Greenlife Industry Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

Why Australia needs to be on red alert for fire ants

The steady spread of red imported fire ants throughout Queensland since their first detection in 2001, and recent detections at two separate sites in NSW, has put industry on red alert. The recent detections in South Murwillumbah and East Wardell are a reminder that growers must remain alert, regardless of how far they might be from the traditional surveillance and treatment zones.

Australia's infested zone has grown year on year from 40,000 ha to 800,000 ha today – but with cooperation, collaboration, education and investment, there's still hope of eradication.

Director RDE and Biosecurity at Greenlife Industry Australia (GIA), John McDonald, welcomed the findings of the recent senate inquiry into fire ants, saying they can guide a plan of action to halt the incursion of the invasive species.

"The Rural and Regional Affairs Committee findings and ten recommendations make it clear that to achieve eradication, industries, government and the public must work together," Mr McDonald said.

"Fire ants should concern every Australian. Modelling indicates that the pest could cost the country at least $2.5 billion annually if it's not controlled by 2035.

"Of Australia's invasive ant species, fire ants pose the most serious threat to our biosecurity status because they move and colonise quickly, and have significant environmental, social and economic impacts.

"This isn't just a problem for the agriculture industry. The continued spread of this species has the potential to have major ramifications for health, tourism and the environment, so we need robust measures in place to prevent the spread."

CEO of Greenlife Industry Australia (GIA), Joanna Cave, said that while it is only one part of the solution, the greenlife sector is playing a major role in the eradication of fire ants in Australia.

"GIA is committed to keeping nursery owners and workers informed, vigilant and proactive by ensuring they have strong nursery hygiene practices, integrated weed and pest management, regular surveillance and robust records.

"GIA continues to champion best management practices, plant protection procedures and cutting-edge techniques and technology to identify and address biosecurity risks. From our extension officers who provide free in-person advice to growers to our Australian Plant Production Standards programs which help production nurseries implement best practice solutions, we're all about keeping our sector – and the nation – safe from dangerous pests like red imported fire ants."

"If we want to eradicate this pest, it is everyone's job to be aware of the fire ant risk and check the source of any material brought onto their property or business."

Your Levy At Work

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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