

Detection Response & Transition to Management Plan - Draft

Summary

Varroa destructor mite

Q: What is Varroa destructor, and why is it significant in Australia?

A: Varroa destructor, commonly referred to as Varroa mite, is a parasitic mite that infests honeybee colonies. It is a notifiable pest in all Australian jurisdictions due to its detrimental effects on bee health, which include weakening the bees and spreading viruses.

Q: What is the expected impact of a Varroa incursion on South Australian feral/wild European honeybee populations?

A: An incursion is expected to significantly reduce these populations, which may have both positive and negative impacts on the environment and community. However, these environmental and community issues are not covered in the plan.

Q: Under which legislative act are beekeeping activities regulated in South Australia?

A: In South Australia, beekeeping activities are regulated under the *Livestock Act 1997*. This includes the regulation (via Gazettal notice) of the entry conditions for apiary commodities into the state to prevent the spread of pests like Varroa destructor.

The Plan

Q: What is the primary intent of the South Australian Varroa detection response and transition to management plan?

A: The primary intent of the plan is to outline the activities to prepare beekeepers to manage Varroa destructor (Varroa) and to respond effectively to detections of the mite within South Australia or in previously Varroa-free states/territories. This includes providing initial management and surveillance tools, and ongoing support through advice, education, and training until February 2026.

Q: What are the aims of the plan?

A: The aims are to prepare the apiary industry, including both commercial and recreational beekeepers, for the eventual establishment of Varroa by:

- Maintaining freedom from Varroa as long as possible while ensuring business continuity.
- Minimizing the impact of Varroa once detected.
- Providing business continuity through a risk-based approach.

How will PIRSA respond to a detection within another State/Territory?

While SA remains free of Varroa, we plan to retain our existing entry conditions if another jurisdiction has an incursion to aid in slowing the spread of Varroa across Australia and into South Australia

Q: What are the general entry requirements for bees and related products into South Australia?

A: Entry requirements are defined under Gazette notices issued under the Livestock Act. These requirements include pre and post-entry sampling to confirm the negative status for Varroa, decontamination, treatments, and providing health certificates from the originating jurisdiction. These entry requirements apply to all interstate or returning SA based beekeepers and aims to prevent the entry of Varroa destructor into South Australia.

Q: What testing rates are required for bee colonies entering South Australia?

A: The testing rates are as follows:

- For 0-64 colonies proposed to enter: All colonies must be tested.
- For 65-640 colonies: a minimum of 64 hives must be tested, sampled from each apiary contributing to the entry movement as evenly as possible.
- For more than 641 colonies: minimum of 10% of hives must be tested from each apiary contributing to the entry movement as evenly as possible.

How will PIRSA respond to a detection within SA borders.

The following questions relate to what would happen under the plan as currently drafted.

Q: What is the initial response plan upon detection of Varroa destructor (Varroa) in South Australia?

A: Upon detection of Varroa, the Plan aims to support the apiary and pollination-dependent industries in managing the incursion and slowing its spread. PIRSA would not enact forced euthanasia of hives with confirmed detections as a management tool in South Australia. Upon notification of an initial detection, PIRSA will seek to confirm Varroa through collection of samples to ensure that these are confirmed through entomological identification and genomic testing by SARDI. This confirmatory testing helps distinguish whether the detection is a new incursion or an extension of a known infestation. In relation to ongoing management of varroa, an obligatory/mandated surveillance interval will not be enforced as beekeepers will need to alter their frequency of surveillance in response to varying conditions and strategies employed to manage Varroa.

Upon confirmation, PIRSA will notify all registered beekeepers via Biosecurity Notice distributed by email/SMS which will also be posted on the PIRSA website and social media channels. The notification will only define the nearest locality and the affected Local Government Area (LGA). Beekeepers in the affected LGA would be encouraged to undertake sampling to check for Varroa presence in their apiaries.

PIRSA would consider measures to ensure the affected apiary to remain in place. This order will remain in place for the shortest possible time. During this period PIRSA will examine the records of the affected apiary operations to aid in defining the potential extent of the incursion.

PIRSA will provide acaricides and surveillance materials to the affected apiary operation to aid in the management of Varroa at the affected apiary. Beekeeping operations that are known with 25km of the detection locality will be provided surveillance materials to aid in defining the extent of the incursion. If additional detections are made, beyond the initial detection, then these adjacent beekeeping operations will also be provided acaricides for their affected apiaries.

PIRSA will continue to issue acaricides and surveillance material to beekeepers within the vicinity of the initial detection site for 30 days post-detection for use by beekeepers on a voluntary basis. Beekeepers can choose to source and use alternative approved products available from resellers if they choose not to utilise the PIRSA issued product.

Q: How would South Australia handle zoning within the state after a Varroa detection?

A: South Australia will not implement intrastate management zoning. It will maintain the existing biosecurity zoning for Kangaroo Island, which is legislated as a sanctuary for Ligurian bees.

Q: What changes will be made to entry permit conditions after a Varroa detection in South Australia?

A: Within 30 days of the detection, entry permit conditions and Gazette notices will be modified or revoked. Entry would then be permitted provided that a Health Certificate can be produced. This would allow beekeepers to declare commodities for entry while continuing to prohibit the entry of commodities with Varroa or other notifiable pests. Further changes including allowing entry to commodities being actively managed for Varroa will require careful consideration by the Government and Industry.

Support for beekeepers

Q: What is the duration and scope of the resourcing and industry support provided for the Varroa mite management program?

A: Industry support, to facilitate the delivery of both National Varroa Mite Management Program (NVMMP) and State-level plan activities through the will be maintained until at least February 2026.

Q: How do Varroa Development Officers (VDOs) support education and training?

A: VDOs roles focus on education, training, and monitoring related to Varroa mite management. They help establish and maintain monitoring programs, assist with beekeeper skills development, and deliver training events including small group and face to face sessions to support all beekeepers – recreational, commercial, registered, and unregistered.

Q: What educational resources are available for beekeepers to help manage Varroa mites?

A: Resources include full-day face-to-face training sessions, online information sessions, and materials for self-paced learning. Training is provided regionally, with workshops targeting recreational and commercial beekeepers. Additional shorter courses and information sessions are integrated into existing industry events

Q: What is the role of the Farm Family and Business (FaB) mentor service?

A: PIRSA provide support to the FaB mentor service which offers free, confidential support to beekeepers, connecting them with financial counselling, local health networks, emotional wellbeing services, government and non-government assistance, and community organizations. This service helps beekeepers manage the impacts of Varroa mite on their operations.