



**Australian
Honey Bee**
INDUSTRY COUNCIL

Industry Update – 20

271 days of response

20th March 2023

Varroa Response Update

Q&A

Q: Why are we still finding so many IP's

The latest detections are as a result of the ongoing purple zone surveillance by the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI). It is important to note that all detections are extremely low in mite counts (mostly 1-5 mites on a mat), but these new detections are continuing to slowly increase the red zones. The purple zone surveillance is nearing completion (except for the new purple zone extensions), and once complete will give the response 99% confidence in the purple zone being free of mites. It is expected that there will be more detections until the surveillance is completed. Whilst the additional detections continue to be in the purple and red zones, it does not trigger a review of the technical feasibility of eradication.

Q: Why are there detections in the red zones? There shouldn't be any hives left in red zones!

Some of the recent detections have increased the red zones and encompassed more hives. Surveillance mats from the newly turned red zone hives have been working their way through the system, so by the time the labs determine there are mites present it is reported as red zone detection.

There are some detections reported from old red zones which have had managed hives removed. These detections are explained as either:

- a) Hives that have not been reported by the beekeeper and are tested prior to euthanasia
- b) Feral colonies that have been sampled and tested positive
- c) Detections on forager bees collected at the bait stations
- d) High-risk hives identified through tracing that are sampled to gather more data despite being in a red zone.

The nationally agreed definition of what is classified as an Infested Premises (IP) means that even if the detection doesn't change any red circles all detections must be listed as IP's.

Q: There appears to be no compliance activity in this response?

The NSW DPI has been actively investigating reported compliance breaches. Many of these investigations have progressed to action, this has not publicly been reported yet. The incident management team (IMT) have now embedded in the response an investigator and a dedicated compliance officer to focus on compliance for the response.

We expect that there will be greater communications around compliance action outcomes to be communicated to the industry in the coming weeks. There will be a significant ramp-up of visible compliance activity in the coming weeks.

Q: Who makes the decision to continue with eradication?

Decisions regarding this emergency response are not being made by the NSW DPI alone. The decision as to technical feasibility (i.e. the continuation of eradication) and if it is cost beneficial to eradicate is decided by the 26 parties that are paying for the response. This includes 16 industry parties and the federal, state and territory governments. Representatives on this Consultative Committee for Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP) include many of the nation's leading emergency pest response specialists with decades of experience.

Q: Is it possible to still eradicate given the number of new detections?

Australia has a long history of eradicating many pests and diseases from our shores. Diseases like equine influenza, citrus canker and prawn white spot are a few that have many similarities to the challenges that our industry is currently facing from Varroa. Prawn white spot is highly transmissible and spreads through the wild populations and has similarities to Varroa and feral bee populations. Or the equine influenza, an invisible virus that spread through a horse population, with horse owners moving stock and spreading the virus. All of which have been successfully eradicated, some even multiple times.

Yes, Varroa is eradicable if we, as an industry, have the resolve to eradicate it. It will take a whole of industry team effort with every beekeeper complying with the rules, as hard as that can be. Together we can eradicate but flaunt the rules or attack the NSW DPI on social media and the momentum and willingness will be eroded, and we will be left to live with Varroa with only ourselves to blame.

To achieve eradication, it critically important that every beekeeper conduct alcohol washing. The current low levels of beekeepers submitting washing results puts the response in jeopardy.

Q: Every beekeeper should have access to miticides and strips to do their own surveillance.

There are a few reasons this is not occurring:

- The current permits for miticide strips are 'emergency use permits' this only allows for miticides to be used for surveillance by authorised personnel.
- The cost of purchasing and importing enough miticides and sticky mats to allow the surveillance by beekeepers is cost prohibitive. Individual beekeepers or industry as collective would need to pay for the miticide as it is not in the agreed response plan, for which there is no system in place.
- The laboratory resources for assessing the individual sticky mats are limited (mats must be inspected under microscope). Already the resources are stretched with the level of sticky mats in the current surveillance program. The system would be completely overwhelmed, and results would be so delayed that it would defeat the purpose.

Q: Alcohol washing is a waste of time, and we should only be doing mats and strips for surveillance!

Alcohol washing is a quick field diagnostic surveillance tool which is effective at providing proof of absence at an area level. This means that alcohol washing is effective at providing confidence that there are no populations of mites across a region/enterprise/area. It can quickly provide field results and does not require lab diagnostics in the first instance. Alcohol washing like any surveillance tool is a numbers game, the more washes that occur the greater the confidence. Strips and mats are great tools for hive surveillance but have a diagnostics delay (mats need to be inspected under microscope in a lab) and do not capture any mites under capping's.

Q: Should Varroa be declared endemic what is AHBIC doing about general use miticides?

There is current 'shelf' registration for Apivar (amitraz) and Apiguard (thymol) and AHBIC is working with chemical companies to have shelf registration for Bayvarol (flumethrin) and Mite away quick strips (formic acid). If the response did transition to management then these 'shelf' registrations would be activated for general use and resellers could begin importing and selling to beekeepers.

AHBIC was successful in securing Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) funding to progress registration of Oxalic acid strips but the company that was to register the product has since withdrawn sighting costs to do field trials. It is unlikely that the APVMA will be willing to register Oxalic acid for Varroa control due to the significant Occupational health and safety (OH&S) risks the acid presents.