



NATIONAL Varroa Mite Management PROGRAM



The Varroa Mite Transition to Management (T2M) plan

Varroa mite (*Varroa destructor*) is the most serious pest of European honey bees. It was detected for the first time in Australia at the Port of Newcastle (NSW) in June 2022. An emergency response was initiated according to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed supported by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and agricultural industries potentially affected by this pest. The Response was led by the NSW Department of Primary Industries, and even though it was the largest agricultural biosecurity response in Australia to date, it was ultimately unsuccessful in eradicating Varroa mite.

In September 2023, the National Management Group agreed it was no longer feasible to eradicate Varroa mite and a plan to assist industry and the community to transition to management (T2M) should be developed. A 24-month T2M plan was approved in February 2024.

This plan will provide an orderly transition to management, minimising the ongoing effects of Varroa mite naturalisation on the European honey bee industry and pollination-reliant industries with a focus on business continuity. It aims to slow the spread of Varroa mite to allow beekeepers, pollination-dependent industries and the community sufficient time to prepare for expected future arrival.

The primary focus will be training beekeepers and providing them with the skills they need to manage Varroa mite and maintain healthy beehives. Tailored resources are being developed to provide accessible, reliable, current, and consistent information and training programs relevant to best practices in an Australian context. These resources are being delivered nationally online via a coordinated webinar series, and face-to-face training will also be conducted.

Varroa Development Officers (VDOs) will engage with commercial and recreational beekeepers to extend best management practice guidelines and resolve problems. They will also establish, coordinate and maintain a voluntary Varroa mite monitoring program in collaboration with volunteer beekeepers, beekeeping clubs and societies.

A National Pollination Industry Coordinator role will gather relevant information from pollination-dependent industries on their concerns, knowledge gaps and future needs related to living with Varroa mite within their industry.

Additional assistance and resources will be provided through updates to the *Australian Honey Bee Industry Biosecurity Code of Practice* and the *Bee Biosecurity Manual*. The Code provides a framework for Australian beekeepers to use best practice biosecurity measures. It is based on the principles of good biosecurity and describes the outcomes a beekeeper needs to achieve for good pest and disease prevention and control.

Diagnostic capability and capacity within NSW have been well established throughout the emergency response to Varroa mite. However, more work is required to bolster this capacity on a national scale to support ongoing surveillance and management needs. The T2M plan will share this knowledge, enabling interstate diagnostic laboratories to detect Varroa mite and associated exotic viruses quickly, initiating efficient responses.

The establishment of Varroa mite in Australia will radically change the way European honey bees are managed. While this is regrettable, the T2M plan will provide the knowledge and tools to allow Australian beekeepers, pollination-dependent industries and the community to use world's best practices to minimise this pest's impacts.