

Question on Notice

No. 1229

Asked on 19 September 2018

MS J PEASE ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the coming of warmer months—

Will the Minister provide an update on the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program is built upon world leading science developed in Queensland. The expert understanding by the Program of the biology of the fire ant and how it is adapting to our environment informs our future plans for eradication, including the timing of treatments.

As the weather warms and the temperature increases, so too does the foraging activity of the fire ant. It is this foraging activity that the Program ultimately relies upon to effect eradication. The treatment used for eradication involves the broad scale application of a food source, preferred by fire ants and infused with an active ingredient that, when fed to the queen, renders her sterile. The subsequent lack of replacement worker ants causes the collapse of the colony.

The coming warmer months bring an increase in the Program's eradication treatment activity. In 2017-18, under the new Ten Year Eradication Plan, the Program delivered eradication treatment across 190 000 hectares. This represented an increase of 95 per cent on hectares treated in 2016-17. With ground temperatures now over 20 degrees Celsius, the Program is commencing its treatment of over 190 000 hectares during the 2018-19 summer, both in the designated eradication area in the Lockyer Valley and north west Scenic Rim, as well as priority suppression areas designed to either protect the eradication area or stop the spread of the ant beyond the current operational area.

The new Ten Year Plan has been accompanied by a significant increase in investment, \$411 million over the life of the plan, from the Commonwealth, Queensland and other state and territory governments. With this increase in resources, the Program has done an excellent job in scaling up its operations over the last year.

In 2018-19, the Program will continue to build a more responsive, flexible and agile program of work as it drives to deliver eradication of the fire ant from south east Queensland and the rest of Australia.