Speech by

Hon. Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Thursday, 18 June 2009

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Fire Ants

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland) (10.25 am): Despite these tough economic times, we have not relented in the fight against fire ants. In fact, Biosecurity Queensland is making major inroads. We believe we have eradicated this serious pest in the port of Brisbane and Gladstone. Monitoring at these locations will still be required for some time, but it is looking good. This is very much due to the efforts of the community and Biosecurity Queensland.

Our scientists have been using genetic analysis to learn more about these dangerous insects. By analysing fire ant DNA, we are developing a genetic map of all known infestations which shows if nests are related. This mapping shows three distinct genetic groups representing three separate introductions into Queensland and Gladstone, the Port of Brisbane and the greater Brisbane area. We can see how different colonies are genetically connected and track the precise spread of fire ants from point A to point B. This is useful in taking steps to prevent such movements and confirming how effective our control methods have been.

We have found and exterminated most infestations which is limiting their physical spread and their genetic diversity. In fact, fire ants in southern Queensland are stuck in what is known as a genetic bottleneck. Armed with this knowledge, Biosecurity Queensland is confident it can eventually eradicate fire ants, but we cannot be complacent. If fire ants take hold here, they will undoubtedly spread throughout Australia, so complete eradication is in the interests of all states not just Queensland. Therefore, we will continue to talk to the Commonwealth and other states about their financial contribution to the fight.

PIMIC agreed to contribute up to $13.6 million subject to agreement from the respective treasuries. We will also be developing remote sensing technology to detect nests in the more difficult semirural areas. In the meantime, the genetic techniques we have developed can now be applied to a range of pests and diseases. We will apply the same processes to electric ants, Asian honey bees, yellow crazy ants and red-eared slider turtles.