

Think again: *Vespula* biocontrol revisited

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European *Vespula* wasps have become invasive in several parts of the world, but biological control against them has so far only been seriously attempted in New Zealand. Parasitoids of the genus *Sphexophaga* were introduced in the late 1980s and shortly thereafter the biocontrol programme was abruptly discontinued. The parasitoids released up to that point established at a limited range and, in the time passed, did not bring wasp populations down to an acceptable level. Wasp populations probably increased further at least in parts of the range. This talk will describe the journey through the renewed interest in the biocontrol option against wasps, which has seen the programme revived in 2014, first with examination of the new species of mite, *Pneumolaelaps niutirani*, which was first discovered on wasps in New Zealand, followed by re-introduction of *Sphexophaga* from a more suitable geographic range, which is nearing completion. More recently we have been awarded funding to explore new promising candidate agents from the wasps' native range - *Volucella inanis*, *Leopoldius coronatus* and *Metoecus paradoxus*. Although not strictly part of the Biological Heritage National Science Challenge, the biocontrol programme links to, and provides support to the Challenge's wasp programme.

