



### *Plague Locust Infestation Victoria*

#### Background

Populations of the Australian plague locust have occurred throughout much of North Central Victoria over the last two months. Adult locusts were able to lay eggs in late autumn 2005; only moderate egg laying was reported within Victoria, particularly in an area known as Terricks, north of Mitiamo. Eggs commenced hatching in Victoria in late October 2005 and the hatchlings have now started to develop and have started to form into bands.

Because of the seasonal conditions over the last few months there is excellent grass growth in the areas where the hoppers are present. The hoppers will be able to develop through to adults with little mortality and those adults will be able to move with the wind up to 20-30 km per day.

There is a high risk that swarms developing in northern Victoria will begin day-flight movement over the next few weeks, particularly in a southerly direction. There is also a risk that populations in northern Victoria will breed and lay eggs over the next 2 to 3 weeks. This could result in a second generation that might require an extension of the current control measures into January and February 2006.

#### Comments

Plague Locusts could be a significant hazard to low-level flying operations including firebombing. Large swarms are presently being tracked and are expected to cross the State. Northerly winds will accelerate this migration.

Locust swarms on the wing will cause major problems for low flying aircraft and should be avoided as practical as possible.

Locust swarms may settle to feed and/or lay eggs but will take to the wing when disturbed by the passage of a fixed wing or a helicopter's downdraft. After the passage of an aircraft or in the vicinity of a swarm there will be high numbers of locusts in the environment, which have separated from the swarm. Locusts on the wing seldom occur above 100 ft AGL. Pilots are advised to avoid low-level flight near the ground when swarms are present. Fire and wind will also cause the locusts to take wing.

Operating aircraft with high numbers of locusts on the wing or on the ground can cause the following problems:

- Obscured vision through the windscreen
- Blocked Pitot tubes
- Blocked oil coolers and fans
- Degraded engine performance
- Degrading performance of the rotor systems (helicopters) as a result of a build up of locust carcasses on the blades
- Possible impact damage to the leading edges of rotor blades (helicopters).

#### Recommendations

Pilots, Air Attack Supervisors and Air Observers are requested to carry out a careful reconnaissance for locust swarms on the ground before conducting low level flight operations or landing in locust swarm infested areas.

Alternate landing sites may have to be nominated and activated at short notice to avoid swarm-infested areas.

Agencies, CFA, DSE and DPI are advised to ensure that at aircraft operations within the locust swarm affected areas adequate resources and cleaning facilities are allocated to assist with the cleaning of aircraft impacted by locusts.