

SITPlus sterility program has wings

The SITPlus pilot program will continue to release two million sterile Queensland Fruit Flies (QFF) over Cobram, Victoria each week through until April 2020, in a bid to disrupt the pest and reduce its spread.

The Goulburn Murray Valley (GMV) Regional Fruit Fly Project supports the pilot program, which has been led by Macquarie University and began in March 2019.

The SITPlus program is a national long-term strategic research and development partnership, delivering an integrated pest management solution for QFF.

Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) is a method of pest control using the area-wide release of sterile insects to reduce reproduction in a wild-population of the same species.

The Cobram release is the first time the \$60 million program, which aims to curb the spread of QFF, has moved into Victoria and NSW for full trials, following the successful releases of sterile flies in South Australia over the past year.

GMV Regional Fruit Fly coordinator, **Ross Abberfield** said the release of sterile flies over Cobram as part of SITPlus was an innovative advancement in the control of wild QFF populations.

“The release of the sterile flies is part of a multi-pronged strategy that includes surveillance trapping, baiting, removal of unwanted or unmanaged host trees and an extensive community awareness and education campaign,” Mr Abberfield said.

Scientists will continue to monitor QFF movement, longevity in the field, impact on crops and the wild population as part of the program, with the weekly mass drop taking place from a customised aircraft.

A team of leading scientists has worked to ensure sterile fruit flies are fit and attractive to native flies, encouraging them to ‘mate’ without producing offspring, limiting the spread of wild QFF populations.

The sterile flies are grown to the pupal stage in Port Augusta, then sterilised at Netley before being shipped to special rear-out facilities in NSW and Victoria where the sterile adult flies emerge from the pupal case and are ‘conditioned’ ready for release. The Victorian rear-out facility is at Tatura.

“The program has the potential to reduce the use of pesticides and severely reduce the spread of the pest,” Mr Abberfield said.

SITPlus is one aspect of fruit fly control and prevention however the community, growers, industry and government agencies are reminded to remain vigilant in undertaking steps and actions to help reduce the spread of QFF.

SITPlus program director, **Dan Ryan** said it was pleasing to see the early results of the Cobram pilot.

“The pilot is establishing the basis for effective urban suppression to help fruit growers in the Cobram region,” Mr Ryan said.

“I’m very happy to see good collaboration happening between Agriculture Victoria, Moira Shire Council and the SITPlus partners for the benefit of the Cobram growers,” Mr Ryan said.

For more information www.area-wide-management.com.au

Wright Air SITPlus Pilot John Williams, GMV Regional coordinator Ross Abberfield and Berrigan Councillor Col Jones at Tocumwal Aerodrome.

