

# OUR GROWTH AGENDA

Priorities for a Flourishing  
Nursery Sector



## CEO'S MESSAGE

The nursery industry is the quiet powerhouse behind Australia's green spaces, sustainable agriculture, urban forests, and biodiversity. From the plants that line our city streets to the crops that feed our communities, wholesale nurseries are where it all begins.

For an industry so deeply rooted in our nation's growth and resilience, the role of public policy in shaping our future cannot be overstated. Policy decisions made today will influence how we respond to climate change, water security, biosecurity threats, housing demand, and green infrastructure needs tomorrow.

That's why this document is more than just a list of "nice to haves". It is a call to action. A vision for how smart, strategic policy can unlock the full potential of the nursery sector to deliver jobs, sustainability outcomes, and economic growth.

We believe the nursery industry deserves to be recognised not just as a supplier, but as a key enabler of state and national priorities. With the right settings in place—across planning, procurement, environment, and investment—our industry can do what it does best: grow.

On behalf of our board, I extend our sincere thanks to the GIQ members who contributed their time, insights, and expertise in shaping this document. Their lived experience on the ground ensures that our advocacy is grounded in reality—and that our recommendations reflect the true needs and opportunities of the sector.

Evidence-based policy, backed by industry knowledge, is essential if we are to meet the challenges ahead and fully realise the value the greenlife industry offers to Queensland and beyond.

Together, let's cultivate a stronger, greener future for all.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Colin Fruk".

Colin Fruk  
Chief Executive Officer

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# SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESS GROWERS

## What's the problem?

Queensland horticulture is worth around \$1 billion annually, making it one of the largest parts of the agriculture sector, however many Queensland greenlife industry growers and retailers are being squeezed like never before.

In fact, we are seeing the longest sustained period of low business confidence in the past 30 years.

In many cases, our costs are growing faster than our plants. A new survey shows greenlife businesses face a double whammy in soaring input costs and a subdued economy. What's more, almost half of the industry's operators expect their profits to decline further over coming months.

When greenlife businesses fail, it affects more than just a family and their employees. The market becomes less competitive, corporations gain more market power, product variety narrows, and customers are forced to pay more for the plants they buy.

Even though our industry is worth billions, the vast majority of greenlife businesses are small and medium enterprises who do not have the capital reserves or supply chain power to navigate an increasingly complex trading environment.

Greenlife Industry Qld is doing our bit to tackle the problem, including:

- alerting members to changes in legislation, regulation and the operating environment
- working side-by-side with program partners to help nursery owners build their business resilience, both by improving productivity and reducing costs and risks
- scanning for government grant and assistance programs and communicating opportunities to production and retail nurseries
- lobbying for lower taxes and less red tape on small and medium greenlife businesses
- representing the industry and individual businesses on specific issues and challenges
- introducing nursery owners to new greenlife buyers
- educating nursery owners about how government procurement works and helping them apply for local and state government contracts
- helping nursery owners to develop succession or exit plans

## What is Greenlife Industry Qld's position?

1. We believe independent growers and retailers are critical to keep Queensland horticulture competitive and sustainable. Smaller businesses deserve **special policies and special support**.
2. We want all levels of government to **drastically reduce the red tape** which is slowly strangling small businesses. 91% of Greenlife Industry Qld members said government over-regulation is a constraint on their business. Fire ant compliance is a significant red tape burden, but regulations are a concern across the board.
3. We need the Queensland Government to **do more to alleviate the cost of power** for small businesses. For their size, growers use a lot of power, and we are paying now for years of government inaction to stabilise electricity prices. While the Federal Government is responsible for national energy policy, the Queensland Government must invest more wisely in both regional power generation and transmission infrastructure. Co-investing with nursery businesses to implement more on-farm generation and storage would make Queensland horticulture more sustainable, and take pressure off our already struggling power networks.
4. Payroll tax is a major drag on medium businesses, and acts as a disincentive for successful small growers. Growing plants is a labour intensive exercise, and payroll tax unfairly penalises our industry in particular. **Payroll tax is a tax on jobs and a plan must be developed to phase it out** and, over time, abolish it completely.
5. The **burden of land tax on small businesses must be addressed** by capping increases and implementing phased assessments.
6. We call on the Queensland Government to **establish a Greenlife Industry Small Business Growth Fund**, a state or federal co-investment fund to support small nursery businesses with modernisation projects, site expansion, workforce development, and entry into new markets (e.g. export, urban greening, online retail).
7. 51% of Queensland nursery growers say they have not experienced any productivity improvements in the past five years, due in large part to the extra input costs and wage increases they are incurring. 82% of growers say they would appreciate more support to increase efficiencies and implement productivity-saving technologies into their businesses. We call on the Queensland Government to provide **funding to support digital transformation in the greenlife industry**. This may include grants or co-contributions to aid in digital adoption projects such as online sales platforms, inventory management systems, customer engagement tools, digital marketing and e-commerce training. This would improve competitiveness and help smaller nurseries reach broader markets.

8. Only 4% of small businesses in Queensland agree that it's easy to sell to government. Government procurement programs say they favour small and medium businesses by applying a weighting to SMEs, but in reality we do not believe this is effective. **Government buyers need to be more transparent in their dealings** and they must make applying for government work simpler and less time-consuming.
9. Insurance is becoming unaffordable for greenlife businesses, especially those based in Queensland's northern parts. **Governments need to step in to address the insurance market's failure** and either work with re-insurers to create affordable coverage, or invest in reinsurance pools to bring premiums down. Stamp duty must be abolished on insurance premiums.
10. Both the State and Federal Governments need to **increase support for horticulture apprenticeships and traineeships**, including financial incentives for growers to hire and train apprentices. They should provide funding support for partnerships between industry and TAFE to ensure training programs are relevant and include on-the-job learning.

# A FAIRER DEAL FOR GROWERS FROM THE BIG BOX STORES

## What's the problem?

Australian retailers of greenlife products, including major supermarkets and big box retailers, have accumulated significant market share and far too much bargaining power, which they use to suppress prices paid to production nurseries and inflate the prices they charge to consumers.

The price setting and other practices of these retailers impact regional communities disproportionately, having the effect of transferring wealth from these regional communities directly to supermarket shareholders.

In a cost-of-living crisis, the Federal Government should step in where the drive within public companies toward greater profits is compromising the sustainability of the greenlife industry and consumer access to affordable greenlife products.

Greenlife Industry Qld is doing our bit to tackle the problem, including:

- participating in a negotiation with Bunnings Warehouse to introduce a new greenlife industry trading framework, which promotes fairness through clear buyer obligations
- collecting de-identified business level data to support the case for stricter protections for greenlife producers
- training greenlife growers in trade negotiation strategies
- running trade days and a variety of consumer-facing events and campaigns, to support independent growers and retailers

## What is Greenlife Industry Qld's position?

1. The Federal Government should legislate to put **Big Box greenlife retailers under the Food & Grocery Code of Conduct**, effectively giving nursery growers the same protection as food growers. Alternatively, a standalone Greenlife Code of Conduct should be legislated to balance the bargaining power between Big Box retailers and nursery growers.
2. The Federal Government should properly resource the ACCC to monitor and enforce compliance with competition law. This should include **giving the ACCC powers to monitor retailers' trading practices** and audit retailers for compliance with relevant codes.

3. The Federal Government should **introduce divestiture powers to act as an ultimate sanction** for gross and malicious breaches of market power by supermarkets and Big Box stores.
4. The Federal Government should amend competition law concerning collective bargaining class exemptions specifically for horticulture businesses to make this more accessible and **introduce legislation to compel buyers to engage with groups of growers.**



# DOING OUR PART IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FIRE ANTS

## What's the problem?

Red imported fire ants are a threat to Queensland because they can damage the environment, threaten business' profitability, and negatively impact Queenslanders' health and lifestyle.

Fire ants were first detected in Queensland in February 2001 and since then efforts to stop their spread have seen mixed results. The National Fire Ant Eradication Program works to contain and destroy the ants, but the infestation area continues to expand outwards and now encompasses most of South East Queensland.

If they're not stopped, fire ants could potentially live in almost all of Queensland and Australia. The Queensland Government has costed the impacts of fire ants in Australia at \$43 billion over 30 years.

Horticulture producers are considered as high-risk potential spreaders of fire ants. Fire ants can spread by 'hitchhiking' in shipments of soil and growing media, landscape material, construction backfill and turf, among other things. Fire ants pose a real threat to every Australian jurisdiction, as they are easily transported through freight or river systems.

Greenlife Industry Qld is doing our bit to tackle the problem, including:

- working closely with the National Fire Ant Eradication Program to quickly communicate suspected fire ant nests as they are detected
- educating growers about their legal responsibility to adopt new biosecurity processes, such as spraying and tracking growing media through the supply chain
- fearlessly representing the views and needs of nursery growers in cases where the rules and regulations are having unintended or unnecessary negative impacts on the industry

## What is Greenlife Industry Qld's position?

1. We acknowledge that the fire ants issue is serious. We **fully commit to taking any practical steps** which help contain and eradicate fire ants from our state.
2. We applaud the 2023-27 National Fire Ant response strategy and associated funding and we call on all **state and federal governments to continue to cooperate and co-fund national solutions** to fire ant spread. A 2021 report estimated that an

annual investment of between \$300M and \$500M over 10 years would be required to eradicate fire ants by 2032.

3. We call on the Department of Primary Industries to **establish a Fire Ant Industry Advisory Panel**, a permanent advisory body made up of nursery growers, landscape suppliers, transport and logistics reps, and biosecurity experts. This would ensure ongoing consultation and early warning of proposed regulatory changes that affect industry. It would also promote a cross-industry and national approach to movement certification. Growers need consistency across jurisdictions and a focus on best practice protocols.
4. We call on the Department of Primary Industries to utilise the trusted position of Greenlife Industry Queensland in educating nurseries about the fire ant risk, and their obligations both inside and outside declared biosecurity zones. Growers will always respond better to industry than government representatives. We believe the **Department of Primary Industries should fund Greenlife Industry Queensland to employ Fire Ant Outreach Officers** – non-government advisers who can work effectively with growers to ensure they are compliant with biosecurity obligations if growers are inside a zone, and that growers know about and are prepared to meet new biosecurity obligations if they are outside a zone.
5. We call for a **significantly increased effort by the National Fire Ant Eradication Program**, as the lead partner in eradicating the ants, including more government resources to detect and destroy nests.
6. We expect the **Department of Primary Industries to improve response times** when suspected fire ants are reported. Exterminations should happen within a few days, at most, after initial notification.
7. We urge the Department of Primary Industries to **prioritise direct nest injection with fipronil around nursery sites**. Baiting with pyriproxyfen or S-methoprene, by itself, has been shown not to be an effective strategy.
8. We urge the Department of Primary Industries to **invest more in detector dogs**, as a much more effective way of finding fire ants in cases of biosecurity zone breaches.
9. We **support the possibility of legal action against property owners** who refuse National Fire Ant Eradication Program officials access to their property to treat fire ants.
10. We call on the Department of Primary Industries **provide growers with financial assistance to subsidise labour and chemical costs**, in cases where they are required to preventatively treat plants and/or media against fire ants. We support investigating price caps on bifenthrin, government rebates for growers in declared fire ant zones, and approving other active ingredients to create more competition and lower chemical prices.

11. We want an **end to mandatory spraying or drenching as a means of preventing fire ant infestations**. Growers who have never experienced fire ants on their properties should be trusted to conduct regular visual inspections of their site, instead of being asked to pay for expensive chemicals and additional labour. This is especially the case in “hot spot” zones where there is no widespread infestation.
12. We call on state and federal governments to **cut the red tape when it comes to complying with different state regimes**. Queensland growers are subject to multiple inspections, multiple application processes and multiple fees to move their products across state borders. Fire ants are a national problem, and the solutions must be nationally harmonised.

# GETTING VALUE FROM THE NURSERY LEVY

## What's the problem?

The nursery products levy (better known as the pot levy) is a government-mandated industry contribution that funds research and development (R&D), biosecurity, and marketing to support Australia's nursery industry. In the 2023/24 financial year, Australia's nursery industry collected approximately \$2.79 million in levy funds from growers.

The Australian Government's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry (DAFF) collects the funds, but it does not decide how the money is spent. Where the levy money goes is up to Hort Innovation, the main body responsible for managing research and development in Australia's horticulture sector. A Research & Development Committee, comprising levy payers, advises Hort Innovation on which projects to fund.

The nursery levy is used in four key areas:

- Research & Development overseen by Hort Innovation (55% of Levy Funds)
  - research to improve plant quality, sustainability, and nursery efficiency
  - assisting growers to develop climate-resilient plants
  - technology investments in automation, smart irrigation, and pest control
  - adoption of sustainable production methods (e.g., water recycling, biodegradable plant pots).
  - data and analytics to support better decision-making in the industry
- Marketing & Promotion overseen by Hort Innovation (40% of Levy Funds)
  - campaigns to increase consumer demand for nursery plants
  - promotes the environmental and health benefits of green spaces
  - encourages landscapers, councils, and developers to source plants from Australian nurseries
- Biosecurity Programs overseen by Plant Health Australia (5% of Levy Funds)
  - supports early detection and control of plant pests and diseases
  - funds nursery hygiene programs to reduce biosecurity risks
  - provides growers with training and response strategies for outbreaks
- Administration & Levy Collection
  - a small percentage of the levy goes to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to cover levy collection costs and program administration

The nursery levy does not go to Greenlife Industry Queensland, or any other peak industry body, and we have no say in how the levy money is put to use. Greenlife Industry Australia (GIA) represents levy payers and, with others, advises Hort Innovation on levy priorities. While the levy provides crucial industry support, many growers have raised concerns about its effectiveness.

Greenlife Industry Qld is doing our bit to tackle the problem, including:

- increasing transparency of the program by communicating with growers about how the levy funds are being spent
- regularly surveying greenlife producers in Queensland about their main challenges and constraints, and creating dedicated feedback loops on the levy to understand sentiments and priorities
- actively connecting with GIA, Hort Innovation and individual project leads to understand the objectives and effectiveness of levy-funded initiatives
- applying for levy funding ourselves, to deliver projects which Queensland growers say they want and need

## What is Greenlife Industry Qld's position?

1. The nursery levy is a critical funding mechanism for supporting the nursery industry. However, **there is room for improvement** in how the levy is managed.
2. We believe Hort Innovation and GIA can do a better job of engaging growers in decision making about how nursery levy funds are spent, and which specific projects are funded. Greenlife Industry Queensland is keen to lead **a more effective, more consistent, levy-payer friendly consultation process** which better engages both large and small production nurseries.
3. We call for a **balanced levy-funded project distribution across grower segments**. We believe the investment committee should demonstrate that projects are balanced across small, medium, and large businesses, retail vs production nurseries, and regional vs metro areas. This prevents over-concentration of funds and promotes equity in benefit distribution.
4. We believe the **levy Investment Committee should be restructured** to give state industry bodies more say in nursery levy investments. The national body, GIA, currently manages the nursery levy investment process which allocated more than \$3M in project funding in 2023/24. Most of that funding went to GIA and Hort Innovation, with other funds going to the Federal Department of Agriculture. We call for a more

decentralised system of appointing investment committee members, in which each state industry association nominates one levy payer from their state or territory. Another three expert committee members, to be drawn from research and academia, would be nominated by GIA. State associations are closer to levy payers “on the ground”, so an investment committee nominated by state industry bodies would increase the chances that funds are invested in projects which growers deem relevant, practical and valuable.

5. Many Queensland growers feel they do not have enough visibility over how levy funds are being spent. We call on **Hort Innovation to publish a detailed project summary** annually, with details of project funding, project owners and partners, detailed project expenditure and interim/final results.
6. We believe Hort Innovation should **introduce a policy requiring independent audits or reviews** of levy-funded projects over \$250,000 to assess value for money, measurable industry impact, and adoption by growers or other end users. Findings should be made public to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.
7. We call upon Hort Innovation to **introduce a transparent, forward-looking Levy Investment Plan**. We believe levy payers should be provided with a 3-year rolling investment roadmap that outlines strategic priorities for levy funding, anticipated budget allocations by category (R&D, marketing, biosecurity), key performance indicators (KPIs) and expected industry outcomes. This will give growers a clearer sense of direction and allow them to assess whether investments align with real industry needs.
8. We call on Hort Innovation to **benchmark and continually measure levy-payer satisfaction** with consultation about levy management and the industry value of each funded project. While nursery growers are unlikely to ever be satisfied with paying any kind of levy, there should be a process by which to gauge levy-payers’ overall perception of value delivered as a result of their contributions.

# DRIVING DEMAND FOR GREENLIFE THROUGH URBAN GREENING STANDARDS

## What's the problem?

Greenlife Industry Qld recognises the vital role that urban greening plays in enhancing liveability, mitigating climate change, supporting biodiversity, and improving public health outcomes.

More urban greening through parks, green corridors and urban forests will:

- absorb carbon to improve air quality and reduce global warming
- lower temperatures in built-up areas
- soak up rainwater to reduce runoff and prevent flooding
- provide habitats for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife
- enhance liveability and lead to better mental health outcomes by encouraging relaxation, exercise, social connection and active transport

Research also shows that urban greening increases property values. Homes and businesses near green spaces tend to sell for more and attract more buyers and tenants.

Greenlife Industry Qld is doing our bit to tackle the problem, including:

- connecting growers with urban placemakers like urban developers, landscape construction companies, town planners and local governments
- supporting initiatives to bring community, growers, government, business, and everyday people together to create green spaces in homes, streets, and suburbs
- helping retail nurseries market the benefits of gardening to their customers
- engaging the general public in growing plants through the Royal Queensland Show (Ekka) and the Queensland Garden Show

## What is Greenlife Industry Qld's position?

1. We call on governments to develop and implement national and state **urban greening strategies with measurable targets** for tree canopy cover and green infrastructure. This would include creating a national urban greening data framework



to track canopy cover, biodiversity improvements, and community benefits. Local governments should be required to report annually on urban greening initiatives and progress towards set targets with the overarching goal of achieving at least 30% tree canopy cover.

2. We support Standards Australia in its work to **develop an Urban Green Infrastructure handbook** with a uniform framework to guide project planners and practitioners.
3. We support **mandated green infrastructure performance reporting for major developments**. Developers should be required to measure and report on urban greening elements of large-scale infrastructure or residential projects, such as canopy cover, biodiversity, stormwater capture, and heat island reduction.
4. We support the **creation of a green infrastructure certification program**, a nationally recognised certification or rating system for urban greening projects that meet high environmental, biodiversity, and social impact standards similar to NABERS or Green Star, but focused on living infrastructure.
5. We urge local governments to:
  - a. **strengthen planning policies to mandate green infrastructure** in new private developments and major infrastructure projects, ensuring that new road, rail, and utility corridors are planned with green buffer zones, tree lines, and landscape integration from the outset, not as an afterthought
  - b. **introduce green space zoning requirements** to ensure equitable distribution of green areas
  - c. **invest more in greening public spaces** including streetscapes, transport corridors, parks and community gardens
  - d. **mandate green infrastructure in public projects** such as schools, hospitals and transport hubs
6. We encourage developers to **use climate-resilient species** in urban greening projects, to enhance each project's sustainability.
7. We call on the federal and state governments to **establish dedicated urban greening funds**, to support local councils and community-led projects and incentivise property developers, businesses, and homeowners to incorporate green infrastructure such as green roofs, walls, and urban forests.
8. We support **expanded funding for tree-planting programs** in metropolitan, regional, and suburban areas.
9. We back more **research and development in greenlife industry innovation**, including resilient plant species and sustainable landscape solutions.
10. We call on the Queensland Government to **integrate urban greening education into school curricula** and public awareness campaigns.



# IMPROVING CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN OUR INDUSTRY

## What's the problem?

Queensland's production nurseries play a critical role in supplying plants for landscaping, food production, forestry, and urban greening. However, the state's tropical and subtropical climate exposes nurseries to extreme weather events, making resilience a top priority.

Queensland experiences some of Australia's most severe climate conditions. Cyclones and strong storms in coastal and northern regions cause damage to nursery infrastructure and plants. Sudden hail events damage young plants, greenhouses, and irrigation systems. And at the other extreme, drought and heat waves reduce water availability, increase evaporation, and stress plants.

Without proper resilience measures, extreme weather can wipe out nursery stock, damage facilities, and disrupt supply chains. The Queensland nursery industry is worth over \$1 billion annually, supplying plants to local councils, landscapers, farmers and retailers across Australia, so severe weather can lead to huge financial losses nationwide.

Of course, behind most production nurseries is a family business. So weather disruptions can take a human toll too. Extreme weather events have an extreme financial and emotional impact on farmers, their families and their employees.

Greenlife Industry Qld is doing our bit to tackle the problem, including:

- lobbying for and co-ordinating support for production nurseries during times of drought, flood and storms
- advancing policies which make running a greenlife business more sustainable, such as water security, resilient infrastructure, disaster recovery support and energy and water efficiency
- setting nursery owners up with technical experts who can help them implement solar and battery solutions, and more economical irrigation
- providing advice and education to greenlife growers to help them build better businesses, so they have the capital and future orders to manage through periods of extreme weather

## What is Greenlife Industry Qld's position?

1. **Industry and governments need to work together**, and invest together, to ensure Queensland has a sustainable horticulture and greenlife production industry. Nurseries and governments both have to contribute to make the industry and the businesses within it more sustainable and profitable over time.

2. We support an **extension to the Farm Business Resilience Program**, which provides nursery growers with government-funded expert advice to improve their drought resilience and overall business resilience.
3. We support a **review into the insurance industry** to determine what role the Federal Government can play (if any) to bring business insurance premiums to an affordable level, especially in the north of the state. This could include the government providing reinsurance guarantees for targeted industries and regions.
4. We call on both the Queensland and the Australian Government to **factor a “build back better” element into disaster recovery** assistance programs. Currently, disaster recovery grants can only be used to fund “like for like” infrastructure. Governments would save billions by offering growers a 20% “top up” on existing grants to enable greenlife businesses to invest in more resilient infrastructure (e.g. cyclone-rated sheds, bitumen sealed roads, reinforced water catchments, etc).
5. We **support the Queensland Government’s current review of the state’s water plans**. We believe the greenlife industry should be prioritised for water allocation given production nurseries’ ability to conserve and recycle water on-farm.
6. We call on the Queensland Government to **extend the Horticultural Irrigation Pricing Rebate scheme** for Sunwater clients, to provide an effective 15 per cent discount on water charges for horticultural growers.
7. We support **grants or tax incentives to greenlife producers to implement recycled water** systems, drip irrigation and moisture sensors and rainwater harvesting infrastructure.
8. We support **research on controlled-environment nurseries** which use automated climate control to protect plants from heat waves and extreme cold.
9. We call on the Department of Primary Industries to **extend the Drought Preparedness Grant Program**, as an accessible way for greenlife growers to make capital investments which improve long-term sustainability such as wind-resistant and hail-proof enclosures, drainage systems, windbreaks and protective netting.

# ABOUT US

Greenlife Industry Queensland (GIQ) is the voice of Queensland's production nurseries and greenlife supply chain—an essential sector underpinning agriculture, urban development, climate resilience, and biosecurity. Valued at over \$1 billion annually in Queensland alone, the greenlife industry grows the plants critical to our food systems, revegetation efforts, and green infrastructure. NGIQ works closely with government to ensure policy settings enable a sustainable, skilled, and biosecure industry—positioning greenlife as a strategic partner in delivering environmental and economic outcomes for the state.

## Acknowledgements

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