

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Answers to Questions on Notice
Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority

Hearing: Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia

Topic: New South Wales permits

Hansard Page: 17

Question Date: 18 March 2024

CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. I just want to start with your submission. In your submission, I think you mentioned that when the outbreak occurred in northern New South Wales, the New South Wales government, I think, or government officials had to get the transfer of a permit from Queensland or some such. Could you just take me through how that worked in practice? Why didn't the New South Wales government already have an approval to use these types of things?

Dr Trainer: We can only issue permits following a receipt of an application. If the New South Wales government didn't have permits in place, it would be because they hadn't applied to have a permit in place. We do work very closely, though, with the state and territory governments. It was a relatively straightforward process to be able to work with New South Wales to either amend existing permits already held by the Queensland or to issue new permits depending on the use pattern that was being requested.

CHAIR: How long did it take from the time the New South Wales government applied until they got the approval?

Dr Trainer: There were a number of permits, so I'd have to take on notice the amount of time it took for each of those. But I know it was very quick.

Answer:

There was a single permit.

The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) applied on 28 November 2023 to extend the permit to authorise use in NSW, at the request of NSW authorities. The application was finalised on 29 November 2023, i.e. the day after submission.

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Topic: Approved treatments for Red Imported Fire Ants

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Dr McEwen: We can take it on notice, but our average time for emergency permits is around 26 days. So, given that these already had approvals in place and it was really about transferring it to another jurisdiction, they probably would have been much faster than that.

CHAIR: Well, 26 days sounds to me like a quite long time in response to an emergency situation like this. But you can take that on notice. Do any of the other jurisdictions have approval to use the approved treatments for red fire ants?

Dr Trainer: I believe there are a couple. There are some that apply to all states and territories, but the vast majority are Queensland or New South Wales or Queensland and New South Wales. But, yes, there certainly are several permits in place that can be used in all states and territories.

CHAIR: Maybe you can take that on notice too. I suppose I'm just thinking we have had outbreaks at different ports at different times, so it's not perhaps just the border that's the issue. It probably depends on how quick that was turned around, but it does seem to me a little strange that we wouldn't just—all DPIs wouldn't get themselves ready to go on something like this. We've had evidence from some commercial operators and we just heard from the CSIRO about some different types of controls. Are you doing any work about facilitating perhaps the approval of these new technologies if they're not already approved by the APVMA or do you just have to wait until someone brings you an application?

Answer:

AQoN-01 provides the time taken by the APVMA to extend the one Queensland permit (PER14317) to authorise use in New South Wales.

The following table provides an updated list of RIFA treatments currently authorised under permit, including information on the jurisdictions in which those treatments can be used:

Permit no.	Holder	Actives	Jurisdiction
12073	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Cyfluthrin	Qld
12242	NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES	Chlorpyrifos	NSW
13439	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Methyl bromide	Qld
13504	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Chlorpyrifos	Qld
13916	NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES	Bifenthrin	NSW
13959	GREENLIFE INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA LIMITED	Bifenthrin	Qld
14093	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	S-methoprene	Qld
14256	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Chlorpyrifos	Qld
14317	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Bifenthrin	Qld & NSW
14458	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Fipronil	Qld & NSW
14770	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Fipronil	Qld
81094	NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES	S-methoprene Chlorpyrifos	NSW
84694	NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES	Chlorpyrifos Bifenthrin	All states & territories

Permit no.	Holder	Actives	Jurisdiction
		Cyfluthrin Methyl bromide	
87728	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Pyriproxyfen	NSW & Qld
88626	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Hydramethylnon Pyriproxyfen	Qld
89374	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	Betacyfluthrin	Qld
90213	DAF - BIOSECURITY QLD CONTROL CENTRE	S-methoprene	All states & territories
93008	GROWCOM AUSTRALIA	Fipronil	All states & territories
94210	NSW DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES	Bifenthrin Permethrin Spinosad	All states & territories

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Hearing: Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia

Topic: Fipronil

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Dr McEwen: Yes. The teams are actively working on the fipronil at the moment, and we should be in a position to have that proposed regulatory decision later this year.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Okay. Will you be looking at the—the committee obviously looked at the varroa outbreak and eradication when it started occurring—the eradication plan. We're familiar with the use of the fipronil baits, which was the biggest—it was a giant trial, basically. The country has never seen anything like this before—having bait stations put out in national parks and reserves and trying to target native—sorry, not native bees; wild honey bee populations. There are obviously significant concerns that the fipronil has got more broadly into potentially native bees and other parts of the environment. Will you be looking at any of this? How do you get that feedback? It's such a big trial. We've never done it before.

Dr McEwen: We look at all of the information that can be available to us, including the data that's been done.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Would DPI provide that information?

Dr McEwen: I would have to take on notice the discussions that we've had with the DPI around it, but I'm sure that our teams would be keen to take that into consideration. If it's not considered in the actual review before we came to a proposed decision, there is the ability during the period of consultation for that information to be provided. If it hadn't been taken into account at that time, we would then look at it and work it into our assessments.

Answer:

The APVMA would consult with the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) should they request a renewal of the current permit. Any data relating to use as part of the eradication plan, including any monitoring information obtained by DPI, would be considered as part of that process.

With respect to the reconsideration of fipronil, the APVMA will consider information provided by stakeholders and available in the public domain that relate to approved label uses. Under the legislation, the scope of chemical reconsideration does not look at uses allowed under permit, but only to approved label uses. The use permitted for control of varroa mites is a not a label use but is approved under a permit.

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Hearing: Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia

Topic: RNAi product

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Question Date: 18 March 2024

Senator COLBECK: I just want to go back to the conversation on the RNA technology being developed in the US. Are you in contact with your equivalent counterparts in the US to understand what's going on? According to the evidence we just had from CSIRO, which I'm sure you heard, it's a product developed by the US Department of Agriculture.

Dr McEwen: We have monthly meetings with regulators from the US, Canada, UK and New Zealand where we discuss these kinds of issues, and particularly things like novel technologies, so that there's an opportunity for information sharing. I'm not sure how much we've discussed this particular issue.

Dr Trainer: We've not discussed extensively the product that we're referring to for the treatment of red imported fire ants, but we have spoken with the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the regulatory body in the United States, regarding the regulatory approach to RNAi in general. Just a couple of weeks ago, as part of the OECD working party on pesticides, we were part of a discussion where the US EPA gave a presentation of their risk assessment approach to another RNAi product that they have recently authorised—the first, I believe, that's been authorised anywhere in the world. That was specifically for the treatment of Colorado potato beetle. We do have those forums in which we discuss these plus direct channels of communication for follow-up.

Senator COLBECK: CSIRO said that there was an RNAi product currently in the market in the US. That was the evidence I thought I heard.

Dr Trainer: I would have to double-check. Certainly, there's an RNAi product in the United States for the treatment of Colorado potato beetle. But whether there is one that's broadly and completely authorised for red imported fire ants, I'm not sure. My understanding was that, if there is one, it's probably under a limited use permit, but I can check.

Senator COLBECK: That may be the case. I would be interested to get a sense of where that's at.

Answer:

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) are not currently evaluating any RNAi-based pesticides for RIFA control. They are not aware of any specific US Department of Agriculture RNAi products under development for RIFA treatment.

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Hearing: Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia

Topic: Fipronil and varroa

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Senator COLBECK: Okay. I'd be interested on notice to understand if you've had any reporting in relation to particularly fipronil, just off the back of Senator Whish-Wilson's questions. Just going to varroa, how many new actives have you approved for the management of varroa mite now that we are in management phase rather than looking to eradicate?

Dr Trainer: I believe we have registered—we've had two products registered for quite a considerable amount of time for varroa. But I'd have to take on notice the total number of active constituents that are either authorised under permit or registered or approved in a registered product.

Senator COLBECK: If you're going to do that, can you find out how many applications there are for a new product? From what I understand, there's a bit of chatter about getting some of the other products or some newer products into the market as well.

Dr Trainer: Are you looking for products to treat varroa or to the broader spectrum of products?

Senator COLBECK: We're looking at treating hives to manage varroa now, aren't we?

Dr Trainer: Yes.

Answer:

The APVMA Adverse Experience Reporting Program has not received any Adverse Experience Reports (AERs) in relation to the use of fipronil as a registered product, or under permit, in either the Red Imported Fire Ant or the *Varroa destructor* responses.

No new actives have been approved for use in a registered product since varroa's transition to management on 19 September 2023.

No permits for new products to treat varroa have been issued. One permit application is currently being assessed for two new products containing one new active constituent. Three additional permits have been issued for to allow broader industry access to varroa control products that were already permitted for use in surveillance.

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Topic: Management of Varroa mite

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Senator COLBECK: We're not in the space where you want to be doing management with emergency use permits—

Dr McEwen: No.

Senator COLBECK: because this is going to be situation as normal. It's management. I really am curious to understand what additional resources beekeepers now have now that we've moved to management. How many—if there are some that have been done on emergency use permits, that's fine. But I'd just like to get a sense of what action has occurred in the period of time since we went to management to provide additional resources.

Dr Trainer: I don't believe we've registered any additional products. I believe that we've had two products registered with a shelf registration for a number of years in anticipation of a potential incursion. The restrictions that were on the labels for those products meant they couldn't be sold or distributed within Australia without a declaration of an incursion. I believe we've been working with the holders to remove those restrictions. I don't believe we've registered new products, but I believe we are actively looking to transition those that were under emergency permits to a minor use permits in order to make sure that there are products available to beekeepers until such time as they're registered and authorised for broader use. But we can certainly take on notice those details for you.

Senator COLBECK: How many applications have you received for new products?

Dr Trainer: I would have to take that on notice. I would go out on a limb and say zero, but we'll take that on notice—for registration of a new product.

Answer:

One new product registration application is being assessed.

One new permit application is being assessed. Three additional permits have been issued since the transition to management for broader industry access to products for control. These were already permitted for use for surveillance.