

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**  
**No. 1742**  
**Asked on 11 November 2009**

**MRS SCOTT** asked the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland (MR MULHERIN)–

**QUESTION:**

Will the Minister advise how the fire ant surveillance and eradication program is progressing?

**ANSWER:**

The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program commenced in 2001 and is now into its ninth year.

The Program has been successful in significantly reducing the population of red imported fire ants in Queensland. In 2001, there was an estimated 65 000 fire ant colonies present in South-East Queensland. In contrast, so far this financial year, there have been 139 fire ant colonies detected on 64 properties.

Genetic analysis of fire ant colonies indicates that there have been at least three separate fire ant incursions into Queensland. Post-treatment validation surveillance has provided evidence that the Port of Brisbane and Yarwun incursions have been eradicated. The program is in the process of eradicating the South-East Queensland incursion.

This significant reduction in pest prevalence has minimised the risk of spread of the pest to other states and territories, and prevented significant impacts on the environment, economy and human health.

Despite this success, there are some challenges in dealing with the dispersed pattern of the infestation that remains in South East Queensland.

An external, independent review has recently assessed the program's current progress, including the use of innovative detection tools such as aerial remote sensing, intuitive modelling and genetic analysis.

A review report has not yet been submitted, but it is expected that the review will make recommendations on the future of the program, including options for the eradication of the 'tail of infestation' that remains in Queensland.

Eradication program activities including bait treatments of remaining infestation are continuing while the review is finalised.

Low numbers of fire ant colonies continue to be detected in the greater Brisbane area including a small number of detections just outside of the restricted area at Milora, Munruben, Ashwell and Daisy Hill.

Extensions to the restricted area are expected to be published shortly to include these recent detections.

A 2008/09 benefit cost analysis estimated the cost to the Australian community, if fire ants were left uncontrolled, would reach \$43 billion over 30 years. Biosecurity Queensland's fire ant eradication program is continuing, and remains the only program to date with the potential to successfully eradicate an established fire ant population.