

APPENDIX 7

The Pollination Program, NZ expert warns agriculture to start preparing for Varroa, Media release, 15 June 2011.



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The Pollination Program



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MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday, 15 June

NZ expert warns agriculture to start preparing for Varroa

Australian agriculture and horticulture need to reduce their reliance on wild European honeybees and start preparing sooner rather than later for the arrival of the devastating bee pest Varroa mite.

This was the message presented to members of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport when they met recently with New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research Ltd pollination and Varroa expert Dr Mark Goodwin in Hamilton, New Zealand.

Dr Goodwin told the group that Varroa mite will have a much larger impact in Australia than it has had in New Zealand - and agriculture and horticulture must start preparing now.

"The key difference is that New Zealand crops were already using managed bee colonies for pollination before Varroa arrived in 2000. Australia relies to a much larger extent on wild bees, which Varroa will quickly eliminate," said Dr Goodwin.

"This is likely to increase the costs of pollination and result in a shortage of hives for the industries that are reliant on pollination to produce food.

"Australia needs to shift to a commercial pollination model and create demand for paid pollination sooner rather than later. The bee keeping industry will grow to meet the demand," said Dr Goodwin.

Experts agree that it is only a matter of time before Varroa mite arrives in Australia.

Chair of the Committee, Senator Glenn Sterle said that it was the committee's intention to investigate Australia's preparedness more closely following the visit.

"The global spread of Varroa mite demonstrates the need for a high level of diligence at our borders," said Senator Sterle.

"There needs to be sound planning to ensure we are prepared in the event of an incursion so that best efforts can be made.

"I would also urge the horticulture sector, which is heavily dependent on bees for pollination, to develop contingency plans to deal with the potential arrival of Varroa mite.

"Their current dependence on wild bees for pollination could leave them seriously exposed", said Senator Sterle.

It's estimated that a staggering 65 per cent of agricultural production in Australia relies on honeybees. Some industries, such as almonds, apples, pears and cherries, rely almost totally on honeybees for fruit and nut production.

Dr Goodwin is currently writing a pollination manual to provide practical advice for Australian and New Zealand beekeepers and the many growers reliant on them for crop production.

The manual is being prepared under the Pollination Program, a research and development strategy jointly funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) and the Australian Government.

The manual is expected to be available in late 2011.

RIRDC produced a report in 2008 on the lessons from New Zealand. This can be found on the RIRDC website - A Study of New Zealand Beekeeping: Lessons for Australia <https://rirdc.info services.com.au/items/08-06>

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The Pollination Program is a jointly funded partnership with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC), Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). The Pollination Program is managed by RIRDC and aims to secure the pollination of Australia's horticultural and agricultural crops into the future on a sustainable and profitable basis. Research and development in this program is primarily to raise awareness to protect pollination in Australia.

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