a farm in Lakeland garnered more than 43 million views, more than 70,000 reactions and 835 shares. View video [HERE](#)



Cutting and humping bananas

43 weeks ago · 42.5M views

70K

Pictured above: A screenshot of the video which gained more than 43 million views since it was uploaded onto the ABGC Facebook page.

This video alone helped increase the ABGC Facebook 'Page Likes' by more than 3000 and 'Followers' by more than 15,000. It also ensured a consistent monthly page reach in the millions since. This screenshot was from the 28 days, July 17-August 13, 2022.

Insights

[See all](#)

Last 28 days : Jul 17 - Aug 13 ▼

People reached

4,714,814
▲107%

Post engagements

154,854
▲131%

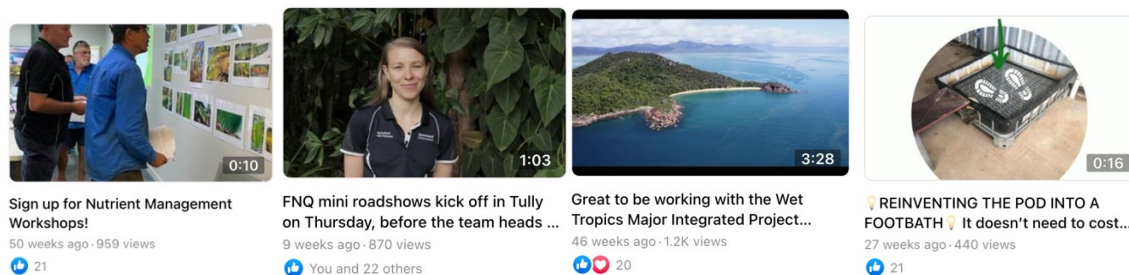
Page likes

68
▲6%

Tagged product clicks

0

Videos are also regularly produced to share industry activities, R&D outcomes and other outputs from the ABGC Best Practice Team and the National Extension Program, increasing awareness and knowledge of both programs.



Pictured above: Screenshots of videos uploaded to the ABGC Facebook page.

LINKS WITH OTHER PROJECTS/ORGANISATIONS

The Communications Project team has a monthly ‘Banana Extension Network’ meeting which involves the ABGC Best Practice Team, the National Banana Development and Extension Program, the ABGC’s Strategic Manager and ABGC Research and Development Manager.

This meeting ensures that all best practice and R&D activities are being communicated effectively to industry. It also assists the Communications Project to remain informed of grower activity involving best practice and R&D, which helps to deliver case studies, media releases and general content for all of our communications activities.

The Communications Program team also has had regular face-to-face, video and phone meetings with the leaders of the Banana Bunchy Top Virus (BA18000), BMPH and TR4 Program Transition (TR4T) to ensure knowledge transfer to growers and improvements to farming practices.

SPECIAL RESPONSES

The ABGC Communications Program has a proven track record of responding to industry needs as they emerge, to ensure growers remain viable, as referenced in the COVID communications outputs above.

Another example of this has been two media campaigns in 2022, to assist growers through an unprecedented period of challenge, including market prices well below the cost of production, global economic pressures increasing production costs, labour shortages and COVID buying challenges.

The Communications Program launched #nana4afarmer in April, to highlight the state of industry to consumers and give shoppers extra incentive to purchase bananas. The message was simple: when you buy a banana, you’re not only purchasing the perfect energy snack, you’re supporting Australian banana growers who are experiencing a time of unprecedented challenges.

The campaign included videos featuring banana growers – which reached thousands of people on Facebook alone. It also included other social media posts – on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok - as well as mainstream media coverage.

View a #nana4afarmer Facebook video [HERE](#)

Grower profile Facebook video [HERE](#)

#nana4afarmer Facebook [HERE](#)

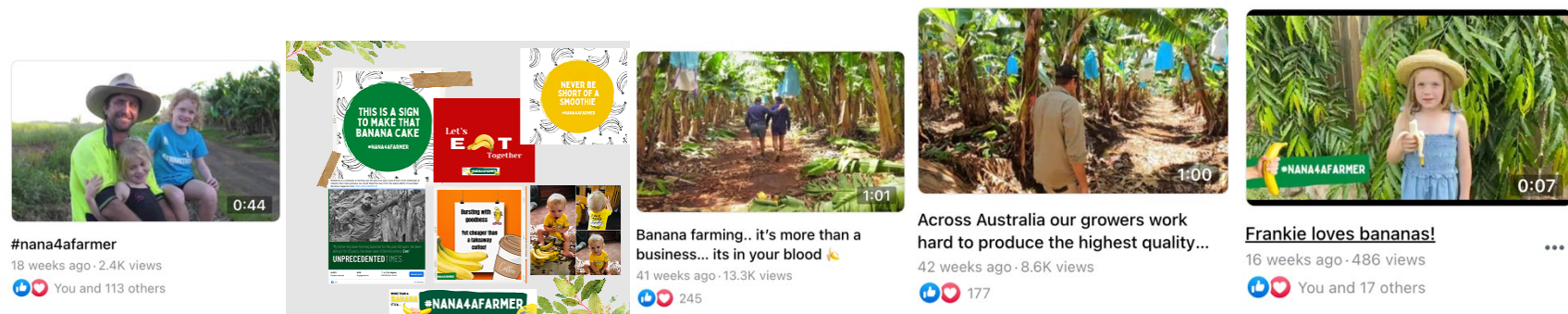
Banana farm work TikTok video [HERE](#)

Banana workers TikTok video [HERE](#)

Banana worker TikTok video [HERE](#)

Instagram grower profile content [HERE](#)

Instagram general banana farm promotion [HERE](#)



A follow-up campaign, #BananasOnABudget, was launched on 17 June and focused on delicious and affordable banana recipes, sparking conversation around the incredible value bananas offer at a time when household budgets are tight.

Each recipe shared features a cost-per-serve, highlighting the fact that bananas are a smart choice at the supermarket checkout. The Communications Team enlisted the help of growers themselves to star in recipe-making videos on farm. These have been the most successful content, gaining the most audience traction and engagement. A 30 second TikTok video featuring an Innisfail grower making a banana smoothie on farm had a Facebook reach of almost 6,500, has more than 3,100 views, 1096 engagement and 252 reactions. A similar video with a Tableland grower, uploaded to Facebook reached more than 7,900, was shared 32 times and received 241 reactions. See this video [HERE](#)



The Communications Program discussed both campaigns with Hort Innovation's banana marketing team, Australian Bananas, who also came on board to add their support by promoting bananas as great value, affordable and a nutritious way to beat the cost of living, while also highlighting industry challenges.



Responding to a disaster

On March 1, Tropical Cyclone Niran brought catastrophic winds to Far North Queensland, decimating banana crops and causing an estimated \$180-\$200m in damage.

Growers already facing the threat of pests and disease, ongoing low prices and critical worker shortages reported crop losses of up to 100 per cent. About 150 farms suffered damage, with 140 of those in the Cassowary Coast. Some growers hit hardest by the cyclonic winds are still without an income, with recovery expected to take up to 12 months.

A raft of communications activity (including media releases, e-bulletins, social media posts and SMS) was delivered in the aftermath of the cyclonic event to address a number of industry impacts and concerns.

Visits to the region by both the Federal and State Agriculture Ministers in the days following the severe storm were communicated widely to growers, giving those worst affected and the ABGC Board a platform to advocate for wage subsidies and tangible disaster relief.

The communications team also assisted in promoting a specially convened meeting of growers to further air concerns over the need for urgent post-cyclone, emergency assistance.

In order to assist in lobbying for government assistance and create a public awareness of the extent of damage caused to crops by Cyclone Niran, Communications Manager Sonia Campbell worked with professional production company HDeVolution to produce a video featuring a number of severely affected growers and ABGC Chair Stephen Lowe.

The video was posted on ABGC's Facebook page on March 5 and reached more than 49,300 people. It was shared more than 350 times and received 12,046 engagements. Video [HERE](#)



Australian Banana Growers posted a video to playlist **Tropical Cyclone Niran**.

Published by Sonia Campbell · March 5 ·

It's hard to comprehend the losses experienced by some of our banana growers in North Queensland this week.

Hear first-hand from growers who have lost so much. The banana industry is seeking urgent assistance. These growers can tell you why.



49,378

People Reached

12,046

Engagements

Boost Post

320

43 Comments 356 Shares

The Communications Manager provided Channel 7's Weekend Sunrise with the video content, with parts of the video airing on the program on March 21. It was followed by a live interview with ABGC Chair Stephen Lowe talking about the cyclone impacts and need for assistance. The show encouraged all Australians to go out and buy bananas.

Sunrise also followed up by broadcasting its weekend weather segment on April 24 – hosted by presenter James Tobin – from an Innisfail banana farm affected by the cyclone owned by the Alcock family. (A screenshot of the segment is pictured below.)



CONGRESS

The current Communications Program helped deliver a successful Australian Banana Industry Congress in Cairns in 2021.

Held every two years, Congress is the Australian banana industry's premier national event, delivering significant outcomes to industry value chain, showcasing a variety of levy-funded research and marketing programs, as well as providing an opportunity for growers to gain a greater insight into latest updates on supply chain development and technology.

The 2021 Congresses were successfully planned and executed under the guidance of the ABGC's Communications Manager, with the assistance of Brisbane-based events management company MCI, an ABGC-led Program Planning Committee and ABGC-led Management Committee.

Despite a raft of uncertainty over COVID during the 20 months of planning the 2021 event, Congress 2021 was successfully held at the Cairns Convention Centre and the Pullman International Hotel from May 12-14. It is worth noting that MCI is a reputable organisation with a large client base and Congress was the only live, face-to-face convention/event that was successfully held under their co-management during the pandemic in 2021.

The decision to host the event in the banana heartland of Far North Queensland proved valuable both for assisting in mitigating the risks associated with hosting a large event during an evolving pandemic, and for attracting one of the biggest delegate attendances in the event's 26-year history.

Almost 470 delegates – including 140 growers – attended over the two-and-a-half days. This built on the success of the 2019 Banana Congress held on the Gold Coast which attracted 370 delegates, including 103 growers.

2021 registrations were particularly positive given the hardship suffered by many growers in the Far Northern Cassowary Coast region from Cyclone Niran in March 2021, when some growers lost 100 per cent of their crops. On top of this, almost every grower nationally was suffering significantly (both financially and emotionally) from critical worker shortages due to COVID.

The event included a comprehensive grower-focused programs, giving all those involved in the banana industry (including growers, supply chain, researchers and other industry partners) a chance to consider ways to improve farming practices, inject growth in their businesses through change and innovation, improve their resilience, value-add, and implement new concepts for a continued robust industry.

Some of the main Congress deliverables in 2021 included:

- Capacity building exercise as the pre-eminent gathering of the banana industry in Australia, as such drew media attention to the issues facing the industry, as well as assisted in growing the knowledge of individuals who attended.
- Greater awareness of levy investments, including the increased adoption of levy outcomes to build a stronger, more robust Australian banana industry.
- Increased grower and other delegate awareness of the latest Hort funded banana R&D and marketing information.
- Greater insight into current international and domestic Panama TR4 science and research.
- Keynote speakers broadened the knowledge of attendees, including to the banana industry value chain on research findings, value adding, best practice, emerging risks and opportunities.
- Exposure to broader opportunities in trade, R&D, innovative on-farm technologies, networking and more through plenary sessions, exhibition stalls and social networking.
- A more cohesive industry in terms of the ability of growers to network with scientists, researchers and marketing specialists who support them.

Congress video [HERE](#)