

Issue

Varroa mite (*Varroa destructor*) is a parasite of honeybees. This pest is a major threat to Australian agricultural Industries that rely on pollination of crops from feral European honeybees and managed hives. The mite was detected in June 2008 in Papua New Guinea, leaving Australia as the last remaining agricultural area in the world that is still free of Varroa mite.

Background

There are currently two main risks of entry of the mite into Australia. There is a high risk that the mite will come into Australia through importing and smuggling of bees that have the mite. There is also the risk that the Asian Honeybee (*Apis cerana*), who has adapted to living with varroa mite over thousands of years will make its way into Australia.

The major threat to Australia is that Varroa mite will enter and cause damage to the feral European bee population. It weakens and kills honeybees colonies and can also transmit diseases. Farmers rely heavily on European honeybee, *Apis mellifera* for pollination of crops. Most agricultural pollination is provided by feral populations of the European honeybee and native insects. A smaller proportion of pollination is provided as a paid service to beekeepers. The mite has been detected in both New Zealand and Indonesia.

Consequences of pollinator decline in Agriculture

- It is expected that there will be a decline in agricultural pollination due to a decline in the feral bee populations if and when the Varroa mite arrives.
- Farmers that grow pollinator dependent crops, without managed hives should expect a decline in yields or quality.
- Managed bee populations would have to become an option for those that rely on feral bee pollination
- Managed bee populations could come at an increased cost if beekeepers have to maintain a disease free hive.

Key industry contacts

Australian Honeybee Industry Council <http://www.honeybee.org.au/>

What Government is doing

Currently, AQIS are carries out surveillance activities in the coastal areas of northern Australia to monitor for incursions of exotic bees and pests and diseases of European honey bees.

Live bees can not be imported into Australia without strict quarantine measures.

Visitors to Australia must declare all bee and honey products for inspection.

Current Association Policy

“that the horticultural industries support the bee industry in their fight to keep Varroa mite from entering this country”

Other information

Pollination Australia document put out by RIRDC see link: <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/07-180.pdf>

This document identifies the potential threat and impact of varroa mite.