

# The *Eucalyptus* stem canker pathogen *Teratosphaeria zuluensis* detected in seed samples

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## Abstract

The global spread of *Eucalyptus* pathogens is thought to be facilitated by the trade in seed for the establishment of new plantations and breeding programmes. In this study we used high-throughput amplicon sequencing to elucidate whether this might be true for the *Eucalyptus* stem pathogen *Teratosphaeria zuluensis* in South Africa. DNA libraries were obtained for seed-capsules, clean seed, one-month-old seedlings grown in a phytotron, plants grown *in vitro* in a tissue culture facility as well as leaves and stems of three-month-old seedlings exposed to a *Eucalyptus* plantation environment. The DNA libraries were sequenced using high-throughput Illumina MiSeq and 454 technologies. Sequencing revealed the presence of

several OTUs in the Botryosphaeriaceae, Mycosphaerellaceae and Teratosphaeriaceae in seed and seed-capsules and amongst these, OTUs that cluster close to *T. zuluensis*. OTUs from the Mycosphaerellaceae were also recovered from seedlings grown in a phytotron, *in vitro* propagated seedlings and those exposed to the plantation environment. The results support the view that important *Eucalyptus* pathogens, including *T. zuluensis*, can be spread via the trade in seed.

**Keywords:** Endophytes, High-throughput sequencing, Horizontal transmission, Quarantine, Seed-capsules, Vertical transmission

## Introduction

The growing international trade in plants and plant products is contributing substantially to the spread of invasive alien plant pests and pathogens (Palm and Rossman, 2003; Brasier, 2008). Several recent studies have shown that the global movement of germplasm, particularly of living plants, as well as plant products such as untreated timber, is responsible for approximately 50% of new invasions by plant pathogens and pests (e.g. Aukema *et al.*, 2010; Haack *et al.*, 2010; Liebhold *et al.*, 2012). These have resulted in significant economic and ecological losses to agriculture and forestry (Pimentel *et al.*, 2005; Rossman, 2009).

The global domestication of Australian *Eucalyptus* species for plantation establishment has resulted in a substantial movement of seed and timber products across borders (Wingfield *et al.*, 2008, 2010). It is currently estimated that more than 20 million hectares of *Eucalyptus* species are cultivated globally (Iglesias-Trabado and Wilstermann, 2008), with significant expansion continuing to occur in developing countries. Because of the need for rapid

plantation development, many of these plantations are initially established using germplasm, such as seed and cuttings, obtained from already established operations elsewhere in the world. Substantial quantities of *Eucalyptus* seed are being collected in native stands in Australia and disseminated worldwide (Ciesla *et al.*, 1996). In areas where these trees are non-native, there are often intensive breeding programmes involving the import of superior seed from other countries, the establishment of seed orchards and often subsequent export of improved seed globally (Wingfield *et al.*, 2001, 2013). The movement of *Eucalyptus* seed is assumed to be a major source for the global spread of pathogens (Ciesla *et al.*, 1996; Burgess *et al.*, 2007; Wingfield *et al.*, 2008).

Important diseases of *Eucalyptus*, particularly those caused by species in the Botryosphaeriaceae, Mycosphaerellaceae and Teratosphaeriaceae are thought to have been spread via the trade in seed (Ciesla *et al.*, 1996; Slippers and Wingfield, 2007; Wingfield *et al.*, 2008; Hunter *et al.*, 2011). However, this has not been proven experimentally. Studies conducted so far detected these fungi in leaves, twigs and trunk increment cores of *Eucalyptus* species, where they occur as endophytes (Pillay *et al.*, 2012; Kemler *et al.*, 2013; Marsberg *et al.*, 2014). Of particular interest was the recent detection of *Teratosphaeria zuluensis* (M.J. Wingf., Crous & T.A. Cout) M.J. Wingfield & Crous (Crous *et al.*, 2009a, b; Cortinas *et al.*, 2006b), an important *Eucalyptus* stem canker pathogen, in leaves of *E. grandis* (Marsberg *et al.*, 2014). This discovery has renewed discussions regarding the possible spread of this important stem pathogen in seed.

Teratosphaeria stem canker is an important disease of *Eucalyptus* species grown outside Australia. It is caused by two closely related pathogens, *Teratosphaeria zuluensis* and *T. gauchensis* (M.-N. Cortinas, Crous & M.J. Wingf.) M.J. Wingfield & Crous (Cortinas *et al.*,

2006b) in the class Dothideomycetes, family Teratosphaeriaceae. *Teratosphaeria zuluensis* was first described in South Africa (Wingfield *et al.*, 1997) and is known to cause disease of *Eucalyptus* species in Africa (Roux *et al.*, 2005; Chungu *et al.*, 2010; Jimu *et al.*, 2014), Asia (van Zyl *et al.*, 2002; Old *et al.*, 2003; Cortinas *et al.*, 2006a) and Central America (Roux *et al.*, 2002). *Teratosphaeria gauchensis* was first described from Uruguay and Argentina (Cortinas *et al.*, 2006b) and has been reported in Africa (Gezahgne *et al.*, 2005; Roux *et al.*, 2005; Jimu *et al.*, 2015), Hawaii (Cortinas *et al.*, 2004) and recently Europe (Silva *et al.*, 2014).

The aim of this study was to consider the hypothesis that the *Eucalyptus* stem canker pathogen, *T. zuluensis*, has been spread globally with seed of these trees. We used Illumina MiSeq sequencing to identify, at genus level, the fungal communities in seed-capsules, clean seed and seedlings. This was then followed by 454 pyrosequencing to retrieve longer sequences required for species-specific identification of fungi.

## Materials and Methods

In this study, we focused on recovering important fungal pathogens on *Eucalyptus* seed as well as seed-capsules, which form the bulk of impurities in seed batches. Furthermore, we tested *Eucalyptus* seedlings grown in protected environments, i.e. phytotron and tissue culture for vertical transmission of pathogens. Some of the seedlings raised in a phytotron were exposed to the plantation environment and then tested for horizontal transmission of pathogens.

### ***Sample collection***

Samples of seed-capsules were collected from six mature *E. grandis* trees in a commercial plantation in the KwaMbonambi (28°37'S, 32°09'E, 65 m above sea level) area of South Africa. This site was specifically chosen because it is one of the first plantations where Teratosphaeria stem canker was detected and the chosen trees were in a heavily infected compartment. The seed-capsule samples were packed in separate paper bags and transported to the laboratory for further study.

### ***Seed germination and seedling tending***

In the laboratory, the collected *Eucalyptus* seed was released from air-dried capsules by rigorous shaking. The seed was then cleaned by removing branch, leaf and capsule residue, followed by sieving using a 1.2 mm sieve, similar to the process followed during commercial seed collection operations. Sub-samples of the seed and seed capsules were stored in a -20 °C freezer for DNA extraction. The remaining seed was germinated in two ways after pre-treating by chilling overnight. One batch was propagated on autoclaved ground pine bark in a phytotron. The seed was watered once every two days until germination. The temperature was maintained at 27 °C. Two weeks after germination, the watering regime was reduced to once every three days. The seedlings were grown for 30 days after germination. DNA was extracted from 31 seedlings. The other 28 seedlings were moved to a commercial nursery near KwaMbonambi where they were exposed to the natural forestry environment for two months. The seedlings were then retrieved for DNA extraction and to test for horizontal transfer of pathogens from the surrounding *Eucalyptus* plantations.

To test whether potential endophytes could be transmitted vertically in the seed, a second batch of seed was surface-disinfested in three steps. First, the seed was washed with running water for five minutes and then washed with deionised and autoclaved water. The seed was then immersed in 70% alcohol for 30 seconds, washed again with deionised and autoclaved water and immersed in NaOCl solution for 20 minutes to degrade DNA on the seed coat. The seed was finally washed twice with deionised and autoclaved H<sub>2</sub>O and then germinated on 40 mL Murashige and Skoog (MS) growth medium (Murashige and Skoog, 1962) which had been adjusted to 5.8 pH with HCl (1 M) and autoclaved at 121 °C for 25 minutes. Twelve successfully germinated seedlings were grown in the tissue culture facility at the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI), University of Pretoria. DNA was extracted 30 days after *in vitro* germination of the seed.

#### **DNA extraction**

For DNA extraction from seedlings, a sterile surgical blade was used to remove the roots. Seedlings were then surface-disinfested with 2.5% NaOCl for 20 minutes and rinsed in deionised and autoclaved H<sub>2</sub>O. For one-month-old seedlings, DNA was extracted from leaves and stems combined. For three-month-old seedlings, leaves were cut from stems for separate DNA extraction. Genomic DNA was extracted from seed, seed-capsules, seedlings, leaves and stems using the Zymo plant/ seed extraction Kit<sup>TM</sup> (Zymo Research, Irvine, USA). DNA concentrations were measured using a Thermo Scientific NanoDrop® ND-1000 Spectrophotometer (NanoDrop Technologies, Wilmington, DE, USA).

### ***Illumina MiSeq sequencing***

Six individual libraries were generated for the *E. grandis* germplasm in this study. These were for ground seed-capsules (18 g), seeds (18 g), seedlings grown in a phytotron (31), seedlings grown *in vitro* in a tissue culture facility (12) as well as leaves (20) and stems (20) of seedlings exposed to the plantation environment. The nuclear rDNA ITS region of the samples was amplified using the fungal specific primer pair ITS 1F (Gardes and Bruns, 1993) and ITS 2 (White *et al.*, 1990). Illumina MiSeq sequencing of the amplicons was performed by Inqaba Biotech (Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa, [www.inqababiotec.co.za](http://www.inqababiotec.co.za)).

The ITS reads generated from Illumina MiSeq sequencing were processed using the QIIME pipeline (Caporaso *et al.*, 2010). The sequences were subjected to quality trimming and chimera removal. Sequences with a Phred quality score <30 and length <200 bp were removed. The sequences were then clustered into Operational Taxonomic Units (OTUs) with a sequence similarity level of 95%. The longest sequence from each OTU was selected as the representative sequence. Representative sequences for each OTU were queried against the UNITE database [released 13.04.2012, including fungal ITS sequences from the International Nucleotide Sequence Databases (Abarenkov *et al.*, 2010)] for taxonomic assignment.

### ***454 GS-FLX amplicon pyrosequencing***

Three individual libraries of *E. grandis* ground seed-capsules (18 g), seed (18 g) and seedlings grown in a phytotron (31) were generated for 454 pyrosequencing. Pyrosequencing was performed on a Genome Sequencer FLX 454 Titanium (454 Life Sciences/ Roche Applied Biosystems, Bradford, USA) by Inqaba Biotech. The nuclear rDNA ITS region of

the samples was amplified using the fungal specific primer pair ITS 1F (Gardes and Bruns, 1993) and ITS 4 (White *et al.*, 1990).

Raw 454 reads were processed using the SEED pipeline (version 1.1.35) (Větrovský and Baldrian, 2013). Denoising and chimera removal (Phred quality score of 20) were performed using MOTHUR version 1.31.2 (Schloss *et al.*, 2009) and UCHIME (Edgar *et al.*, 2011) respectively. Reads <400 bp after denoising and chimera removal were discarded. Reads were aligned using MAFFT Version 7 (Katoh *et al.*, 2005) and clustering was performed using USEARCH Version 5.2.32 (Edgar, 2010). Clustering was performed at 97% similarity level (O'Brien *et al.*, 2005). Consensus sequences of each OTU were assigned to taxons using BLASTn with an e-value <10<sup>-80</sup> and minimum query coverage >80%. Sequences highly similar to important *Eucalyptus* pathogens were extracted and Maximum Parsimony analyses were conducted using PAUP v. 4.0b10 (Swofford, 2002).

## Results

### *Illumina MiSeq Sequencing*

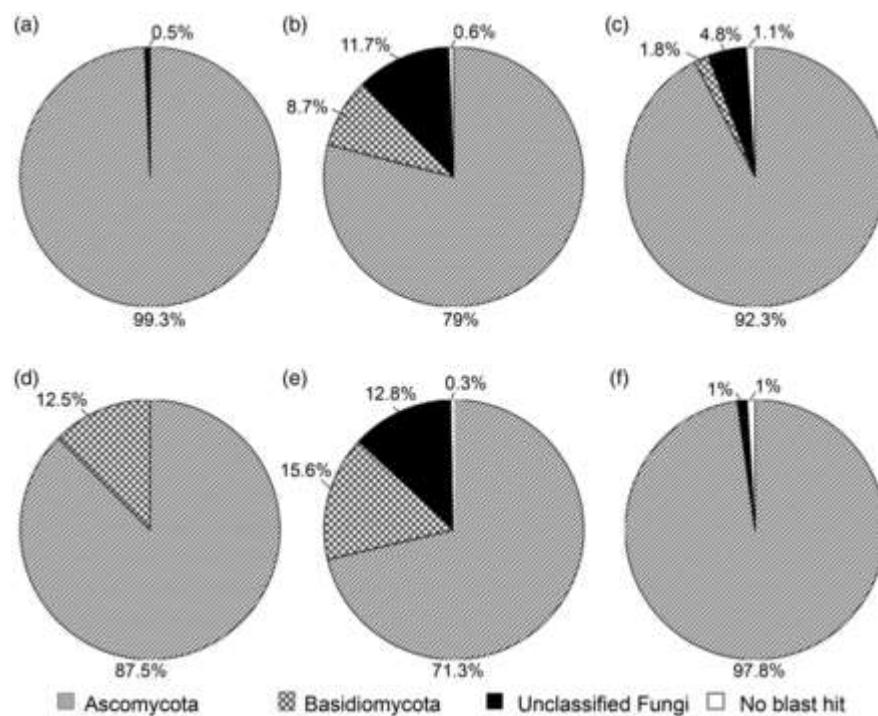
A total of 3 805 reads were recovered from seed capsules (996), seed (654), seedlings grown in a phytotron (1 039) and those grown *in vitro* in a tissue culture facility (8) as well as leaves (709) and stems (399) of seedlings exposed to the plantation environment, after quality trimming. Taxonomic composition assessment of *E. grandis* seed-capsules, seed and all seedlings revealed a predominance of fungi belonging to the Ascomycota (71.3–99.3%) followed by Basidiomycota (0.1–15.6%) (Table 1, Figure 1). A total of seven fungal classes were identified, dominated by the Dothideomycetes and Sordariomycetes. At least 29

**Table 1** Percentages of fungal communities identified in *E. grandis* seed-capsules, seed and seedling libraries as revealed by Illumina MySeq sequencing.

Family	Genus	Total	seed-	Seed	Phytotron	<i>In vitro</i>	Stems of seedlings	Leaves of seedlings
		reads	capsules	seedlings	seedlings	seedlings	exposed to the forest	exposed to the forest
							plantation	plantation
Mycosphaerellaceae	<i>Mycosphaerella</i>	24	-	0.3	0.1	62.5	3.3	78.1
Pleosporaceae	<i>Alternaria</i>	10.8	5.7	9.8	29.2	-	19.5	0.7
Trichocomaceae	<i>Aspergillus</i>	9.8	58.9	-	-	-	-	-
Nectriaceae	<i>Fusarium</i>	10.2	3.3	7.1	50.8	-	-	-
Dothioraceae	<i>Hormonema</i>	6.3	13.6	22.9	1.3	-	-	-
Amphisphaeriaceae	<i>Pestalotiopsis</i>	4.9	3.4	11.9	3.8	-	10	0.1
Mycosphaerellaceae	<i>Cladosporium</i>	4.6	10.2	14.8	0.1	-	2	0.1
Polyporaceae	<i>Trametes</i>	2.1	-	-	-	12.5	-	-
Botryosphaeriaceae	<i>Neofusicoccum</i>	1.7	-	0.9	-	-	9	0.1
Incertae sedis	<i>Nigrospora</i>	1.5	3.5	0.2	0.1	-	3	2.1
Botryosphaeriaceae	<i>Botryosphaeria</i>	1.3	-	0.5	-	-	6.8	0.3
Valsaceae	<i>Valsa</i>	0.9	-	1.7	0.1	-	3.3	0.1
Teratosphaeriaceae	<i>Teratosphaeria</i>	0.6	-	2.9	1	-	-	-
Cucurbitariaceae	<i>Curreya</i>	0.3	-	0.3	1.3	-	-	-
Ustilaginaceae	<i>Pseudozyma</i>	0.3	-	-	-	-	2	-
Incertae sedis	<i>Phoma</i>	0.2	-	0.5	0.9	-	-	-
Pezizaceae	<i>Peziza</i>	0.2	-	-	1.4	-	-	-

Dothioraceae	<i>Sydowia</i>	0.1	-	0.6	-	-	-	-
Botryosphaeriaceae	<i>Lasiodiplodia</i>	0.1	-	0.5	-	-	-	-
Pleosporaceae	<i>Curvularia</i>	0.1	-	0.2	0.4	-	-	-
Trichocomaceae	<i>Penicillium</i>	0.1	-	0.5	-	-	-	-
Valsaceae	<i>Phomopsis</i>	0.1	0.3	0.2	-	-	-	-
Glomerellaceae	<i>Glomerella</i>	0.1	-	0.6	-	-	-	-
Mycosphaerellaceae	<i>Guignardia</i>	<0.1	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Pleosporaceae	<i>Bipolaris</i>	<0.1	-	0.2	-	-	-	-
"	<i>Cochliobolus</i>	<0.1	-	0.2	-	-	-	-
Herpotrichiellaceae	<i>Exophiala</i>	<0.1	-	0.2	0.1	-	-	-
Trichocomaceae	<i>Eupenicillium</i>	<0.1	-	-	0.1	-	-	-
Incertae sedis	<i>Scolecobasidium</i>	<0.1	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
"	<i>Myrothecium</i>	<0.1	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
"	<i>Khuskia</i>	<0.1	-	-	0.1	-	-	0.1
Diaporthaceae	<i>Diaporthe</i>	<0.1	-	0.2	-	-	-	-
Polyporaceae	<i>Laetiporus</i>	<0.1	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Trichosporonaceae	<i>Trichosporon</i>	<0.1	-	0.2	-	-	-	-
Incertae sedis	<i>Rhodotorula</i>	<0.1	-	-	-	-	0.3	-
"	<i>Sporobolomyces</i>	<0.1	-	0.2	-	-	-	-

families were identified from the samples. The Dothideomycetes were dominated by Mycosphaerellaceae (29.3%), Pleosporaceae (11.2%), Dothioraceae (6.4%), Botryosphaeriaceae (3.1%) and Cucurbitariaceae (0.3%). Sordariomycetes included Nectriaceae (10.2%), Amphisphaeriaceae (4.9%), Valsaceae (1%), Diaporthaceae (0.1%) and Glomerellaceae (0.1%). Families belonging to the other five classes included Trichocomaceae (10%), Polyporaceae (2.2%), Ustilaginaceae (0.3%), Pezizaceae (0.2%), Herpotrichiellaceae (0.1%) and Trichosporonaceae (0.1%). A total of 38 genera were identified with 11 of these predominant and accounting for 76.5% of the total sequences. Predominant genera were *Mycosphaerella* (24%), *Alternaria* (10.8%), *Aspergillus* (9.8%), *Fusarium* (9.5%), *Hormonema* (6.3%), *Pestalotiopsis* (4.9%), *Cladosporium* (4.6%),



**Figure 1:** Illumina sequence read abundance for fungi belonging to phylum Ascomycota, Basidiomycota, other Fungi, and no blast hit associated with *E. grandis*. (a) seed-capsules, (b) seed, (c) seedlings grown in a phytotron, (d) seedlings grown *in vitro* and (e) stems and (f) leaves of seedlings exposed to forest plantation environment.

*Trametes* (2.1%), *Neofusicoccum* (1.7%), *Nigrospora* (1.5%) and *Botryosphaeria* (1.3%) (Table 1).

Seed-capsules were dominated by Eurotiomycetes (58.9%), Dothideomycetes (29.5%) and Sordariomycetes (10.8%). All reads belonging to the Eurotiomycetes represented Trichocomaceae. Dothideomycetes were composed of Dothioraceae (13.6%), Mycosphaerellaceae (10.2%) and Pleosporaceae (5.7%). Sordariomycetes included the Amphisphaeriaceae (3.4%), Nectriaceae (3.3%), Valsaceae (0.3%) and an unidentified family (0.3%). No Botryosphaeriaceae or Teratosphaeriaceae were recorded from seed-capsules. Predominant genera were *Alternaria*, *Aspergillus*, *Cladosporium*, *Fusarium*, *Hormonema*, *Nigrospora* and *Pestalotiopsis*, representing 98.6% of the total reads (Table 1).

Seed samples were dominated by Dothideomycetes (54.6%) and Sordariomycetes (23%). Other classes included the Eurotiomycetes (0.7%), Tremellomycetes (0.5%), Microbotryomycetes (0.2%) and Pezizomycetes (0.2%). Dothideomycetes consisted of the families Dothioraceae (23.5%), Mycosphaerellaceae (15.1%), Pleosporaceae (10.6%), Teratosphaeriaceae (2.9%), Botryosphaeriaceae (1.9%) and Cucurbitariaceae (0.3%). Sordariomycetes were composed of fungi belonging to the Amphisphaeriaceae (11.9%), Nectriaceae (7.1%), Valsaceae (1.9%), Glomerellaceae (0.6%) and Diaporthaceae (0.2%). Eurotiomycetes were represented by Trichocomaceae (0.5%) and Herpotrichiellaceae (0.2%) whilst Tremellomycetes were represented by Trichosporonaceae (0.2%) and an unidentified family (0.3%). Pezizomycetes were composed of the Pezizaceae family. At the genus level, the seed was dominated by *Alternaria*, *Cladosporium*, *Cytospora*, *Fusarium*, *Hormonema*, *Neofusicoccum*, *Pestalotiopsis* and *Teratosphaeria* (Table 1).

Seedlings grown in a phytotron were dominated by fungi belonging to the Sordariomycetes (54.9%) and Dothideomycetes (34.5%), with a very low representation of Eurotiomycetes (0.2%). Sordariomycetes were dominated by fungi belonging to the family Nectriaceae (50.8%) with lower representation of fungi belonging to the Amphisphaeriaceae (3.8%) and Valsaceae (0.1%). Dothideomycetes were composed of fungi belonging to the Pleosporaceae (29.7%), Cucurbitariaceae (1.3%), Dothioraceae (1.3%) and Mycosphaerellaceae (1.2%). The predominant genera were *Alternaria*, *Curreya*, *Fusarium*, *Hormonema*, *Phoma*, *Pestalotiopsis* and *Peziza*, accounting for about 88% of the reads (Table 1).

Seedlings grown *in vitro* in a tissue culture facility were dominated by Mycosphaerellaceae (62.5%) and Polyporaceae (12.5%). The fungi belonged to the genera *Mycosphaerella* and *Trametes* respectively (Table 1).

The fungal communities of *E. grandis* seedlings exposed to the natural plantation environment were characterised separately for stems and leaves. Stems were dominated by fungi belonging to the Dothideomycetes (40.6%) and Sordariomycetes (34.5%), with lower representation of Agaricomycetes (11.8%), Microbotryomycetes (0.3%) and Ustilaginomycetes (0.3%). Dominant families were Pleosporaceae (19.5%), Botryosphaeriaceae (15.8%), an unidentified Agaricomycete family (11.8%), Amphisphaeriaceae (10%) and Valsaceae (3.3%). Predominant genera were *Alternaria*, *Botryosphaeria*, *Cladosporium*, *Mycosphaerella*, *Neofusicoccum*, *Nigrospora*, *Pestalotiopsis*, *Pseudozyma* and *Valsa* representing more than 59% of the total reads. Unlike the stems, leaves of the seedlings exposed to the plantation environment were predominated by fungi belonging to the Dothideomycetes (79.4%), followed by Sordariomycetes (2.5%) and then

Agaricomycetes (0.1%). They were dominated by fungi belonging to *Mycosphaerella*, representing 78.1% of the reads.

#### **454 GS-FLX amplicon pyrosequencing**

A total of 2 417, 1 842 and 2 023 sequences  $\geq$ 400 bp were respectively recovered from seed-capsules, seed and seedlings after quality trimming. Identification of fungal organisms in seed-capsules and seed revealed the presence of at least 102 fungal taxa. The most common taxa across the two samples (Table 2) were *Hormonema* sp. (45.2%), uncultured endophytic fungus (6.9%), uncultured Basidiomycete (6.5%), *Alternaria alternata* (Fr.) Keissl (4.6%), *Davidiella tassiana* (De Not.) Crous & U. Braun (4.6%) and *T. zuluensis* (4.5%). Besides *T. zuluensis*, other *Eucalyptus* associated fungi were *Teratosphaeria* sp. (0.6%), *Neofusicoccum eucalyptorum* Crous, H. Smith and M.J. Wingf (0.3%), *Davidiella* sp. (0.2%) and a *Mycosphaerellaceae* sp. (0.2%).

A total of 38 fungal taxa were identified for one-month-old-seedlings grown in a phytotron. The most dominant taxa were *Cladosporium* sp. (47.7%), *Pestalotiopsis microspora* (Speg.) Bat. & Peres (16.5%), *Phoma glomerata* (Corda) Wr. & Hochapf (6.9%), *Erythrobasidium* sp. (4.3%), *Pleosporales* sp. (2.4%), *Pseudozyma* sp. (1.6%). Other fungi included *Pestalotiopsis aquatica* (Ellis & Everh.) Steyaert (0.7%), *Hyalodendron* sp. (0.7%), *Alternaria* sp. (0.6%) and *Pestalotiopsis disseminata* (Thüm.) Steyaert (0.6%).

**Table 2** Percentages of fungal communities identified in *E. grandis* seed-capsules, seed and seedling libraries as revealed by 454 sequencing

Genus	Seed-capsules	Seed	Phytotron seedlings
<i>Hormonema</i>	62.1	29.7	–
<i>Uncultured fungi</i>	12.7	40.0	15.8
<i>Teratosphaeria</i>	8.6	1.7	–
<i>Fungal spp.</i>	8.2	0.4	–
<i>Davidiella</i>	6.1	3.7	–
<i>Cladosporium</i>	0.9	7.0	48.2
<i>Mycosphaerellaceae</i>	0.3	–	–
<i>Ascomycete</i>	0.2	–	–
<i>Comminutispora</i>	0.2	–	–
<i>Alternaria</i>	0.2	11.1	0.6
<i>Neofusicoccum</i>	0.2	0.4	–
<i>Cercospora</i>	0.2	0.3	–
<i>Curvularia</i>	–	0.9	–
<i>Cylindrocarpon</i>	–	0.8	–
<i>Macrophomina</i>	–	0.3	–
<i>Fungal endophyte</i>	–	0.3	0.6
<i>Pestalosphaeria</i>	–	0.3	–
<i>Pestalotiopsis</i>	–	–	18.3
<i>Phoma</i>	–	–	6.9
<i>Erythrobasidium</i>	–	–	4.4
<i>Pleosporales</i> sp.	–	–	2.4
<i>Pseudozyma</i>	–	–	1.6
<i>Herpotrichiellaceae</i> sp.	–	–	0.2
<i>Rhodosporidium</i>	–	–	0.2
<i>Exophiala</i>	–	–	0.2
Other organisms	0.2	3.3	0.7

**454 pyrosequencing based identification of *Teratosphaeria zuluensis* and *Neofusicoccum eucalyptorum***

A total of 64 sequences recovered from *E. grandis* seed-capsules (n=46) and seed (n=18) showed high similarity to *T. zuluensis* sequences found on GenBank. These sequences met the requirement that their query coverage was >99% and that their identities to the closest hit is >90%. Sequences recovered from seed-capsules ranged from 501 to 533 bp with identities ranging from 97% to 99%. Sequences recovered from seed ranged from 504 to 559 bp with identities ranging from 98% to 99%.

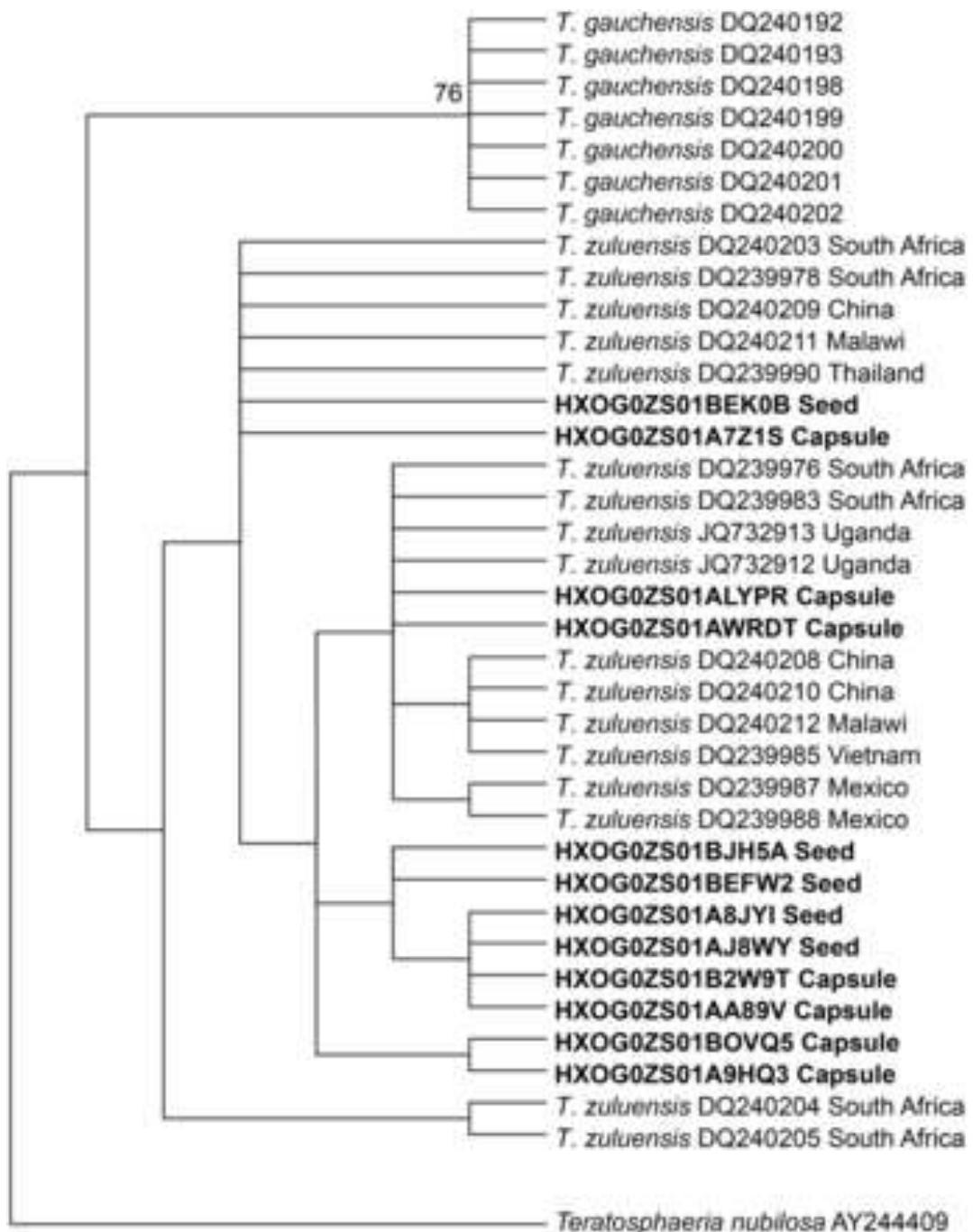
When a more stringent requirement of ≥99% query coverage and ≥97% identity was applied, only 12 sequences remained from the original 64, seven from seed-capsules and five from seed (Table 3). Identities to the closest *T. zuluensis* match ranged from 97 to 99% for seed-capsules and 98 to 99% for seed. These sequences displayed high query coverage (88-90%) and identities (98-99%) to the ex-type sequences DQ240207 and DQ240214 (Cortinas *et al.*, 2006b). These highly matching sequences were used for phylogenetic reconstructions.

Phylogenetic analyses of the ITS gene region of DNA sequences of fungi tentatively identified through BLASTn searches showed that they were identical to *T. zuluensis* (Figure 2). Besides, *T. zuluensis*, another important *Eucalyptus* pathogen tentatively identified to species level, was *N. eucalyptorum*. Two sequences recovered from *E. grandis* seed were identified as *N. eucalyptorum*, with 98-99% query coverage and a common identity of 89% (Table 3). Both sequences were 533 bp in lengths.

**Table 3** Sequences recovered from *E. grandis* seed and seed-capsules matching *T. zuluensis* and *N. eucalyptorum* sequences in NCBI GenBank.

Sample Name	Seed-capsule						Seed					
	GB <sup>a</sup>	CA <sup>b</sup>	QC <sup>c</sup>	E <sup>d</sup>	ID <sup>e</sup>	Sample Name	GB <sup>a</sup>	CA <sup>b</sup>	QC <sup>c</sup>	E <sup>d</sup>	ID <sup>e</sup>	
HXOG0ZS01B2W9T	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	JQ732913	99	0	98	HXOG0ZS01BJH5A	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	JQ732913	99	0	98	
HXOG0ZS01A7Z1S	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	KF454696	99	0	99	HXOG0ZS01BEK0B	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	KF454696	100	0	99	
HXOG0ZS01ALYPR	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	JQ732913	99	0	99	HXOG0ZS01BEFW2	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	KF454696	100	0	99	
HXOG0ZS01BOVQ5	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	KF454696	100	0	98	HXOG0ZS01A8JYI	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	KF454696	100	0	99	
HXOG0ZS01A9HQ3	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	KF454696	99	0	98	HXOG0ZS01AJ8WY	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	JQ732913	99	0	98	
HXOG0ZS01AWRDT	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	JQ732913	100	0	99	HXOG0ZS01BGLOD	<i>N. eucalyptorum</i>	KC479188	99	0	89	
HXOG0ZS01AA89V	<i>T. zuluensis</i>	JQ732913	99	0	97	HXOG0ZS01AGALJ	<i>N. eucalyptorum</i>	KC479188	98	0	89	

<sup>a</sup>Closest GenBank match, <sup>b</sup>Three Closest Accessions, <sup>c</sup>Query Cover (%), <sup>d</sup>E-value, <sup>e</sup>Identity



**Figure 2:** Majority-rule consensus of the 18 most parsimonious trees obtained from a heuristic search with 37 random taxon additions of ITS sequences using PAUP v4.0b10. Bootstrap support values (after 1000 replicates) of >75% are shown at the nodes. 454 reads are shown in bold font. *Teratosphaeria nubilosa* was used as an outgroup.

## Discussion

The results of this study provide unequivocal evidence that the stem canker pathogen *T. zuluensis* occurs in seed and seed capsules of *E. grandis* when this material is collected from a site where the disease is common. Vertical transmission via the seed, however, seems unlikely, because the fungus was never identified from seedlings grown from cleaned seed and grown in an isolated phytotron or under sterile conditions on agar. This suggests that the fungus is not vertically transferred from seed to plants, which is similar to the situation for fungi such as the pine pathogen *Diplodia sapinea* (Bihon *et al.*, 2010). The results suggest that *T. zuluensis* was probably introduced into South Africa in seed batches, as has been previously proposed (Cortinas *et al.*, 2006b; Hunter *et al.*, 2011), but not tested.

High-throughput sequencing of *E. grandis* seed-capsules, seed and seedlings revealed a dominance of Dothideomycetes and Sordariomycetes. The Dothideomycetes included fungi in the Botryosphaeriaceae, Mycosphaerellaceae and Teratosphaeriaceae, which include major *Eucalyptus* stem and leaf pathogens (e.g. Wingfield *et al.*, 2008; Keane *et al.*, 2000; Old *et al.*, 2003). The Sordariomycetes also constitute important stem canker pathogens of *Eucalyptus* in the Diaporthaceae, Nectriaceae and Valsaceae (e.g. Keane *et al.*, 2000; Old *et al.*, 2003). Saprophytic fungi, dominated by the Dothioraceae, Pleosporaceae and Trichocomaceae, were previously isolated from *Eucalyptus* seed using culture based techniques (Mittal and Sharma, 1982; Mwanza and Kellas, 1987; Yuan *et al.*, 1997; Mehrotra and Singh, 1998; Keane *et al.*, 2000). A study on *E. grandis* leaves, petioles, twigs and trunk increment core samples similarly reported the occurrence and high sequence abundance of Botryosphaeriaceae, Mycosphaerellaceae and Teratosphaeriaceae (Kemler *et al.*, 2013).

Our experiment, investigating vertical transmission of pathogens from seed to seedlings yielded inconsistent results with the two chosen high-throughput sequencing techniques. Illumina MiSeq sequencing showed the occurrence of *Mycosphaerella* species in both seed and seedlings grown *in vitro* in tissue culture and those grown in a phytotron, both controlled environments. This raises the possibility that this group of fungi might be vertically transmitted from seed into seedlings. This is strongly supported by the low number of reads recovered from seedlings grown *in vitro*, which can be attributed to the high sterility in the tissue culture facility, increasing the likelihood that *Mycosphaerella* species were vertically transmitted from seed into seedlings. However, these findings were not confirmed by 454 pyrosequencing that showed only the presence of these fungi in seed-capsules. The failure of 454 sequencing to detect these fungi could be a result of primer bias (Bellemain *et al.*, 2010) because different primers were used for 454 and Illumina sequencing technologies. The two sequencing technologies are expected to give the same fungal diversity results when the same primers are used (Luo *et al.*, 2012). We failed to find evidence of vertical transmission of *N. eucalyptorum* and *T. zuluensis* from seed to seedlings, increasing the likelihood that these pathogens could be horizontally transmitted. The occurrence of Botryosphaeriaceae in seedlings exposed to the plantation environment suggests horizontal transmission of some of these species and genera, as proposed previously by Slippers and Wingfield (2007) and for *D. sapinea* shown by Bihon *et al.* (2010).

The occurrence of Botryosphaeriaceae, Mycosphaerellaceae, Teratosphaeriaceae and particularly *T. zuluensis* in *E. grandis* seed batches requires further study. This is especially to determine how these pathogens in seed, end up infecting growing *Eucalyptus* trees. There is little evidence to demonstrate that pathogens identified in seed, result in systematic infections in *Eucalyptus* trees (Slippers and Wingfield, 2007). Yet it is of great importance to

fully understand the role of seed movement in spreading these important *Eucalyptus* pathogens. This is especially true given that these pathogens survive as endophytes in healthy plant material (Pillay *et al.*, 2012; Marsberg *et al.*, 2014), making it difficult or even impossible for commonly applied quarantine programmes to detect them. This appears to be, leading to these important pathogens spreading unnoticed. Once introduced into new areas, the pathogens would likely infect eucalypt species in plantations, leading to the spread of diseases.

Sequencing techniques used in this study have their limitations despite their high resolution in detecting microbes on environmental samples such as seed. A major drawback is their inability to distinguish viable from non-viable DNA, leading to overestimation of viable fungal species (e.g. Amend *et al.* 2010; Vaishampayan *et al.*, 2013). It is also difficult to tell whether the nucleic acids amplified during PCR were from filamentous hyphae or spores. Different proportions of hyphae and spores lead to biases during DNA extraction and sequence abundances (Amend *et al.*, 2010). Despite these limitations, we are confident of our findings as similar studies dealing with viable fungal cultures from leaf tissue similarly identified the endophytic fungi identified in this study, including *T. zuluensis*, in *E. grandis* plant material (Pillay *et al.*, 2012; Marsberg *et al.*, 2014). However, future work will be required to test the viability of *T. zuluensis* and other pathogenic fungi detected on *E. grandis* seed.

## Conclusions

This study has provided evidence that the stem canker pathogen *T. zuluensis* occurs on seed and seed capsules of *E. grandis* when this material is collected from a site where the disease

is common. This also applies to some of the most important *Eucalyptus* pathogens, particularly those belonging to the Botryosphaeriaceae, Mycosphaerellaceae and Teratosphaeriaceae. These fungi were detected in seed and seed-capsules, which form part of the chaff in seed batches moved around the world for *Eucalyptus* plantation establishment.

Endophytic fungi or fungi on the surface of seed are difficult to detect, allowing them to escape quarantine. It is, therefore, important to ensure that seed batches are free of chaff and that surface disinfestation of seed is applied to reduce the load of pathogens. Additional studies to consider the vertical and horizontal transmission of these pathogens should be conducted to gain a better understanding of the spread of important *Eucalyptus* diseases.

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