

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 1042
Asked on 2 September 2004

MR FINN asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (Mr Palaszczuk)—

QUESTION:

With he outline current measures to eradicate fire ants in south east Queensland?

ANSWER:

In June 2004 the initial three-year phase of the Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program was completed. The original infested areas had received their third and final season of treatment and in accordance with the National Eradication Plan, staff from the Fire Ant Control Centre (FACC) will now conduct two years of surveillance in these areas to ensure we have effectively eradicated the pest.

Progress towards eradication in the treated areas has been excellent with preliminary monitoring results from the current survey of infested properties showing that over 99% of previously infested properties no longer have viable fire ant infestations. This is up from 75% and 97.5% respectively after the first and second seasons of treatment. In the odd location where viable nests are found, treatment will continue for the next year.

Treatment activities will also continue from mid September in a zone to the south west of the original treatment and in three other small areas that lie outside the core treatment area. These areas will then receive two rounds of surveillance over the following two years (2005-06 and 2006-07).

Additionally, the FACC is conducting a further year of surveillance of the surveillance buffer. The Fire Ant Habitat Identification System that was developed at the FACC is being used to guide the FACC's structured surveillance beyond the treatment boundary. This model allows surveillance efforts to be focused on those areas that are more likely to harbour Fire Ant infestations and thus is allowing the FACC to survey a greater area with no additional effort or drop in efficacy.

It is important now that the Eradication Program heads into its next stage that the commitment towards eradication does not wane. Compared with February 2001, the threat from fire ants has been significantly reduced, but the risk to the Australian lifestyle and environment could rapidly re-establish if the program is not successfully completed. Total eradication is currently within striking distance.