

Industry Update – Blue Zone Paper

215 days of response

24th January 2023

Blue Zone freedom paper

The NSW Varroa eradication program has now been operating for 215 days. Restrictions on beekeepers' operations and movements are still in place for NSW beekeepers. The continued cross border restrictions have been significantly impacting interstate beekeepers with both QLD and VIC hives still stranded in NSW. In order to get the stranded hives repatriated and provide the confidence to jurisdictions to facilitate some conditional cross border movement NSW DPI has produced the Blue Zone Freedom paper to support jurisdictions in their decision-making process.

The Blue Zone Freedom Paper has been produced collaboratively with input from epidemiology teams from NSW, QLD and VIC. The paper discusses, in detail, the surveillance that has been completed in the NSW Blue Zone and the resulting level of confidence that the Blue Zone is free of Varroa mite. The calculations and statistics are based on the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) guidelines - ISPM4 – *Requirements for the establishment of pest free areas*.

The paper provides jurisdictions with clear transparent scientific based evidence that the Blue Zone of NSW is free of Varroa with 99.99% confidence. This level of confidence is based on all the DPI surveillance and also takes into account the beekeeper alcohol washes (assuming a level of non-compliance).

The Blue Zone Freedom paper has been scrutinized by all 26 parties in the CCEPP including experts from each state and territory governments. Endorsement of this paper demonstrates the level of confidence all the experts in this space have that the Varroa is contained to the Newcastle zones.

What changes?

Acceptance of this paper does not change anything for the NSW beekeepers. It does, however, give jurisdictions greater confidence when re-assessing border restrictions. Those discussions are separate to the paper and will need to be considered by each jurisdiction.

To maintain the confidence in the Blue Zone freedom NSW must continue with the current level of surveillance and tracing capability. Agreement to the paper has been conditional on continued Blue Zone surveillance and hive movement recording. So, NSW beekeepers will still need to continue with 16-week alcohol washes and movement declarations for some time yet.

Vote of Confidence

Endorsement of this paper demonstrates to the broader beekeeping community that the eradication program is on track and is in the best possible position to achieve eradication. As always this is dependent on no new Blue Zone unexplained detections occurring and totally reliant on beekeepers complying with the rules.

Beekeeper Compliance

The whole system including the eradication, continued easing of restrictions and maintaining confidence is reliant on beekeepers being compliant. Each state has different requirements for their beekeepers, but it is critically important that we all play our part. Whilst we are on-track for eradication we can only achieve it if beekeepers remain vigilant and continue to work within the rules.

Cross-Border movements

AHBIC has been lobbying VIC, QLD and SA to allow controlled and harmonised cross-border movements to allow business continuity. The Victorian government has been the first to allow some movements. This easing of the restrictions is not allowing free-for-all movements, but strict conditional movement permits that require permitted beekeepers to adhere to surveillance and movement recording requirements.

This conditional easing of movement restrictions will not compromise the eradication efforts but will allow hives to be repatriated. It will also allow beekeepers that rely on cross-border movement to gain some business continuity.

This is a big moment for the response with a national vote of confidence in the eradication program giving jurisdictions the confidence to facilitate easing of restrictions whilst not compromising eradication.