



**The Hon. Barnaby
Joyce MP**
Minister for Agriculture



**The Hon. Katrina
Hodgkinson**
NSW Minister for Primary
Industries

M E D I A R E L E A S E

2 December 2014

Rapid response to suspected fire ant detection

Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce and NSW Minister for Primary Industries Katrina Hodgkinson highlighted the rapid response to a detection of suspected imported fire ants at Port Botany in Sydney as a positive example of Australia's biosecurity system at work.

Minister Joyce said imported fire ants are a serious pest that could inflict painful bites on people, pets and livestock – and can seriously disrupt people's enjoyment of outdoor areas.

"They also pose an economic and environmental threat – through attacking young animals (farm animals and native fauna) and by invading food and water sources," Minister Joyce said.

"That is why the Commonwealth and NSW Governments have responded so quickly, deploying entomologists and biosecurity officers to the location to immediately determine the extent of the detection.

"Expert entomologists from Queensland are currently reviewing samples to confirm the species of the pest ant."

So far five ant holes have been detected along with many native ants. Finding these native ants is a positive and important sign since they are usually the first casualties when imported fire ants establish.

"Whilst serious, the Port Botany detection is a good example of the value of a biosecurity system that can detect pests and then quickly work across all levels of government and with industry to rapidly respond," Minister Joyce said.

"Destroying these ants before they establish will save the government money and the community inconvenience."

Ms Hodgkinson said the NSW Department of Primary Industries will now lead eradication efforts.

"A local control centre is now being established in Rosebery and emergency response experts, including regulatory officers, biosecurity officers and entomologists are currently inspecting the site, searching for nests and planning eradication efforts," Ms Hodgkinson said.

“The nests will be destroyed – along with their inhabitants – and surveillance and trapping will be stepped up in the area to ensure there are no additional nests remaining at Port Botany.

“While this is a serious biosecurity incident, the NSW Government is working closely with the Commonwealth to deliver a positive outcome.

“I thank industry and the Australian Government for the high level of cooperation so far.”

Australia’s first detection of Red Imported Fire Ants was made in Queensland in February 2001. Since then, the Australian, State and territory governments have invested \$281 million towards eradicating them from southeast Queensland.