

National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (SEQ) Steering Committee
Risk Management Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee)
Tuesday 22 March 2022
Brisbane, Queensland
(Held by videoconference)

MINUTES – MEETING 8

ATTENDANCE

Attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alan Millis, Chair• Irene Sitton, Independent expert• Wendy Craik, Chair, Steering Committee• John Robertson, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland• Jo Laduzko, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Commonwealth Government
Apologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries, NSW
Presenters/Observers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graeme Dudgeon, General Manager (NRIFAEP)• Andrew Turley, Strategy Director (NRIFAEP)• Brett Turville, Operations Director (NRIFAEP)• Brian Bond, Executive Officer (NRIFAEP)• Jacqui King, Director, Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce (DAF BQ)
Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kerrian Nobbs (NRIFAEP)

Agenda Item 1 – Introduction

The eighth meeting of the Risk Management Sub-Committee (RMSC) was opened by the Chair at 10.00am (AEDT). The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting, noting Scott Charlton as an apology. The Chair provided a brief overview of the meeting's agenda and objectives. The agenda was confirmed with no changes.

Minutes of the September 2021 meeting, which had been circulated out of session, were confirmed with agreed amendments. Members noted all actions had been completed.

Business arising from the minutes:

- ***Questions raised about compliance models and resourcing and whether the CSIRO study findings have been incorporated into the risk register.***
 - Compliance will be a large component of the work of the new Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce (FAST). There is also a focus from a policy perspective on the compliance aspect of self-treatment. Compliance issues under the revised eradication/suppression arrangements will be added to the Risk Register.
- ***Follow up with the Communication and Engagement team whether there are opportunities for improvements in relation to spatial strategy triggers and the extension of community self-management participation.***
 - In Progress, to be followed up.
- ***Issue of staff uncertainty - weekly reports indicate that it is being managed?***
 - Retaining staff has been a challenge due to uncertainty of future funding for the Program and the short-term nature of contracts. With confirmation of funding, a commitment could be made to extend contracts for a minimum of 12 months. This will also assist with having field teams ready for the significantly increased field workforce required from 1 September 2022.
- ***Issue of treatment gaps – landholder risks***
 - A constant challenge for the Program is treatment gaps, largely due to not being able to treat organic farms as they could lose their certification. The Program is looking at science trials to resolve the issue. Refusal of entry is also an issue. However, the Program has been hiring Queensland Police to assist with entry to properties.
- ***Self-Management pilots***
 - Self-management pilots will continue but will transition into the suppression program. There will be a lot of involvement with other parties, including local government and industry. Further details to be provided in Agenda Item 7.
- ***Communication and engagement – local media with hay producer***
 - The Program is currently working on refining engagement with hay producers, potentially having an engagement officer attend to discuss options prior to sending compliance officers in.
- ***Governance of the Risk Management Sub-Committee and its Terms of Reference – including updating risk management policy and plan***
 - RMSC governance to be added to the agenda for the September 2022 meeting, to include risk assessment processes and review of risk mitigation processes.

The Sub-Committee:

- **CONFIRMED** the agenda as previously circulated.
- **APPROVED** the minutes of Meeting 7.
- **NOTED** the actions list and the updates provided.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
1. RMSC Governance to be added to the agenda for the September 2022 meeting.	Secretariat	Sept 2022	Completed
2. Follow up opportunities for improvements in spatial strategy triggers and the community self-management participation	Program / Secretariat	Sept 2022	In Progress
3. Add compliance issues under new eradication/suppression arrangements to Risk Register.	Program / Secretariat	Sept 2022	Completed

Agenda Item 2 – General Manager’s Update

Graeme Dudgeon provided a summary on progress and challenges for the scale-up of the Program as per the Strategic Review recommendations. Currently, the most significant risk is having the funding and capacity to ramp up to a larger scale and having to strategically plan and manage a massive change exercise over a very short period of time.

The Scale-Up Project will be led by a Project Manager in collaboration with an Organisational Change Manager to oversee the implementation of the new operational model and look for and address symptoms of change issues, with engagement from the Program management team. Learnings from the legacy issues of the ‘2017 ramp up at a large scale’ will be considered during the process.

An added risk is the availability of the additional field labour force required to add to current capacity for the scale-up, noting that COVID has had a significant impact on the workforce. The Program is looking to streamline the recruitment process for the professional workforce by utilising recruitment agencies. It is a very tight market and attractive packages would need to be offered to attract quality candidates. This extra cost is a risk for the Program and could have a financial impact on other aspects of the Program, so other efficiencies would need to be found to offset any increases in labour costs.

Contingency planning is in place to keep the current 2021-22 Workplan within the funding constraints and to retain the current workforce.

The Chair queried the impact of fire ants rafting during the recent flooding event. It is most likely that the fire ants will stay local as the water systems move mostly from west to east, so there is limited chance of expanding beyond the containment area due to the floods.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Program and strategic risks provided by the General Manager.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda Item 3 – Business Improvement Register

Brian Bond provided an overview of the Business Improvement Register, the Risk and Issues Registers, the summary reports, and how the new “live” register provides up to date data on risks and actions. The registers are updated fortnightly following discussions with the Program’s management team.

The Chair acknowledged the updates to the risk register, including the subdivision of actions and identifying responsible parties; and noting the new risks which have been identified and recorded. The Chair also reiterated that the register was to be circulated to members on a quarterly basis, with a summary report outlining where changes have been made.

The Sub-Committee also discussed:

- the strategic risks, the ratings and how to better align them with public reporting, eg. insufficient uptake of self-treatment
- the co-dependency between the national Program and the FAST in relation to the scaled-up operations and the need for appropriate risk assessments and governance
- provision of a more detailed high-level report, highlighting the top 5-10 risks with a breakdown into strategic, ramp-up and FAST, for discussion of effectiveness of mitigation
- the risk of unavailability of additional remote sensing cameras for the scaled-up Program
- perception and reputational risks of bait usage and availability of awareness material.

The Sub-Committee:

- **DISCUSSED** and **NOTED** the update on the Business Improvement Register and the Risk and Issues Registers
- **NOTED** and thanked staff for the informative report provided on “What risk does flooding pose to the Program?”.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
4.	Update registers from the feedback provided and risk assessments through the year and provide more detail in a high-level summary to be provided quarterly.	Executive Officer	April 2022	Ongoing

Agenda Item 4 – Implementation of Strategic Review recommendations

Andrew Turley provided an update on the implementation of the Strategic Review recommendations. The Agriculture Senior Officials’ Committee (AGSOC) met in December 2021 and considered the proposed approach to develop and implement a revised strategy and funding arrangements for the Program. The 2022-23 Workplan and the 2022-27 Response Plan have been drafted addressing the recommendations of the review. Following the Steering Committee’s approval of the 2022-23 Workplan, it will be progressed to AGSOC to assist with their decision on future funding for the Program.

The FAST will address a majority of the compliance function with the assistance of the Program’s Policy team working through the Biosecurity Act and responsibilities.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the implementation of the NRFIAEP Strategic Review recommendations.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda Item 5 – Future of the Program – Funded/Unfunded

Graeme Dudgeon provided an update on the current status of the Program’s funding and the risks associated with the recommended scale-up, including contingencies for the 2021-22 Workplan.

The 2022-23 Work Plan being progressed to AGSOC is forecast to cost approximately \$95M, which will require bring forward of funding from cost share partners. A further funding bid will follow to secure funds for the remainder of the 2022-27 Response Plan. Meeting the KPIs in the scaled-up Program will be reliant on the bring forward of funding.

The review panel determined that eradication is still possible. The panel will be provided with an update of where the Program has progressed in relation to the scale-up to meet Option A of the review recommendations and the challenges it will face in relation to engaging staff and the complicated procurement processes.

The Program and FAST will work together to monitor the progress of the two programs through the next phase in relation to containment and suppression. The first meeting of FAST included representatives from five local councils, the Local Government Association of Queensland, key industries and DAF. Collaborative discussions with the major stakeholders are progressing well, with sub-committees to be formed in local areas. Discussions will be held with the Commonwealth Government in relation to a significant area of Defence land in the suppression area and also with the Brisbane Airport Corporation and the Port of Brisbane.

There will be considerable reliance on remote sensing surveillance, with the need to ramp up to 4-5 times more than is possible with one camera to reach the required capacity. Challenges are being experienced in the procurement of additional cameras, including an 18 month wait with the manufacturer and confirmation of the extra funding commitment. The contract with the current RSS service provider has been extended. However, the Program will go to market to seek additional suppliers for availability and to cut costs. This poses a risk as the current supplier has the IP for the model currently in use but has agreed to write manuals on how to operate their model.

Other risks discussed were:

- correctly identifying the areas that are to be targeted through risk mapping
- efficacy of treatment through statistically sound analysis of surveillance
- quality control – maintaining the coverage and the standard of coverage
- maintaining the current achievements and capability of the Program while planning for and implementing the scale-up
- operational risks of weather with mitigants such as contingency allowances, etc.
- workforce retention and availability of staff for the scale-up
- communication strategies for outbreak controls and public reporting.

The Sub-Committee

- **NOTED** the update on the Future of the Program – funded/unfunded.
- **CONSIDERED** the major risks identified in the 2022-23 Work Plan and will provide advice to the Steering Committee at its May 2022 meeting.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
5.	Add RMSC update to the May 2022 Steering Committee meeting agenda.	Secretariat	May 2022 Completed

Agenda Item 6 – Program Ramp-Up

Graeme Dudgeon provided an overview of the high-level activities in terms of the ramp up for the Program over the next three years.

AGSOC agreed in-principle to bring forward existing approved funding to fund 'Option A', the revised eradication program for 2022-23, a recommendation of the Strategic Review. The Program has commenced scaling up the treatment plan and surveillance plan for 2022-23 based on the forecast budget of \$95M, in line with the 2021 Strategic Review. The 2022-23 Workplan will be progressed to Agriculture Ministers in March 2022 for their decision.

The Review also recommended the FAST program which will significantly contribute to what the Program is doing. FAST was discussed further at Agenda Item 7.

The Sub-Committee discussed the assumptions of the operational boundary which is now defined around suburb boundaries to assist in dealing with Councils, communities and FAST, and also to align with biosecurity zones which are implemented at a suburb-wide level. In some cases, the operational boundary will sit beyond the 10km containment ring that was a recommendation of the strategic review. This will also allow for better alignment for communications with communities and for recording of significant detections.

The Policy team are considering the best options for how many biosecurity zones will be required to accommodate the eradication, containment and suppression areas.

There is a significant risk involved in delivering the expanded program while planning and doing all the other work required for further expansion and the adoption of new responsibilities in the suppression areas and coordination with FAST. Confidence is needed to ensure these different work streams can be delivered and don't conflict.

It was suggested that with the change in biosecurity zones and the general change to the Program, issues related to transferring costs to stakeholders and the general community, human rights and equity considerations may need to be taken into account and there may need to be a consideration of associated costs within the FAST Program.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the NRIFAEP Ramp-Up.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda Item 7 – Queensland's Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce

Jacqui King provided an update and outlined the challenges and risks for FAST, which commenced in February 2022 and is responsible for the suppression activities east of the eradication area and for delivery of the proposed Queensland Fire Ant Suppression Response Plan (QFASRP). It was a recommendation of the 2021 Strategic Review that Queensland entities invest additional funding to undertake these suppression activities.

The most significant potential risks and challenges are:

- FAST's ability to engage with all parties involved and the receptivity of various parties
- logistical challenges in achieving required activities
- coordination with Program activities, challenges with governance and the timing of transition from Program to FAST responsibility for various activities
- suitability of the existing regulatory framework for sharing of responsibilities
- storage of bait

- the tight labour market, given the requirement for recruitment of additional resources.

FAST is working with the Program during the transition period. The Program’s Policy team will assist with the legislative framework and changes to the Biosecurity Act. The team has also written a paper on ‘public versus private benefit’ and the provision of bait under the current financial management practice manual and government operations. The Program’s communication and engagement team is also assisting with transitioning self-management to FAST while recruitment processes are being finalised in this transition phase.

Following the initial FAST meeting which included representatives from five local councils, the Local Government Association of Queensland, key industries and DAF, discussions have continued with major stakeholders. One of the four initial projects being considered is with the Oxley Creek consortium (a not for profit) which has a ‘beautification project’ under way involving industry, local, State and Federal Governments and private landholders.

During the first 12-month transition period, FAST will negotiate and work with major stakeholders and landholders to accept and undertake a new role in surveillance and control on their properties. This will include providing training, including how to report, and providing contacts to keep communications open.

FAST will have its own Governance Plan and Risk Register, with transparency built in on where risks impact on what is happening within the Program. It has been proposed that a member of FAST will sit in on Program’s Steering Committee meetings as an observer and a Steering Committee member be on the FAST.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the risks involved in the creation of FAST and in delivery of the proposed QFASRP.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda Item 8 – Sole Supplier Arrangements and Ability to Change This

Mark Winter provided an update on the Program’s procurement strategy in relation to current major sole supply arrangements and contracts. The Program uses a number of procurement strategies in accordance with the DAF Procurement Policy. Most of the Program’s procurement activities are completed under the Queensland Government Standing Offer Arrangement (SOA). SOAs are the preferred options for procurement for both small and large contracts. A number of sole supplier arrangements are also in place, including the bait, aerial and RSS contracts.

The main ‘volume’ constituent of the bait is corn grit supplied from the US and at this stage, there is no real incentive to manufacture the corn grit in Australia. Current shipping delay issues and additional costs are also a challenge for the Program. The current bait supplier’s contract expires in April 2022 but is being extended a further 12 months.

To realise savings with the scale up of the Program’s operations, it is intended to go back to market for the supply of bait and establish an SOA to widen accessibility to the provision of bait across other agencies and levels of government, to enable them to purchase bait and conduct their own treatment; and to also investigate the quantities of bait purchases, particularly whether volume increases may justify changes in supplier arrangements.

A similar approach is being taken with aerial operations, to go back to market to identify opportunities for efficiencies and savings. Aerial services were previously brokered through the whole-of-government SOA but to save on brokerage costs, the Program has been engaging directly with the service provider. However, the Program is looking to test the market again through a broker, to determine the cost

benefit, what models providers would support and how they would provide the aerial services for the Program moving forward.

Currently, the supplier provides the operation of the aircraft and the bait delivery system, with the Program supplying remote landing sites and the operational base for the choppers to operate out of Brisbane. There may be added benefits if there is a small aerial supplier in the western part of the treatment area to provide local treatment and surveillance operations in those areas. However, using smaller suppliers could potentially increase risks, including safety and some coordination risks.

The current supplier has the IP for the bait delivery system, the hoppers that sit on the side of the choppers to spread the bait at the required rate. However, the hoppers are constructed by another company. The Program is currently looking at alternative technologies, including the use of drones or rotary or fixed wing aerial. The current service contract has been extended a further six months.

There are multiple procurement process strategies in place for RSS, including contracts for service and for the cameras.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the Program’s procurement strategy in relation to current major sole supply arrangements and contracts.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda Item 9 - Other Business

The Chair summarised the meeting which focussed on the scaling up of the Program and commencement of the FAST and implementation of the Strategic Review recommendations, while also delivering on the 2021-22 and the 2022-23 Workplans.

The RMSC advice to the Steering Committee is that the sub-committee supports the risk assessments the Program has completed for the work plans and for the Program scale-up and restructure.

The Chair wished the Program and FAST management well for the challenging year ahead and thanked attendees for their participation in the meeting.

The Sub-Committee:

- **SUPPORTS** the risk assessments that the Program has completed for the work plans and for the Program scale-up and restructure.

The next meeting is to be held in September 2022.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
6.	Meeting to be scheduled for September 2022	Secretariat	April 2022	Completed