

AGRICULTURE

Questions on Notice

Question 1

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. Well, in March this year when you announced the unprotection order lapse in north-west Victoria, the media release said that:

... this decision follows new research, strong advice and the effectiveness of non-lethal dingo control methods to protect livestock.

What was that new research? Is it the research paper from the Arthur Rylah Institute? What does it say? Will it be –

Ros SPENCE: There have actually been a number of papers that have been developed in regard to dingo research, and there is consistency amongst them that, first of all, the number of dingoes is very, very low in the north-west of the state, potentially as low as 40 dingoes; secondly, there is the classification of whether it is a wild dog or a dingo, and this is also subject to that research, with more indications now that there is not as much dingo-dog hybridisation as was previously thought; thirdly, in that research there is also the predation numbers showing that within the north-west of the state the levels of predation are significantly lower than in the north-east of the state and, indeed, ranging from around 10 to 68 predation numbers annually over the last 10-year period.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, Minister, can you provide a copy of the Arthur Rylah Institute report that informed the decision to classify the wild dogs in the Big Desert as dingoes?

Ros SPENCE: As I just said, there is more than one piece of research.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, can you provide it all?

Ros SPENCE: I am happy to provide you with research that shows what the levels of predation are. I can go through, there is some research by Kylie Cairns, which shows the likelihood of it –

Danny O'BRIEN: Is that public?

Ros SPENCE: Correct.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is the ones that are not public that we are after.

Ros SPENCE: I am going through the research that was asked of me.

Danny O'BRIEN: We just want to know if you can provide it to us.

Bev McARTHUR: The ones that have not been made public, Minister.

Ros SPENCE: I will ask for the research that can be made public to go to you.

Answer:

The Arthur Rylah Institute (ARI) produced analysis in February 2024 which informed the decision making in the relation to the remaking of the dingo Unprotection Order in March 2024.

The research included summaries of data from the wild dog management program for the financial years 2013-14 to 2022-23 inclusive, summaries of the number of dingoes removed

by trapping and the number of livestock (e.g. sheep, cattle, goats, other livestock) confirmed to have been either killed or maimed as a result of predation. In addition, the report included an estimate of the total abundance of dingoes on public land within the footprint of the unprotection order boundaries, separately for the eastern and western boundary areas.

Abundance estimates were derived from an array of 357 remote infrared cameras set on public land in Victoria during 2021 and 2022 using camera trap distance sampling methods. Additional cameras were also set within the Big Desert and Wyperfeld national park during 2023. Distance sampling and image counts of Dingos recorded on cameras were analysed using density surface models. Estimates were then subdivided into populations inhabiting the eastern and western portions of the unprotection order boundaries.

Abundance estimates were as follows:

Region	Estimate	SD	CV	Lower CI	Upper CI	Area (km ²)	Density (dingoes/km ²)
Eastern	4,900	2,095	0.43	2,640	8,880	40,909	0.12
Western	110	66	0.61	40	230	6,864	0.02

SD – standard deviation, CV – coefficient of variation, Lower CI - lower 95% confidence limit, Upper CI – upper 95% confidence limit, Density – average density.

In addition, the research showed that:

- Relatively few dingoes have been trapped through the (WDMP) in the north west of the State, with between 0 and 17 dingoes trapped annually in this area since 2013-14.
- There is a relatively low level of livestock predation in the north west of the State, generally ranging between 10 and 68 livestock reported as killed or maimed by dingoes annually in the region since 2013-14.
- There is a greater level of livestock predation in the east of the State, generally ranging between 672 and 1,222 livestock reported as killed or maimed by dingoes annually in the region since 2013-14.

Question 2

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. Can I move on to biosecurity. We have been talking about red ants, but varroa mite is the other one that you would be aware of. The varroa mite transition to management plan states that it will 'allow movement of hives and bees with testing and treatments'. How many mite strips and what volume of miticide have been stockpiled in preparation for the upcoming pollination season?

Ros SPENCE: I do not have a response for that. I will pass to the end.

Katherine CLIFT: Thank you for the question. In terms of our preparations for the upcoming almond pollination season, we have been working closely with the industry to clarify the arrangements that will be required for hives from interstate to be able to enter Victoria. That does include stringent requirements around being registered with either the Victorian government or their home jurisdiction. It also includes testing requirements, as you have indicated, and those permits will be assessed by Agriculture Victoria. We do anticipate, as you have said, that as we are now in a transition to management phase that we will have varroa detected in Victoria at some stage in the future.

Danny O'BRIEN: Hence the question: how many mite strips and what volume of miticide has been stockpiled?

Katherine CLIFT: We are confident based on the discussions that we have had with our colleagues in New South Wales that there are no concerns around the availability of miticide strips in Australia at this point in time. They have been readily available.

Danny O'BRIEN: But the department does not keep it itself.

Katherine CLIFT: We have had some miticide strips previously. I would have to take that on notice if you wish to have the current details.

Answer:

Victoria currently has 1,640 miticide strips with an additional 4,000 currently being shipped from New South Wales. These 5,640 miticide strips could treat approximately 1,410 hives (four per hive) in the early stages of Victoria's first detection of Varroa mite.

Agriculture Victoria would be looking to provide strips to the initial (1) infected beekeeper. The 1,640 strips (plus the additional 4,000 strips that are being shipped from NSW) would be sufficient to treat an initial beekeeper's hives, and could cover multiple beekeepers.

The number of strips required in a hive is typically two to four. In order to help manage miticide resistance and promote good agricultural practice, it is recommended that miticides are only used when minimum mite thresholds are met.

Miticide strips are readily available through commercial suppliers in New South Wales but will not be available in Victoria until after the first detection of Varroa mite as the permit only authorises the use of unregistered chemicals to control varroa mite when present, rather than as a preventative measure. This is to help prevent resistance issues, chemical residues in honey and illegal use. Following the first detection, retailers can be added to the existing Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) permit enabling supply of miticide strips for varroa treatment in Victoria. The permit process is expected to take approximately one week.