

The varroa destructor parasite, which was found in Australia for the first time, threatens to cost the honey and food production industries millions of dollars.

Until now, Australia was the only continent free of the varroa mites, which are considered the biggest threat to bees worldwide.

However, according to a [report by the BBC](#), the mites were discovered at a port near Sydney last week, and have since been detected in hives 100km away.

NSW Farmers' Ian McColl indicated that if the mites continue to spread, the outbreak could cost Australia's honey production industry alone A\$70 million (\$48 million) a year.

However, the outbreak could also cost the food production industry millions, as about a third of Australia's food production relies on bee pollination, including almonds, apples and avocados.

"Bees are an integral part of our production system," Mr McColl added. "This is not just a concern for industry, but it's a major community concern as well."

The pests - which are about the size of a sesame seed - weaken and kill colonies by feasting on them and transmitting viruses.

Therefore, authorities have introduced several biosecurity measures to limit the outbreak, after the deadly parasite was detected at seven sites across New South Wales.

For example, any hives within 10km of infested locations - about 400 so far - will be destroyed. Meanwhile, colonies within 25km will be inspected and monitored.

In addition, a "bee lockdown" is being enforced, whereby beekeepers inside a new biosecurity zone will not be able to move hives, bees or honeycombs until further notice.

Previous detections of other kinds of varroa mites in Queensland and Victoria have been eradicated and farmers expect the next few days to be critical in tackling the outbreak.