




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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ADJOURNMENT

Oakey, Fire Ants

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (7.27 pm): Late on Thursday, 18 April, I was alerted to a fire ant outbreak on federal grounds in Oakey by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. It was apparently two days after the fire ants were detected, according to the Premier's answer to a question without notice this morning. The outbreak was confirmed as being located on the grounds of the Army Aviation Centre on the outskirts of Oakey's town centre. This news was very disturbing, as at no time before had fire ants been found in the Condamine electorate, with Gatton being the closest location to Oakey with recorded infestations. Since then, we have learned that over 100 nests have been found within the Army Aviation Centre and subsequently destroyed.

On Monday this week, I attended a briefing with representatives from the department and the national red imported fire ant eradication team who provided me with comprehensive information regarding the outbreak and the destruction of nests, which was appreciated. The fire ant nests have been present for approximately two years, and the eradication team is confident they have confined them to the Army Aviation Centre's grounds. Time will tell whether that prediction is correct. There will be at least 18 months of ongoing monitoring by the fire ant eradication team and restrictions on entry.

The most disappointing part of the whole situation is the lack of a management plan, consultation, communication and information provided to the local authorities, business owners and the community of Oakey by this government. Even the neighbouring residents to the base did not receive information until many days after the nests were found. This is, yet again, another failure by this government to inform or communicate. Until recently, there was no signage displayed alerting locals and travellers and no protocols or processes advertised as to what to do if you find a nest in your backyard. This has created a great deal of distress and anxiety in a community that has had more than its fair share of environmental issues which have damaged its reputation.

Oakey is situated within an agricultural region, and therefore concerns were held about the geographic location of fire ant nests and whether they had spread outside the base. The close proximity to Oakey Creek, especially given recent rainfall events, was concerning farmers, as was the potential of soil carrying fire ants being washed into the creek and then downstream and flowing into the Condamine River and subsequently the Balonne. I would hope for—and request—an open investigation into the source of the infestation and for this information to be publicly available, with ongoing communication and information provided to the community regarding any developments and concerns the eradication team may have. To date, this has been almost non-existent. It is important the Oakey community feels confident that the threat of further infestations will be investigated thoroughly.