

In an attempt to restrict the spread of the destructive Panama disease TR4 in Australia, the Queensland government recently granted the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) AUD\$12.1 million (over US\$8 million) in funding.

However, starting this July it has asked that a cost-sharing arrangement be made between itself and the industry to continue efforts against the disease.

Its funding currently aids the TR4 Management and Containment Program, run by Biosecurity Queensland (BQ), which has been key in restricting the pathogen's spread.

While TR4 usually spreads rapidly, since its original discovery in Tully Valley in March 2015, it has only been detected on two other farms, thanks to the joined efforts of ABGC, BQ, individual growers, researchers, and the wider community.

During the crisis, a national levy and ABGC funds covered costs when the first infected farm, in addition to all of its operations, was shutdown to ensure containment.

"The efforts of industry, government, community, and researchers in minimising the spread of this potentially devastating disease have been world class ... But the reality is that Panama TR4 is here to stay and it will eventually spread. Therefore planning for the future is critical," said ABGC chair Stephen Lowe.

"ABGC believes that the TR4 Program is well worth investing in into the future."

To ensure it will be, ABGC and BQ have formed a group with the aim of developing a formal partnership agreement regarding the TR4 Program.

The agreement will concern how the program would be designed, delivered, funded, and managed over the next four years.

ABGC has also begun consulting with international banana growers on the new partnership agreement, specifically how the industry could fund its share.

Lowe emphasized that while the disease was contained to a relatively small area in Far North Queensland for now, slowing the inevitable spread is beneficial for the banana industry as a whole.