



MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

MEDIA STATEMENT

Attention: News Editor/Chief of Staff

2/4/08

Detector Dogs enlisted to fight pine pest.

In a world first, detector dogs will be used to target a serious pest of untreated pine, the European House Borer (EHB).

Agriculture Minister Kim Chance said the dogs had undergone specialised training to detect EHB larvae or adults within pine wood, including pine trap poles and in untreated pine wood such as in pine plantations, at businesses and on private property.

"The detector dogs will boost efforts to contain and eradicate the pest as part of a nationally-funded EHB eradication program conducted by the Department of Agriculture and Food," Mr Chance said.

"Currently, to confirm EHB in pine, the wood has to be sliced and examined for the presence of exit holes - a lengthy and painstaking process.

"By using the dogs, the pest can be quickly detected inside the wood, where it can otherwise survive for up to three years unnoticed.

"This will significantly speed-up the eradication process."

The Minister said the dogs, Jed, an 18-month-old male Labrador, and Lara, a two-year-old female black Labrador, arrived from the Eastern States in December 2007.

"Two experienced Department of Agriculture and Food field staff have been trained as specialist dog handlers to carry out EHB surveillance in and around affected areas," he said.

"The dog team will continue to undergo training in different field situations, before being fully operational."

Mr Chance said EHB was first identified in Perth in January 2004, and since then more than 60,000 Perth properties and 300,000ha of pine plantations had been inspected for the pest.

"There are 122 infested sites centred around two main clusters; the Mundaring Hills and the Gnangara/Ellenbrook area, including nine pine plantations," he said.

"The majority of infested urban sites have been cleaned up, removing all potential host material.

"Thousands of tonnes of susceptible material such as dead pine trees, pine logs and in some cases, live pine trees in high-risk areas which have the potential to harbour EHB, have been destroyed.

“There are also plans to fast-track the harvesting of plantation pines, particularly adjacent to housing areas, where the pest poses a risk to pine timber in houses.”

Signs of EHB infestation include oval-shaped emergence holes in pine timber, running in line with the grain of the wood. Dust and droppings can sometimes be seen below the timber where an adult has emerged.

The borer tunnels through the wood, packing its tunnels or galleries with wood dust and droppings as it goes. As it nears the surface, narrow blisters along the grain of the wood may be seen.

Where there are exposed untreated pine beams or pine products, the borer may also be heard chewing the timber. However, to date, there has been no evidence of EHB in structural timber.

More information about European House Borer is available at <http://www.ehb.wa.gov.au> or by calling freecall on 1800 084 881.

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