

## ABC RURAL

# Flower industry concerned about bloom imports and biosecurity fights for Australian-made labelling

ABC Rural / By [Eden Hynninen](#) and [Lucy Barbour](#)

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Australia imports millions of flower stems each year from countries like Kenya, Ecuador, Colombia and Malaysia. (Supplied: Aldo Vumbaca)

Local flower growers have come up with their own Australian-grown label, as pressure mounts on the Federal Government to mandate country-of-origin labelling for imported flowers.

Flower growers are concerned about the high volume of imports and [the biosecurity risks they bring](#), and said consumers deserve to know where flowers are grown.

New South Wales flower grower, Sal Russo, helped launch the label and said more than 16 Australian growers are already using it on their packaging.

"We've spent in excess of four years trying to make this registered trademark, called Australian Grown Flowers," Mr Russo said.

He said that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) had already approved the label.

## Florists looking local

### Key points:

- Australian flower industry, concerned with the number of imports and biosecurity risks, creates their own Australian-made label
- Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud has written to the Federal Industry Minister asking for country-of-origin labelling to be made compulsory for imported flowers
- Growers hope the Australian-made label will give consumers more awareness and choice when buying flowers

Mr Russo said a "growing number" of florists had since chosen to use the label because they believed customers were becoming "more concerned about where their flowers are coming from".

Each year, Australia imports millions of flower stems — mainly roses, chrysanthemums and carnations — from countries such as Kenya, Ecuador, Colombia and Malaysia.

Those imports are sold everywhere from supermarkets to florists and petrol stations.

National farm lobby groups and many growers are [concerned about the number of flowers found with foreign pests and diseases](#) when they arrive in Australia.

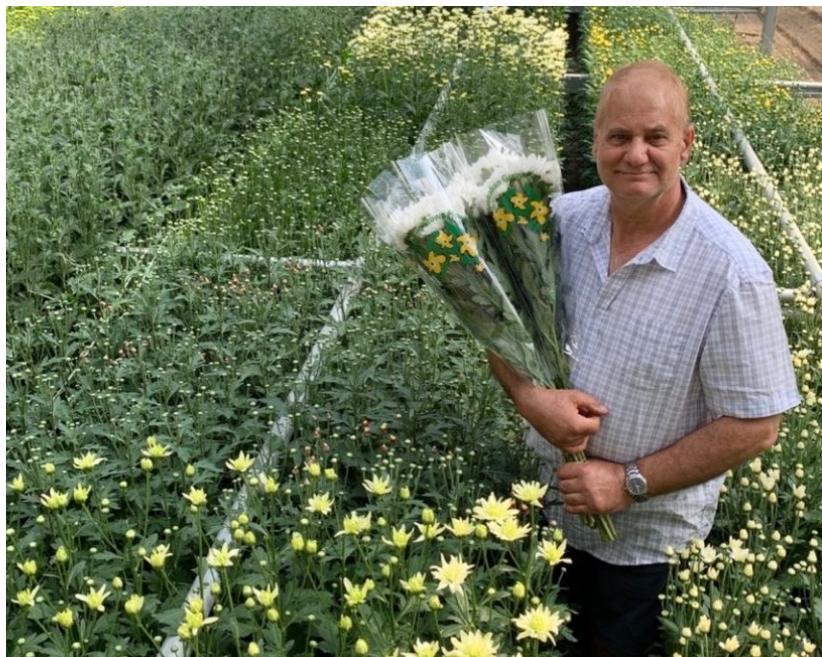
But the Federal Department of Agriculture said those numbers had decreased and that no pests or diseases from imported flowers had made it past quarantine inspectors.

The ABC understands the Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud has written to the Federal Industry Minister, Karen Andrews, asking for country of origin labelling to be made compulsory for imported flowers.

The government is reviewing country of origin labelling, and is considering what other products it should be compulsory for.



Australian flower growers created the registered trademark, Australian Grown Flowers, in December 2018. (Supplied)



ey flower grower, Aldo Vumbaca, first started trialling the Australian grown label near at a local market. (Supplied: Aldo Vumbaca)

## Trialling the label

Sydney flower grower, Aldo Vumbaca, has been in the flower trade for more than 40 years and first started trialling the Australian grown label last year at a local market.

"We get repeat sales because customers are coming back wanting to support local — they can't believe it when they hear

about the number of imports," Mr Vumbaca said.

The Victorian Flower Industry has backed the move and hoped it will give consumers more awareness, particularly given imports have dropped due to the pandemic.

Flowers Victoria Chair, Michael van der Zwet, said with the low number of imports during COVID-19, the Australian grown label might help promote local growers.

"I'm a great believer in the Australian psyche to buy Australian," Mr van der Zwet said.

"I think when the public learns that there's a lot more flowers grown within Australia, I'm sure we'll be supported."

## 'Australian voice for Australian grown'

Victorian grower, Danielle White, has produced paddock-grown roses and peonies on her property in central Victoria for the past five years.



er imports have dropped during COVID-19. (Supplied: Aldo Vumbaca)

She said during COVID-19 business had been slow because wedding flower orders had dried up.

But during the downtime, Ms White connected with local and larger growers in the industry, with positive results.

"An opportunity came up to collaborate with other small growers in the Macedon Ranges and Daylesford areas, so we started a group called Consortium Botanicus, that promotes local and seasonal flower farming," she said.

In recent months, larger growers have reached out to Consortium Botanicus members.

They have since formed the Flower Industry Association that looks to promote the Australian flower industry.

"It bodes well for the health of Australia's floraculture and it's an upside to come out of an otherwise challenging period for

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growers," Ms White said.



ers Victoria Chair Michael van der Zwet said he hoped the Australian grown label  
t help promote local growers. (Supplied: Michael Van Der Zwet)

## 'Silver lining'

While Melbourne is under Stage 4 lockdowns, and regional Victoria Stage 3, many florist shopfront doors are closed, but inside some businesses are still turning a profit.

South Melbourne florist, Summer Markopoulos, said there had been a silver lining to the second lockdown in Victoria, with delivery orders almost doubling since the pandemic began.

"We still have a lot of customers that would like to come in and see what they're buying, but our regulars know what they want and can give us a call — it's pretty straight forward," Ms Markopoulos said.