

Question on Notice

No. 143

Asked on 18 February 2020

MS C LUI ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise of the action that Biosecurity Queensland is taking to manage the threat of the fall armyworm incursion in Far North Queensland?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

Fall armyworm is an invasive moth pest that feeds in large numbers on the leaves, stems and reproductive parts of more than 350 plant species. It causes damage to economically important cultivated grasses such as maize, rice, sorghum, sugarcane and wheat, as well as other horticultural crops and cotton.

The pest has rapidly spread around the world since it was first recorded outside its native range (tropical and sub-tropical parts of the Americas) in Africa in late 2016. It has been reported in 65 countries and has not been successfully eradicated from any of these.

Fall armyworm was confirmed to be present on Saibai and Erub islands in Torres Strait on 3 February 2020. Specimens were collected from traps managed by the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment's (DAWE) Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) program. This was the first time the pest has been detected in Australia.

The national Consultative Committee on Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP) met to consider the detections on 24 February 2020 and agreed that it was not technically feasible to eradicate the pest from Australia.

The CCEPP comprises representatives from the Federal Government, all State and Territory Governments and affected industry parties and it makes technical decisions about incident responses managed under the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed.

The CCEPP referred the matter of domestic market access for carriers of fall armyworm to the Sub-Committee for Domestic Quarantine and Market Access for advice. At this stage, no jurisdictions are proposing market access restrictions for fall armyworm.

The decision that the pest is not technically feasible to eradicate was not made lightly by CCEPP. The decision was based on the degree to which fall armyworm has already spread in Queensland; its ability to feed on many kinds of plants; its ability to fly long distances and rapidly disperse; its reproductive capacity; and the likelihood that it will continue to spread naturally to Australia from infested countries to our north.

Fall armyworm has subsequently been detected in monitoring traps that had been established by Biosecurity Queensland in locations including: South Johnstone, Tolga, Lakeland, Mareeba and Walkamin and the Burdekin.

Biosecurity Queensland continues to work with counterparts from Western Australia and the Northern Territory, NAQS representatives and industry to discuss the response to fall armyworm, such as national surveillance strategies, chemical controls and nationally coordinated information sharing.

Fact sheets have been developed on fall armyworm for key affected industries including sorghum, maize, cotton, wheat, sugarcane and vegetables. DAF will add to this body of information as new details become available.

Biosecurity Queensland continues to work with industry to adapt to the presence of the pest in Australian cropping systems and to minimise its impact.

Knowledge sharing across the agriculture sector and all stakeholders will help ensure a truly coordinated, swift and meaningful response to fall armyworm.