

**ROBBIE KATTER**

Member for Traeger



## MEDIA RELEASE

February 26, 2020

### QLD PEST CRISIS THREATENS FOOD SECURITY

Katter's Australian Party Leader and Traeger MP Robbie Katter has warned Australia is facing a potentially "cataclysmic" biosecurity threat, with confirmation a dangerous exotic pest with the ability to wipe out agricultural crops has arrived and is spreading across mainland Australia.

The fall army worm, a moth-like caterpillar originally from the Americas, was identified in Bamaga in Cape York last week and was yesterday confirmed in a trial maize crop near Georgetown, located 300 kilometres west of Cairns.

Mr Katter said the news was sending shockwaves through the agricultural industry, and there were growing concerns the worm's tendency to eat more than 350 crop species including corn, wheat, rice, sugarcane and vegetables could threaten local food security.

In the past the fall army worm has been known to reduce crop yield by 50 per cent. <sup>1</sup>

Mr Katter said it was infuriating Biosecurity Queensland was only now reacting to the pest's arrival, with an emergency roundtable meeting planned in Brisbane tomorrow.

"Biosecurity Queensland's failure to prepare for what is coming instead of reacting once it gets here is a clear symptom of the state's weak biosecurity protections, which are a result of continued ignorance from policy-makers in Brisbane," he said.

"Biosecurity in Queensland is grossly under-funded, and we are seeing constant reductions in the number of staff who are actually on the ground identifying problems before and when they arrive.

"The KAP have warned for many years about an invasive pest disaster such as this one."

Mr Katter said, since growers have had little to no time to prepare for the fall army worm's arrival, insecticides would likely be their only defence in controlling the infestation in the short-term.

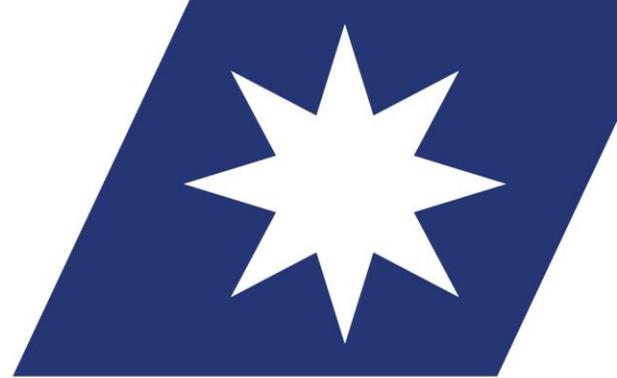
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<sup>1</sup> "Crop-destroying fall armyworm detected in northern Queensland", ABC News, 26 February 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/crop-destroying-fall-armyworm-detected-in-northern-queensland/12000954>

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"I understand control work on the most recent fall army worm infestation located on the Gilbert River cost 10 times more than the usual insecticide costs for controlling the pest load on maize," he said.

"This fact alone indicates the increased volume of insecticides that will have to be employed against this pest."

Mr Katter said the use of insecticides could have been greatly reduced had there been a more proactive approach and better planning regarding a local infestation, including more research on the use of natural predators.

"Investigations could have also been well-advanced on possible biological control options to form part of a more integrated approach in the longer term, but instead we continue to keep playing the catch-up game," he said.

**—ENDS—**

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