

Biosecurity Advice Update

Pest

Xanthomonas citri Citrus Canker

Date

02 August 2018

Location

Northern Territory and Western Australia

Situation Update

Citrus canker was detected in early April 2018 at two retail outlets in Darwin and Palmerston in the Northern Territory. The disease was found on West Indian and Tahitian limes. Citrus plants propagated on an infected premise are understood to have been sold from the Darwin and Palmerston retailer before the symptoms were noticed. All citrus products have been removed from the affected retail outlets and have been disposed of under strict biosecurity procedures. Following tracing and testing of nursery plants from Darwin, there are confirmed and linked cases to ten locations within the Greater Darwin area and one in Katherine in the NT. In Western Australia there are links to three premises in the north of the state, with two are at Kununurra and one in Wyndham. Host material traced to these locations has been destroyed. The source of the disease is not known at this stage.

The Northern Territory's (NT) Department of Primary Industry and Resources is urging local residents to report any purchases of citrus plants they have made in the last 12 months so that they can be checked for signs of citrus canker infection. A nationally agreed Response Plan is in place agreed by commonwealth, state and territory governments plus the affected industries of nursery production and citrus. The aim of the Response Plan is to detect and destroy citrus canker infected material from the original NT source premise across NT and Western Australia (WA). Surveillance and tracing activities are guiding this approach. Most of the citrus canker infections have been found on three different varieties of lime in WA and NT.

In the effort to eradicate citrus canker, the nationally coordinated response to seek and destroy citrus canker is progressing, with on-ground response teams in place in the NT and WA. There are several infected premises, with eleven in the NT and three in northern WA, all linked back to the one premises in the NT. This number is likely to increase as ongoing tracing information identifies the location of risk plants for destruction. The increase in the number of infected premises is providing confidence that the tracing system is working and guiding removal and destruction activities, as appropriate, in NT and WA.

As at the 17 July 2018 surveillance has been conducted on 702 premises in the NT, and 400 in WA. This surveillance has shown infected plants remain limited to those supplied from a single premise in Darwin. There has been no spread from these infected plants to other host plants. The other states have also conducted surveillance and testing because of the tracing information they received from the NT. In total around 7,000 traces have been investigated across Australia, and no citrus canker has been found. Between the NT and WA, more than 12,000 plants have been destroyed, and

disposed of in accordance with the agreed response strategy for citrus canker. The premises that have been surveyed included retail outlets, residential properties, and production nurseries. There are no traces to commercial citrus orchards, however, they have also been inspected as a precaution.

Available evidence indicates that citrus canker is restricted to containerised plants distributed through the retail supply chain to the home garden sector in NT and northern WA. Citrus canker has not been detected in any citrus orchards to date and those orchards impacted have only been so due to their proximity to an infected containerized plant. Recent national surveillance activities in citrus production areas across Australia has determined that there are no apparent citrus canker infections in commercial citrus crops.

The NT and WA governments have put movement controls and quarantine measures in place to contain the disease with businesses cooperating at every stage of the process. Other jurisdictions have introduced domestic movement controls to prevent the entry of citrus canker hosts and carriers, plants and plant material, soil, equipment and machinery, from control areas in the NT and WA. However, stringent measures are in place to allow for the safe interstate trade of fruit.

As standard practice in a response of this kind, specialist working groups have been established to help achieve the aim of the national response strategy. Two working groups have met, and a third working group is being planned to develop surveillance plans in each risk area.

1. The Response Strategy Working Group is providing advice on risk-based response activities to eradicate citrus canker from Australia. They have developed four scenarios to test possible response strategies against, as well as identified unknowns that may hinder the response success and potential actions to address them; and
2. A Tracing Working Group is harmonising all tracing procedures and analysis being undertaken across jurisdictions, including assessing residual disease risks of infected trace material. This group is critical to targeting response activities to areas of disease risk and will provide the confidence to declare that the disease is no longer present in Australia.

NT government has reported on several citrus samples that have been provided to their plant pathology laboratory over the course of the past 14 years (2005 – 2017) for disease diagnostics. All samples in that period have been confirmed as citrus bacterial spot, not citrus canker, with evidence suggesting it is not an economically damaging disease however further assessment will occur.

NGIA can confirm that the source business in the NT has provided numerous citrus samples for pathology analysis during this 14-year period plus has been independently surveyed by experts from NT biosecurity and the Northern Australia Quarantine Service (NAQS) over the same years without any detections of citrus canker. Thorough testing has indicated that this is a new incursion. We now know that this current incident is not the re-emergence of citrus canker from a previous outbreak due to genetic differences between this outbreak and the previous NT and QLD outbreaks.

It has been acknowledged some growers' have concerns about the 600-metre destruction zone for citrus trees in the affected areas in the NT and WA. The 600-metre destruction zone is designed to manage the potential natural spread from any infected plants and is based on the scientific evidence we have available from previous outbreaks in Australia, and from overseas. This current incursion

differs different to the 2004 Emerald incident in that The source of the outbreak in Emerald was in an orchard in a commercial citrus area. What we have in the NT and WA, are citrus plants that are intended to be in a pot on someone's veranda or in a residential backyard. The agreed response plan is constantly being reviewed by technical experts and adjusted as the incident changes or when new information becomes available.

If you think you have a plant with citrus canker, or if you have recently sourced citrus plants from the Northern Territory or northern Western Australia, please contact the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881. This will put you in touch with the department of primary industries or agriculture in your state or territory.

**Hort
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Strategic levy investment

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