Myrtle Rust - A Notifiable Disease: Implementing Risk Management Protocols for Your Business and Helping To Protect The Industry and Environment

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Myrtle rust (Urodo rangiello) detections in both retail garden centres and production nursery businesses in NSW continued during October, albeit at a lower level than in September. The nursery industry and associated industries should consider adopting suitable risk management procedures to minimise the risk of becoming infected with Myrtle rust and assisting in the management and eradication of the Emergency Plant Pest (EPP) from Australia.

A critical element to managing Myrtle rust is to raise the awareness of the associated industries (landscapers, cut flower growers, bush regeneration, garden maintenance) and have them supporting the eradication plan. We all have a role to play in here by raising the awareness and protecting not only yourself but other businesses, industries and the environment - so please help in communicating what Myrtle rust could do if it is allowed to establish.

As temperatures increase throughout spring and plants from the Myrtaceae family respond with flushes of new growth, the concern is that environmental conditions for possible infection of susceptible plants by the pathogen are generally ideal. Think of this way - the presence of the pathogen, with a suitable environment and a susceptible host provides the suitable balance for infection and hence expression of the disease.

Latest situation update as at 19th October 2010

• Myrtle rust has been isolated to 45 infected sites from approximately 500 properties across NSW inspected for Myrtle rust since April.

• In October, the number of new infected premises (IPs) being detected each week had fallen and most of these were detections through direct tracing activities to retail outlets.

• Austromyrtus dolichopoda "Auroa" and "Brushing Beauty" account for the majority of the detections.

• All infected plants and plants in the infected line on each IP have been destroyed.

• Systemic fungicides are being applied according to label which is typically 10 to 14 day intervals for commercial Myrtaeaeas on IPs and surrounds.

• Fortnightly surveillance of all Myrtaeaeas on each IP is undertaken by trained personnel.

• Surveillance now includes target surveillance on production nurseries and cut flower operations in the Sydney basin that have not already been inspected. Over 20 of these have been inspected and found negative.

• Myrtle rust has not been detected in natural bushland.

• Myrtle rust has not been detected in inland NSW.

• Myrtle rust has not been detected in interstate trace forward investigations so the possibility of eradicating Myrtle rust is still high.

• Risk based movement management is being undertaken on all IPs. This is assessed based on age of symptoms, the length of time infected plants were at the site, number of plants infected and level of infection on the infected plants.

• Many nurseries are proactively developing and implementing biosecurity measures to manage the risk associated with pests and diseases such as Myrtle rust.

The need to check your nursery frequency for the presence of existing and new pests and for unusual symptoms is crucial for early detection to intervene - particularly for Myrtle rust. You are encouraged to become familiar with the symptoms of Myrtle rust on the industry & Investment NSW website so you can tell if something different is present in your nursery or property. Go to http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/plant/myrtle-rust/myrtle-rust-images

Updated known host list as at 19th October 2010

• Agonis flavus (willow myrtle) cv. "Afterdark" and cv. "Burgundy"

• Eucalyptus nitriifolia (water gum)

• Syncarpia glomulifera (turpentine)

• Callicarpum virgatum (bottle brush)

• Leptospermum nanumotum (tea tree)

• Syzygium leucomannii x Syzygium waeilin (illy pilly)

• Syzygium jambos (rose apple)

• Syzygium australe cv. "Meridion Midget"

• Melaleuca cordata cv. Dwarf

• Austromyrtus dolichopoda cv. Auroa and Brushing Beauty (renamed to Gossia myrtifolia)

• Rhodanthes obtusifolia (brush turkey)

• Metrosideros vittoriosa

Some Simple Preventative Methods to Prevent New Pests Entering Your Nursery - things you can do now

• Adopt biosecurity practices

• Implement access restrictions - place visitor signage on the property

• Practice good hygiene

- wash your hands, tools, clothing, foot boots, don’t work in contaminated stock

- understand the pest/pathogen and undertake surveillance - weekly at minimum at the end of the day’s work

- modify the growing/retail environment (conditions)

- apply preventative pesticides/fungicides where appropriate

APVMA PER 12156 or APVMA PER 12319; http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER12156.PDF

- Implement Farm Management System Best Management Practice of NIASA, EcoSmart(R) and BioSecure KACCPC

- Use clean nursery inputs - stock, containers, growing media

- Inspect all stock on arrival and only accept it if it is disease free of Myrtle rust

- Establish quarantine areas (at least for several weeks)

- Inspect the nursery on a regular basis and keep records

- Clean vehicles/equipment and disinfect/sanitise them