



Chair's report

Steve Rathjen

The past 12 months have been busy for Onions Australia, with many events and accomplishments along the way.

Droughts across the Murray Darling Basin and most of Australia, having diminished our water storage capacity to an all-time low, are on everyone's minds. This is stressful and concerning to growers who have reduced plantings in the hope we are looking forward to the return of wetter and normal weather patterns across Australia to replenish our water storage for the irrigation upon which our future is so reliant.

Yet there is much work being done in our industry, with much to be positive about, and industry-wide discussion and forward planning remains important for us all. To this end, Onions Australia, in conjunction with AusVeg, held a conference from 29 May to 1 June at the Sydney Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour, with the theme 'Vegetables Claim Centre Plate'. This was a great opportunity to attend sessions with keynote speakers, such as

- Professor Peter Cullen, National Water Commission
- Michael Luscombe, CEO Woolworths
- Robert Belcher, Sustainable Agriculture and many more.

During the year, Onions Australia has worked with a number of primary industries departments from around Australia, Australian Quarantine Inspection Services, Horticulture Australia and Plant Health Australia to develop a national Industry Biosecurity Plan to protect

the onion industry from the risk of exotic pests and diseases entering Australia which would be of a major concern to our industry. The plan was completed and officially launched at the Trade Exhibition Hall, Darling Harbour, in conjunction with the conference. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody involved—may we look forward to this plan carrying our industry into a future free from exotic pests and diseases.

Onions Australia also held several well-attended workshops in conjunction with general meetings around Australia with a very good cross-section of the onion industry chain to develop its Strategic Plan 2006–2011. With the aid of Horticulture Australia Limited and Russell Cummings as facilitator, a Strategic Plan has been launched and four main strategic imperatives identified as follows:

1. Grow the market for Australian onion products.
2. Improve industry competitiveness.
3. Strengthen industry information and communication networks.
4. Identify and build industry leadership and capacity.

The executive committee members are working towards these imperatives with several projects including a communication project featuring a new electronic data collection system, a mild onion certification project, the next stage of the biosecurity plan (involving a deed of responsibility), and the sending of a delegation including two scholarship recipients to represent Australia at the 5th International Symposium of Edible Alliaceae and the 2nd World Onion Congress held in the Netherlands from 25 October to 8 November 2007.

The symposium brought together hundreds of delegates from 32 countries from around the world. This was an ideal opportunity for our representatives to network within the world onion industry while investigating the latest research and developments from around the world. Tour organiser Dan Weddell reports on the trip on Page 29 in this magazine.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the executive committee members for their commitment and work over the past 12 months and the executive officer, Joanne, for her dedication, efficiency and commitment to Onions Australia. Their work helps to build a strong industry association which in turn serves all of us in the industry well.

Steve Rathjen

Chair, Onions Australia