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First locust swarms threaten summer crops

The first plague locust swarms of the season have emerged in the State's Central West and will be targeting crops, Minister for Primary Industries Ian Macdonald said today.

"The first sightings of locust swarms this season have been reported near Coonamble and swarming is expected to intensify over the next few weeks if the weather remains warm," Minister Macdonald said.

"Green crops around Coonamble will be under immediate threat from the voracious pest, with crops and pastures in surrounding regions to follow.

"Sorghum crops are just starting to emerge and are likely to be the first to suffer.

"If locusts get sufficient feed off these crops, they could lay eggs and create a new generation that could be a danger throughout summer for other green crops and pastures."

Mr Macdonald said swarms are expected to begin forming to the east and south east of Coonamble, then over following weeks to the west around Quambone and further south around Gulargambone and towards Gilgandra.

"They can travel hundreds of kilometres each day, targeting any green crops and pastures in their path, but unfortunately the options for swarm control are limited.

"Some aerial spraying of medium and high density swarms may be undertaken, but only where environmental constraints, weather conditions and safety concerns allow.

"Enough ultra low volume insecticide for spraying swarms is on standby should opportunities for aerial treatment arise."

Mr Macdonald said 361 reports of spring locust activity have been reported, with 287 of those reports coming from within the boundaries of Central West Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA).

"Unfavourable spring weather interrupted treatment operations around Coonamble at the optimum control time, enabling many locusts to survive and reach maturity," he said.

"We could be looking at more swarming than initially expected.

"This is despite a sustained effort by landholders in finding and treating nymph locusts on the ground, together with the work of LHPAs and the Australian Plague Locust Commission.

“Rain and cold, windy conditions at critical times delayed treatment on many properties in the Coonamble district and by the time weather conditions had improved, many locust bands had dispersed.

Mr Macdonald reminded landholders in all affected areas of the need to continue reporting any locust activity to their LHPA and especially to be on the lookout for any egg laying.

“If egg beds are found it is vital they be marked, reported to the LHPA and be monitored so that should seasonal conditions remain favourable, the next generation can be treated as soon as it starts banding,” he said.

“Reporting of swarms will help in tracking where they are moving and give more of an idea where to expect next generation egg beds.”

For further information go to www.dpi.nsw.gov.au
