

Question on Notice

No. 803

Asked on 17 August 2022

MR L POWER ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the incursion of Varroa Mite detected in New South Wales— Will the Minister advise how the Queensland Government is protecting agriculture and ensuring apiary services remain viable?

ANSWER:

Firstly, Queensland contributes to the nationally cost-shared response program to eradicate varroa mite from New South Wales. The work undertaken by New South Wales provides a level of protection to Queensland beekeepers and pollination dependent industries.

In Queensland, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) has activated a response team to put measures in place to prevent entry of the pest into the State and to prepare for any detection should it occur in the future. The team is in regular contact with peak industry bodies, such as the Queensland Beekeepers' Association, to ensure that activities are realistic and achievable for beekeepers and consider the needs of other industries.

Legislatively, the *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the Act) lists varroa mite as prohibited matter. Certain obligations apply to prohibited matter, including the reporting of any detections to an inspector without delay. Additionally, a person must not take any action reasonably likely to exacerbate, and must take any action reasonably likely to minimise, the biosecurity risk posed by varroa mite.

A movement control order has also been implemented under the Act to restrict the entry of risk items that may move varroa mite into Queensland. These items, including beehives, cannot be moved into the State from any other part of the country without a permit. Permit conditions are being developed by our risk scientists in consultation with the Queensland Beekeepers' Association to ensure they are practical, but still protect the state from the entry of varroa mite

Surveillance activities for the pest are being conducted at national, state and industry levels.

Queensland undertakes surveillance under the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program at high-risk port environments for the early detection of a range of pests, including varroa mite. This program is funded by the Hort Frontiers Pollination Fund, part of the Hort Frontiers strategic partnership initiative developed by Hort Innovation, with co-investment from the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council and Grain Producers Australia, and contributions from the Queensland and Federal Governments.

The Queensland Government is also conducting surveillance efforts at lower risk ports, including with local volunteer beekeepers, to provide enhanced early detection capability in the short term. Surveillance will also be done at key pollination events to provide additional assurance that varroa mite is not present within the State.

Now that the pest has entered Australia, a wide network of apiary surveillance is required for early detection in Queensland. To facilitate this, the Queensland Government has developed Bee 123, an online reporting portal to capture surveillance done by beekeepers themselves.

Beekeepers are encouraged to look for the signs of varroa mite in their hives and, even if they do not find varroa mite, make a report on Bee 123 of the surveillance undertaken.