



Minister for Agriculture and Food

27/5/09

Media Statement

Latest weapon in fight against timber pest unveiled

Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman today unveiled the latest weapon in the eradication of the destructive timber pest European House Borer (EHB) in Western Australia.

Mr Redman said five working prototypes of an acoustic sensing device had been completed and delivered to the Department of Agriculture and Food. These devices can identify the 'crunching' sounds of EHB larvae and transmit their exact location to a computer.

"I am also pleased to announce that the WA Government has committed \$2.07m in 09/10 as part of a multimillion dollar program funded by the federal and state governments across Australia to stamp out EHB in Western Australia," Mr Redman said.

"EHB is a destructive pest of seasoned timber including pine, fir and spruce. It has been found on 144 properties throughout the State, mostly in dead sections of pine tree as well as in some pine furniture and untreated pine timber."

Mr Redman said EHB larvae could remain undetected boring through wood for up to 10 years without ever breaking the surface. Previously the only way of confirming presence of EHB was if the pest had left an exit hole in the wood, which by then meant the pest had spread elsewhere.

"This device will mean that pests will be detected before they move on, which is a huge breakthrough.

"In the long term, approximately 1000 devices will be used throughout EHB affected areas in Western Australia, providing a non-destructive method of detecting EHB larvae before the adult beetle emerges," he said.

"Without eradication, there is a real risk of EHB migrating from infested trees to nearby houses. Most WA homes in the past 10 years have been built or renovated with untreated structural pine. A house infested with EHB will over time suffer extensive structural damage," Mr Redman said.

The prototype acoustic device comprises a small box which houses hardware circuitry and microphones set to identify, characterise and differentiate the sounds of EHB larvae.

A wireless radio transmitter within the device has been developed to send a signal to a hardware radio receiver, which when attached to a computer can access specific software that can listen to and analyse the signals being transmitted.

Mr Redman said the prototypes were currently being assessed in the laboratory to determine its effectiveness in various situations, such as detecting EHB larvae sizes, distance from the microphone, distinguishing between other borer sounds and successful transmission.

He said further testing would then be carried out in the field before a user friendly and practical device could be produced. Further research on the device is expected to take up to two years.

Mr Redman said the EHB larvae feeding sounds were first recorded by the department's EHB research team, who were able to identify and characterise the sounds, and differentiate them from sounds made by another pine borer, Buprestis.

In order to engage the engineering expertise to develop an acoustic device, Associate Professor Adam Osseiran at Edith Cowan University and the department funded a feasibility study by engineering Masters student, Ivo Jacquemai.

Mr Jacquemai went on to design the hardware needed to listen for and record sounds, and the signal processing software required to identify EHB chewing signals.

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