

## **QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**No. 889**

**Asked on 26 May 2011**

**MR CRIPPS** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Regional Economies (MR MULHERIN)–

### **QUESTION:**

Will the Minister advise what steps are being taken to ensure that myrtle rust will not spread throughout Queensland?

### **ANSWER:**

The Government has committed \$0.8 million to assist Queenslanders respond to the impacts of myrtle rust through a combined program, including disease management, improving disease knowledge and understanding, education and training, as well as communication and community engagement.

The Queensland Government has also strongly advocated for the development of a comprehensive national program for myrtle rust and is encouraged by the Commonwealth Government's recent funding announcement of \$1.5 million for myrtle rust.

Myrtle rust is a serious fungal disease which infects common Australian native plants in the myrtaceae (mur-tay-cee) family, such as lillypillies, paperbarks, bottle brushes, eucalypts.

The disease produces large numbers of tiny spores which can spread rapidly by wind, through the movement of infected plant material, on animals and through human activities like bushwalking.

Myrtle rust was first detected in New South Wales in April 2010 and has since become widespread in coastal areas of that state north to the Queensland border.

Disease control options for myrtle rust are limited and it was determined in December 2010 by the National Management Group that it was not possible to eradicate myrtle rust from Australia.

The disease spreads easily by spores, making control and containment almost impossible in most situations. It is anticipated that the disease will spread throughout climatically favourable areas of coastal Queensland from the New South Wales border to Cape York.

The disease was first detected in Queensland in late December 2010. An immediate emergency response was put in place to contain the rust while further surveillance and investigations were conducted.

Movement and disease control measures were applied to the nursery sector in Queensland at identified infected premises until late March when the disease was found in a variety of non-nursery situations including public parks, roadside vegetation and backyards.

The sale of infected plants in Queensland remains prohibited.

The Queensland Government has worked closely with industry and other stakeholders by establishing a coordination group to better understand the disease and develop management options.

As a result, the Queensland Government has responded with a program to limit the impact of myrtle rust where possible, to track the spread and host range of the disease and to assist Queenslanders adapt to live with the impact of myrtle rust.

A broad consultation, communication and awareness program has been conducted across a diverse range of stakeholder groups potentially affected by myrtle rust. These include forestry, lifestyle horticulture, bee keeping, bush food, ecotourism and zoos and local government.

Actions by the Queensland Government to date have, I believe, assisted in slowing the spread from known infested sites and helped stakeholders become aware of and prepare for this serious disease.

Negotiations with interstate jurisdictions have resulted in more workable interstate entry conditions to help Queensland businesses trade with other states.

In a continued effort to limit the impact of this disease, the Queensland Government is supporting a comprehensive program of public engagement, industry liaison and education and research to better understand the disease, its impacts and to find rust tolerant plant varieties. This work will continue over the next year through a dedicated myrtle rust team within Biosecurity Queensland.