



THE GOVERNMENT OF NORFOLK ISLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

Exotic Pest Alert: Potato-Tomato Psyllid Eradication Plan

Update 5

BACKGROUND

Tomato/ Potato psyllids have now been confirmed at six Norfolk Island localities in low numbers. As this pest and associated agricultural disease pose such threat to our fresh produce supply and food security, an island wide Psyllid eradication project is being developed and possible project funding details are currently being worked through. The associated liberibacter bacteria have been identified at three locations.

This pest insect and the bacterial disease pose a massive threat to our food security, our capacity to produce healthy fresh produce, and poses a biosecurity risk to our regional neighbours not already affected by these pests.

NEXT STEPS

- Since the emergence of this issue most growers and many others have indicated a strong support for an eradication effort. Eradication can only succeed with community support. The acceptance of government appointed officers or other external agents onto private land can be confronting for some. This project will only be progressed if there is strong community support for it to do so.
- An eradication project has been developed, costed and was included in the Norfolk Island Government's 2014 -2015 annual supply budget. However the budget was only able to partially cover the projected costs and we are currently working through the consequences of this partial supply.
- The New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture has been extremely helpful and forthcoming with information including providing links that have revealed several more potential host species.
- For an eradication project of this scale to be effective it is crucial that:
 1. There is community recognition of the problem and acceptance of the eradication effort, and that all growers are willing to work with the eradication team to achieve a rapid and effective response. Many Norfolk gardens are in secluded settings that could easily be missed if owners are not forthcoming. Unchecked gardens amount to causing failure of the eradication attempt. There will also be a need for growers to take various crop management actions to aid the eradication attempt.
 2. All possible measures are taken to minimise transportation of produce and related agricultural materials. Preventive measures will need to be taken to ensure tractors and other farm machinery are adequately cleaned prior to movement between properties.
 3. That household waste containing vegetable material is properly disposed of to avoid contamination of farms and gardens.
 4. While growers are the initial and primary observers, all gardens and likely host plants need to be thoroughly inspected by those who have the knowledge and reference materials to rely on.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

As growers take advantage of the wetter months to revive their gardens, and as potato crops derived from recent consignments of imported seed potatoes develop, it is highly likely there will be more affected gardens identified. Growers need to be on the alert for symptoms. It is asked that all commercial and home growers view the psyllids material held at the Quarantine office and regularly inspect their crops, particularly Tomato, Capsicum, Potato and sweet potato (Kumara).

The psyllids (adults and young) can be difficult to find and identify, so please have your gardens checked by those who have the knowledge and reference materials to rely on. Any concerns should be referred to Quarantine officer Mr Neil (Snowy) Tavener) in the first instance.

The Norfolk Island Quarantine Office continues to progress the survey field work and data collection to determine distribution of the psyllids and the bacteria.

If suspected infestations are found it is better to refer the infestation for coordinated control rather than individuals taking a range of control measures that could limit success of island wide control effort. There is no cost to land holders for inspection or control works instigated by the Administration.

All queries regarding the psyllids and the risks they pose to local agricultural production should be directed to the Health and Quarantine Office on phone 22609 during their business hours.

Ron Ward
Minister for the Environment

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