

# The Institute of Foresters of Australia

ABN 48 083 197 586



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The Hon. Tony Burke, MP,  
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry,  
PO Box 6022,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra ACT 2600  
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Dear Minister Burke,

## **Myrtle rust incursion**

The Institute of Foresters of Australia is extremely concerned that the recent incursion of myrtle rust (*Uredo rangelii*) which is a member of the eucalypt rust complex, has not been met with an adequate and speedy response to eradicate this most serious plant pathogen. We call upon the Commonwealth government to be much more pro-active in preventing myrtle rust from establishing in the native vegetation of this country.

**This is a major bio-security incursion and the consequences to our native flora and plant industries are unknown but potentially enormous.** There is a real concern that the disease caused by myrtle rust will not be significantly different to that caused by guava rust (*Puccinia psidii*), a high priority listed emergency plant pest – and in relative terms greater than the potential impact of equine influenza or the fire ant incursion, to which there were much more active responses. The rust has the potential to severely affect our forests, including our conservation reserves. The consequential damage could affect the apiculture, nursery and cut flower, plantation pulp wood and plantation timber, oil mallee, tourism, wildflower and native forest timber industry.

The appropriate Pest Specific Contingency Plan prepared by the Office of the Chief Plant Protection Officer should have been followed immediately the rust was identified. The response put in place by government bodies has fallen well short of the actions recommended in this Plan.

According to scientists taking part in the campaign there is cause for optimism that the rust may be eradicated as its range is limited, it has not yet spread to native vegetation and it has been responding well to fungicidal chemicals. Moreover the current cold conditions will probably kill much of the spore load already deposited.

The IFA calls for the National Biosecurity Committee to make strenuous efforts to eradicate the rust. At the very least the activities of Government agencies overseeing the management of the rust should comply with the spirit of the Contingency Plan.

Yours sincerely

Dr Peter Volker FIFR RPF  
President

For further information contact David Wettenhall - 0407 944 998