

# Movers & Shakers

## Sustainability 'at the core'

By GREGOR HEARD

**C**REATING a sustainable plant nutrition industry in the long term is the goal of Incitec Pivot's general manager of fertiliser, Gary Brinkworth.

"We are taking the opportunity to work through how products get more efficient and how the fertiliser industry changes to a more globalised marketplace," he said.

"Sustainability is the biggest issue and at the core of that is ensuring the right science to drive effective nutrient management."

But he said it was not just the environment that IPL was working to foster.

"When we talk about sustainability, it is not just environmental sustainability, but also in the context of the ongoing viability of the rural communities that underpin agriculture."

"There are hundreds of people in rural communities, all over the country, and IPL is providing good employment opportunities."

In terms of better nutrient management, Mr Brinkworth said it was a matter of ensuring the right nutrients went in the right places. "There are technologies that look at issues such as nitrification and volatilisation," he said.

Soil testing was also becoming more sophisticated.

"Traditionally, there was just a soil test. Now we are doing deeper testing and making sure farmers know what to apply and when for best results, ensuring they have more understanding of how the nutrients work."

This year, Mr Brinkworth said the focus was on the full nutrition suite, after a good season.

He said issues such as trace element management, ensuring farmers best leverage their nutrient application, was important.

"Agriculture is highly competi-

ive, and Aussie farmers need to leverage every opportunity to make best use of our sometimes difficult conditions," he said.

"This is where really sophisticated nutrient management comes into its own."

He reeled off a list of techniques, including precision agriculture and coated fertiliser with lower volatilisation rates, as examples of the improvement in technology in Australia.

Mr Brinkworth believes liquid fertilisers will be increasingly important.

"They have a huge scope, especially in parts of Australia where rainfall is less reliable," he said. "I don't think we've fully explored it yet."

"I am excited about liquids and how they can help growers get a better return from investment."

While Incitec Pivot will continue to diversify into other areas, such as explosives, through its Dyno Nobel business, Mr Brinkworth believes its plant nutrition arm will continue to be an important business sector.

"Although the share of earnings that fertiliser contributes may diminish, it will still be an important part of ensuring we have a robust business overall," he said.

Mr Brinkworth believed there was a base for an ongoing Australian-based fertiliser business.

In spite of the trend for overseas takeovers of Australian agribusinesses, he said IPL was happy with its market position.

"There certainly are challenges surrounding being a manufacturer of fertiliser, but we believe we have a strong manufacturing asset that really underpins the fertiliser business as a whole," he said.

After the company came under flak from farmer groups during 2007-08, when fertiliser prices



### A different path for Gary

INCITEC PIVOT executive Gary Brinkworth came to a position at the pointy end of Australian agribusiness via an unusual path.

Before taking up his role with IPL in July 2008 he spent 17 years in the energy sector in the US, the UK and New Zealand. One of his key roles was managing the distribution end of the businesses, which has been a key part of his current position.

"Within that experience, I have also done quite a bit in retail, distribution and financial services," he said.

Before coming to IPL he was with BP Energy group, but the call of home brought a return to Australia, where he managed Coles' business development unit.

"My experience has been running large distribution businesses," he said.

"I've operated in environments with a lot of change and volatility, which stands me in good stead here."

"When the opportunity with IPL presented itself, just after the company had bought Dyno Nobel, it was too good to refuse."

"Since then IPL has become a multi-national organisation, and I have experience with international businesses."

He said working in agriculture suited him well.

"It is a good space to be in. Agriculture is vital to the nation and the world in terms of feeding the people."

increased rapidly, Mr Brinkworth said he believed it now had better relationships with its customers, both at a farmer and retail level.

"We have great support with both these groups," he said. "Obviously, they have ebbed and flowed over time, but we are trying to rebuild those farmer relationships and rebuild that trust - its an important investment for our business."

Mr Brinkworth said the company was working hard at research, development and extension level on nutrition issues.

"We are investing in agronomy and trial work and trying to provide the information to growers,"

he said.

"There is a focus to ensure we are more easily available for grower field days, recognising we are part of the same industry."

"We are trying to be seen as a responsible partner in nutrient management. It is not about us selling you as much fertiliser as we can, it's about finding the right nutrient levels to suit your circumstances. It is not in our interest in the long term to get farmers to over-apply nutrients."

Mr Brinkworth said he saw the Australian fertiliser space as constantly evolving, with several new players and the demise of others.

#### Curriculum vitae

##### Gary Brinkworth

- ◆ Spent 17 years in the energy sector in the US, the UK and New Zealand
- ◆ Also formerly managed Coles' business development unit
- ◆ Now general manager of fertiliser at Incitec Pivot

#### Uncertainty the only certainty

INCITEC Pivot's Gary Brinkworth believes the volatility that has marked the fertiliser industry over the past five years will continue to be a distinguishing feature of the sector in the medium term.

"Prices have increased from their lows in the phosphate area but that appears to have plateaued now, given we have

more production on line in Saudi Arabia and Africa," he said.

"However, there is a solid global demand for product, so you would not expect prices to drop off too much."

"In recent times, there has been some movement in nitrogen prices, which we would expect to continue

in the future."

He said volatility would continue, especially with artificial price flashpoints, such as Chinese export tariffs.

"With Chinese fertiliser production, obviously availability is tied to the current tax regime," he said.

"Currently, the tariffs are off, or are about to be, but there is

always uncertainty there, which creates volatility in the market."

Mr Brinkworth said while market prices would jump around, the trend was for firmer prices.

"They are likely to be volatile, but you'd say they will be firming in the near term," he said.

## Quality Product Quality Service



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