THE diversity of insect life in a cotton crop must be judged harshly. Are you a pest or are you a beneficial? It’s discrimination at it’s worst!

A pest lives as though on death row. Overstep the threshold and life is over. An anxious life is led, constantly attempting to avoid detection from the prying eyes of the vigilant agronomist. Well versed in social distancing, pests know full well the consequence of gathering in large numbers.

Two per square metre hardly seems a party, but for mirids that’s enough to bring on the heavy artillery.

Spilt honeydew from an all-night mealybug binge can result in a rush to get affairs in order before the Cryptolaemus release.

Heliothis don’t stand a chance against the triple genes of GM. Each generation desperate to develop a vaccine but with only 42 days and little funding, the task is overwhelming. Quarantine is offered to the privileged few in the safe harbour of the pigeonpea.

As for the self-indulgent aphids and spider mite suffering destination envy and unable to resist the lure of the latest hot spot, their fate is all but sealed.

The heavy lifting of saving the ecosystem falls to the beneficials. Lacewing, ladybird, shield bug, thrips, big eyed bug and many more all work with a common goal. Not wanting to see their world ruined by consumerist pest behaviour, they hunt and chew and pierce with the determination of a Thunberg army.

Beneficials work with militant fervour to curtail Pest numbers. Ever hopeful that their efforts will prevent the arrival of the pesticide spray – the ominous cloud of disruption.

To watch, guide, encourage and cheer this entomological interaction below the surface of a cotton crop, is to realise that the insects have their very own environmental battle for a precariously balanced life.

Graham Volk, Agronomist, Emerald, Queensland