

# ABC NEWS

## Bee-killing varroa mites found in Port of Townsville nest

By Matt Watson

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PHOTO: Varroa mites have been discovered at the Townsville Port. (Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry)

**The destructive varroa mite has been found in a nest of Asian honey bees in the Port of Townsville, in far north Queensland.**

The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) said the single hive was found last week within the hollow metal support of a container stand.

**The hive of about 5,000 bees along with two varroa mites, which were detected on two of the bees, were destroyed by staff from the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.**

Varroa mites are mainly found in the northern regions of Asia and they infest bee hives, feeding on larvae and ultimately killing them.

A bee hive infected by varroa mites usually dies within three or four years.

**The mites are particularly destructive to the European Honey Bee, which Australia gets most of its honey from.**

**The AHBIC's executive director, Trevor Weatherhead, said an outbreak of the mites in Australia could decimate the honey industry.**

"It is possible that the hive had been there for up to two years," he said.

Mr Weatherhead said a check of the surrounding area found no further Asian honey bees or their hives.

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"Traps and sentinel hives that are already in place around the port as part of the National Bee Pest Surveillance Program have not collected any exotic bees or mite pests over the past two years," he said.

Last year, a swarm of Asian honey bees carrying the varroa mite were destroyed at the Port of Brisbane, while another hive was discovered at the port in May.

## Restrictions on bee movement

Biosecurity Queensland is conducting surveillance in the Townsville region in response to the detection.

It has imposed restrictions on the movement of bee hives, bees, bee products and equipment used for beekeeping.

Mr Weatherhead said testing will be done to see if the bees had any relationship to Asian honey bee populations that were already present in areas of far north Queensland.

"Or bees that were associated with previous detections at the Townsville Port, with the last detection having occurred in 2014," he said.

"While Asian honey bees are established in areas of far north Queensland, varroa mites are not known to be present in that population.

"It has previously been determined that Asian honey bees cannot be eradicated from Australia, so response activities are only focused on the varroa mites."

**Topics:** rural, agribusiness, agricultural-policy, quarantine, townsville-4810, qld

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