

Final Report

Risk and crisis management planning for the melon industry

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Risk and crisis management planning for the melon industry VM18002

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Summary

VM18002 – *Risk and crisis management planning for the melon industry* (“the project”) is informed by the vision and mission of Horticulture Innovation Australia (Hort Innovation), the rural research and development priorities prescribed by the Commonwealth’s levy process and the Australian Melon Industry’s Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2016-2021. Control Risks worked closely with stakeholders from the Australian Melon Association (AMA) to realise the project objectives, including its incumbent Executive Officer, Johnathon Davey. The AMA is the peak industry body for Australian melon growers and is responsible for responding to and supporting the industry during crises.

This project was conducted following the industry identifying a requirement to review its crisis management guidelines following a listeria outbreak in 2018. The project was envisaged to help the industry identify, mitigate, and respond to other crisis scenarios through proactive risk management planning for threats including, but not limited to environmental contamination, biosecurity, food safety, supply chains and labour issues.

Control Risks’ consultants were engaged to conduct the project activities between October 2019 and May 2021 to support the melon industry’s crisis management capability and development. The project timelines were adjusted within these timeframes to accommodate COVID-19 restrictions. This required some workshops to be conducted remotely.

The objective of the project is to support the melon industry’s crisis management capability, risk identification capacity and overarching resilience. This has been realised through conducting the following activities:

- Revising and enhancing the industry’s crisis management plan (CMP).
- Ensuring potential industry risks and threats are identified to inform preparedness.
- Establishing and training the industry crisis management CMT.
- Providing crisis management media training for nominated CMT members to act as spokespersons.

These objectives were achieved through the following project phases and milestones:

- **Phase one:** CMP review and gap analysis
- **Phase two:** Industry risk awareness workshop
- **Phase 3A:** Crisis management media training (one-on-one workshops)
- **Phase 3B:** Crisis management training workshops (conducted remotely)
- **Phase four:** Industry communication and grower awareness

The desired outcome of the project is creating a more resilient melon industry. Through the AMA, the melon industry maintains a revised, enhanced CMP which can be used to manage industry related crises. A core CMT has undertaken media and crisis management training and is well placed to continue its crisis management activities. The success of the industry’s crisis management capability and continued development will be dependent on the commitment to ongoing training, resourcing and revision of the CMP, ensuring an effective response for future scenarios.

Keywords

Crisis management; incident management; melon industry; AMA; resilience; risk management; risk assessment; crisis communications; training.

Introduction

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These objectives were achieved through the following project phases and milestones:

- **Phase one:** CMP review and gap analysis – Completed in **October 2019**.
- **Phase two:** Industry risk awareness workshop – Completed in **January 2020**.
- **Phase 3A:** Crisis management media training (one-on-one workshops) – Completed in **April 2020**.
- **Phase 3B:** Crisis management training workshops (conducted remotely) – Completed in **May 2021**.
- **Phase four:** Industry communication and grower awareness - Completed in **May 2021**.

This report details Control Risks approach to the project, and subsequent outputs and outcomes.

Methodology

Introduction

Control Risks consulted with the AMA and its Executive throughout the project phases to:

- Assess emerging risks identifying potential crises collaboratively with key industry stakeholders.
- Review and update the crisis management plan and relevant guidelines.
- Conduct crisis management training for the Australian melon industry crisis management team.
- Ensure media training was provided to appropriate AMA / CMT stakeholders.
- Develop and raise industry awareness of crisis management arrangements for industry participants.

From March 2020, project activities were required to be conducted remotely. This included conducting one-on-one media training sessions with nominated industry spokespersons and facilitating the exercise workshops over Microsoft Teams.

The project phases are detailed below along with the corresponding milestones.

Milestone 102: Project kick-off meeting

Control Risks commenced the project with a kick-off meeting with project stakeholders from the AMA to identify the timelines and key participants required for the project. The meeting also focused on understanding the state of the industry’s current crisis management arrangements and potential enhancements that could be focused on during the project.

Milestone 103: Phase one: Gap analysis and CMP review

The industry CMP and incident management logs were reviewed by Control Risks to understand the CMP, related documents and framework that has been used by industry. It examined the following elements of the CMP:

- Fitness for purpose and usability by industry stakeholders.
- Integration of relevant Hort Innovation and industry plans, policies and procedures.
- Use of every-day, consistent language to describe emerging situations clearly, informing appropriate and effective employment of industry response procedures and resources.
- Clear presentation of “immediate need” information, such as key contact details and considerations for initial response actions.
- Clear instructions for activating appropriate resources and stakeholders, and convening crisis management meetings, including virtual meetings.
- Inclusion of appropriate and succinctly prescribed procedures for escalation of response and resource deployment.
- Communication arrangements (physical) and evidence of measures for redundancy thereof.
- Effective knowledge management to ensure availability of and access to relevant material.
- Resource allocation and continued development and maintenance.

This enabled the plan to be revised and enhanced based on good practice crisis management and suitability for the industry. Plan enhancements were supported by a detailed gap analysis report for the CMP.

Milestone 104: Phase two: Risk assessment workshop

Once the CMP was revised and enhanced, Control Risks facilitated a face-to-face, three-hour risk assessment workshop in Brisbane for industry stakeholders and the AMA executive.

Risk management workshop

The workshop was conducted in line with the methodology outlined in *ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management* and informed by industry experts who participated in a three-hour risk workshop.

The workshop ascertained the ‘worst case’ and ‘most likely’ scenarios the melon industry may face in the next 12-24 months from the perspectives of each participant. As part of the discussions, participants discussed the presence of and suitability of control measures for each of the identified scenarios, including environmental contamination, food safety concerns including product sabotage and labour issues. The objectives included:

- Increase awareness of potential risks to the melon industry and assist with identifying risks or vulnerabilities from ‘gate to plate’ that may not have been addressed otherwise.
- Investigate historical events directly and indirectly impacting the melon industry’s reputation, operations and market, such as the 2018 rockmelon listeriosis incident and lessons learned.
- Validate known and perceived risks to the industry by reviewing threat identification and analysis of peer industries, as experienced by Control Risks.
- Review, validate and update the industry risk register to capture new risks and re-assess known ones.

The risk register provided an open forum to discuss risks the industry may need to collectively manage and prepare for. These were documented and included as an Annex in the CMP.

Milestone 105: Phase 3A: Media training

Control Risks’ media expert, Stephen Feneley facilitated one-on-one media workshops for nominated industry spokespersons. The workshop covered the following topics relevant to crisis communications:

- Interview theory, media strategies and techniques
- Developing and effectively communicating key messages

- Crisis communication principles and planning
- One on one coaching and high-pressure interview scenarios with a professional interview (Stephen Feneley and professional camera setup)

Coaching and detailed debriefs were held with each participant following the workshops. The aim was to ensure the CMT had members that could act as the face of the industry during times of crises.

Milestone 105: Phase 3B: Crisis management workshops

Control Risks conducted two half-day (three-hour) desktop crisis management workshops for the industry CMT.

- The workshop discussion points and agenda included:
- Crisis management training workshop including:
- Crisis management anatomy and objectives
- Crisis communication principles and objectives
- Desktop exercise based on a realistic and relevant industry crisis scenario.

The crisis scenarios selected were based on plausible worst-case events and previous crises which had impacted the industry as well as risks identified during the earlier project activities. The workshops are designed to promote confidence and familiarity in applying the CMP to a relevant, and realistic event.

Milestone 190: Phase four: Industry awareness

Control Risks prepared a double-sided crisis management flyer to be distributed to growers to promote awareness of the AMAs crisis management capability. It is designed to:

- Provide growers' information on who to contact in the event of a crisis or media enquiry.
- Provide basic assessment guidelines to encourage growers to escalate potential crisis scenarios.

The final milestone report (this document) was prepared following completion of the above activities.

Outputs

This section details the outputs and key deliverables that were achieved during the project:

Phase one:

- CMP Gap Analysis report
- CMP revision and enhancements

The gap-analysis informed the CMP revisions and enhancements to ensure an updated fit-for-purpose CMP.

Phase two:

- Industry risk assessment workshop
- Risk workshop post-activity report
- Industry risk register (Located in the CMP)

The risk workshop promoted awareness of potential risks and crises and the mitigation measures required.

Phase 3A:

- One-on-one media training workshops
- Media training guidelines and principles (located in the CMP)

The media workshop ensured CMT spokespersons had appropriate instruction on responding to the media.

Phase 3B:

- Two crisis management training workshops
- Post-activity report and next steps document

The training workshops ensured the CMT were able to apply the CMP to a plausible crisis management scenario.

Phase four:

- Industry awareness flyer (crisis management card) prepared for drafting

The awareness piece is designed to be sent to growers once the CMT has established a centralised contact number for reporting industry crises. It should be sent following adoption of the recommendations detailed in the Post-activity report.

These outputs were provided separately to Hort Innovation and nominated industry stakeholders.

Outcomes

Each project phase was conducted with the purpose of achieving the following project objectives:

- Ensured the industry has a relevant, fit-for-purpose CMP that underpins its crisis management response and can be continually updated and enhanced.
- Promoted awareness of industry risk events and potential crises that may need to be prepared for and managed in the next 12-24 months.
- Identified and trained nominated CMT spokespersons that can respond to media enquiries and promote the industry's key messages during a crisis while protecting its reputation.
- Established a core CMT which has been trained in applying the CMP and can convene during industry crises to protect the industry's people, operations and reputation.

At the conclusion of the project, the industry has a revised CMP and a CMT which can be considered its baseline crisis management capability. The success of the industry's crisis management capability and continued development will be dependent on the commitment to ongoing training and revisions of the CMP, ensuring its relevance for future scenarios.

Monitoring and evaluation

Several recommendations have been made to ensure the continued development and enhancement of the industry's crisis management capability. The adoption of these is designed to consolidate the outputs of this project and ensure a continued capability based on a practical, crisis management programme (detailed in the CMP and in the following section).

Once the CMT has formally agreed on its structure and roles, industry awareness and education should be prioritised to ensure all growers and the wider horticulture industry is aware of the AMA's crisis management function and capability. As a key post-project activity, the CMT should also establish a permanent crisis management contactable number that growers can use to notify the AMA of potential crises.

Recommendations

The recommendations made in the gap analysis report (Annex A) have been incorporated into the revised CMP (Annex B) and are designed to serve solely as a reference point.

Following the development of the plan, establishing the CMT and conducting training workshops, the following recommendations are designed to ensure a permanent capability underpinned by continued development.

The key recommendations are addressed to the AMA and include:

Recommendation 1: Create additional CMT depth

Crisis management functions will invariably compete with day-to-day operations and other priorities. It is essential, where possible, that CMT roles and responsibilities are supported by alternate members, who are included in the regular crisis management programme and well-placed to support the crisis management function. This includes:

- **Identify additional industry subject matter experts**, ensuring an alternate person is available, should the primary contact be unavailable, this can also be completed through ongoing risk management and crisis management exercises.
- **Train additional core CMT members** and establish alternates for the core CMT roles, including chairperson, facilitator, communications spokesperson and log keeper, this should be considered as part of a training programme and a minimum requirement for an ongoing industry CMT capability.

Recommendation 2: Establish administrative functions

To ensure continuity of the crisis management programme and effective knowledge management, an effective administration function should be established. The CMT chairperson should be responsible for overseeing and delegating administrative functions and custodians of crisis management material, including post-incident reviews, incident logs and reports. This should evolve as resources become available.

- **Establish record keeping procedures** and user access management protocols, ensuring crisis management material and records are maintained and available for post-incident or legal review.
- **Review contact lists and communications arrangements** every three months to ensure relevance and accuracy of the lists and confirm all phone lines and teleconferencing functions are operable.
- **Review the CMP annually** to identify necessary updates, including risk register updates and overall review of the plan, consider updating more frequently if gaps are observed during future exercises or crises.

Recommendation 3: Establish a crisis management training programme

Ongoing training is an effective means of maintaining capability and capacity to respond to crises. Relevant and realistic scenarios should be used to familiarise the CMT with exercising the first response protocol and CMP until it becomes intuitive. A regular training programme will establish a benchmark for continued improvement.

- **Conduct collaborative risk storm workshops** every 6-12 months, ensuring all industry threats and risks are captured and recorded, and relevant treatments can be prioritised. This can be conducted via face to face or teleconference, requiring only a couple of hours.
- **Conduct desktop crisis management training** every six months, allowing core, supplementary and alternate members to apply the CMP in response to a realistic scenario. Contextual industry risks and relevant events should inform development of the scenarios. This should be conducted in a face-to-face environment and over the course of a half or full-day.
- **Consider semi-live scenario training** as the CMT matures in its capacity and capability. This should be considered to build the complexity of training once the CMT comfortably demonstrates its capability during desktop scenarios. The semi-live scenario should take into consideration the CMT convention process and ability to convene remotely, managing a time-based scenario. These scenarios should be conducted over the course of a half day or full day. This should be considered a long-term strategic objective as the CMT matures.

Recommendation 4: Promote industry awareness

Effective communications are essential to an effective crisis management response. Once the CMT is established and agreed, the CMT should ensure the following points of communications arrangements are in place:

- **Establish an industry single point of contact** and communicate the phone number to the wider industry, ensuring incidents and crises can be communicated to CMT by growers or other industry stakeholders.
- **Incorporate a mass messaging service** application into the crisis management programme, enabling quick and effective industry wide communications (This a longer-term strategic objective aimed at reaching growers quickly and effectively).

Refereed scientific publications

None to report.

References

Australian Melon Industry Strategic Investment Plan 2016-2021

ASIS SPC.1-2009 Organisational Resilience

ISO 22301 Business Continuity Management Systems Requirements

BS 11200 Crisis Management – Guidance and Good Practice

ISO 31000 Risk Management – Principles and Guidelines

Intellectual property, commercialisation and confidentiality

No project IP, project outputs, commercialisation or confidentiality issues to report.

Acknowledgements

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Appendices

- Annex A: CMP Gap Analysis report
- Annex B: CMP revision and enhancements
- Annex C: Risk workshop post-activity report
- Annex D: Post-activity report and next steps report
- Annex E: Industry awareness communication (flyer)