



National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (SEQ) Steering Committee

Online Teams Meeting

17 February 2022

10.00am – 2.00pm (AEDT)

MINUTES – MEETING 19

ATTENDANCE

Attendees	Wendy Craik, Chair John Robertson, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) (QLD) Jo Laduzko, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (Commonwealth) Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries (NSW) Nigel Ainsworth, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (VIC) John van Schagen, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA) Marcelle O'Brien, Department of Natural Resources and Environment (TAS) Mike Richards, External Financial Consultant Jasmyn Lynch, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (ACT) Nathan Rhodes, Department of Primary Industries and Regions (SA)
Program Presenters	Graeme Dudgeon, General Manager Brett Turville, Director Operations Andrew Turley, Strategic Review Secretariat Sarah Mitchell, A/ Manager, Business Support and Governance Sharon Janssen, Manager, Planning and Quality Management Chris Hollingdrake, A/ Manager, Communication and Engagement Mel Blankenberg, Principal Police Officer, Strategy and Legislation Erin Wallace, Scientist
Observers	Wayne Hall, A/Chief Biosecurity Officer/Deputy Director-General, Biosecurity Queensland (DAF) Carmel Kerwick, Policy Manager, Strategy and Legislation (DAF) Elissa Van Oosterhout, Department of Primary Industries (NSW)
Secretariat	Kerrian Nobbs, Senior Policy Officer (NRIFAEP)
Apologies	Anne Walters, Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT) Rae Burrows, Department of Natural Resources and Environment (TAS)

MAIN DISCUSSION, AGREED OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

The meeting opened at 10.00am (AEST)

Agenda Item 1 - Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees, noting Anne Walters and Rae Burrows as apologies, Elissa Van Oosterhout sitting in as an observer for NSW, and Wayne Hall attending on behalf of Malcolm Letts, Deputy Director-General/Chief Biosecurity Officer, Biosecurity Queensland during his absence.

A letter received from the City of Gold Coast was circulated to members relating to provision of bait for a further two years. To be discussed in Agenda Item 11 – Self-Management Update.

The Chair advised she did a radio interview with the ABC's Richard Glover on Monday 14 February 2022 in response to a story on delimiting the boundary. Mr Glover was very supportive of the Program.

Minutes for the quarterly meeting held on 24-25 November 2021, and the extraordinary meetings held on 10 December 2021 and 2 February 2022 were taken as a correct record. All actions have been completed, in progress or on the agenda for discussion, noting the difficulty in engaging an independent party to evaluate the risk of the recommended option prior to the Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee meeting in February 2022.

The Chair provided an overview of the meeting agenda, including discussion to be held around the out-of-session briefing paper and attachments, National Program Workplan 2022/23 and the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce (FAST) overview circulated to members on 16 February 2022. A further meeting will be scheduled for final discussion and a decision to be made.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** the minutes of Meeting 18, and the minutes of the extraordinary meetings held on 10 December 2021 and 2 February 2022.

Agenda item 1 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
1.	Schedule extraordinary Steering Committee meeting to discuss and make decision on the out-of-session briefing paper and attachments, National Program Workplan 2022/23 and the FAST overview	Secretariat	17 February 2022	Completed – meeting to be held on 4 March 2022.

Agenda Item 2 - General Manager's Update and Omnibus

The General Manager provided the Steering Committee with an update on the Program, including delivering against the current work plan, the Program scale-up and the review of key performance indicators (KPI).

The Program has been planning and delivering against the current Work Plan and developing the plan to 'scale-up' to Option A and transitioning to the National Program and the Queensland FAST phase to align with recommendations from the 2021 Independent Strategic Review and agreed in-principle by the Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee in December 2021. More detail to be provided in the presentation to follow.

The Program has to be more efficient and effective in operational delivery to meet the target of Option A as recommended by the review. However, transitioning to the much larger scale Program will need to be carried



out in increments due to constraints in capacity of field staff, supply of bait, availability of helicopters and procurement of additional remote sensing surveillance (RSS) cameras.

It was discussed and agreed that the incremental planned scale up for 2022-23 be referred back to the Independent Review Panel for review and consideration on whether Option A is achievable under the proposed plan.

The Program KPIs have been reviewed and updated to be more 'outcome' based and will be outlined in the monthly and quarterly reports and integrated into the Program's three-year strategic plan to help to inform decisions over the next 12 to 18 months.

Andrew Turley presented a summary of the National Program Plan for 2022-23, including the strategic plan for two phases, the western eradication and containment phase (2022 – 2027) and the containment and ultimate eradication phase (2027-2032); the NRIFAEP Budget forecast from 2022-23 to 2026-27 where 100% capacity could be reached and the KPIs and potential triggers for the National Program and the Queensland Suppression Program.

The NRIFAEP Response Plan for 2022-23 includes 65,000ha in the surveillance zones using remote sensing and ground surveillance; 150,000ha in the eradication treatment zone receiving up to three IGR treatments and 40,000ha in the containment treatment zone, also receiving up to three IGR treatments. There is also a contingency plan for outbreak responses to treat ants outside of the planned treatment in other zones.

Other operational priorities captured within the plan include scaling up communication and engagement with stakeholders, treatment products and services, and operational staffing. Challenges with the operational scale up include communication and engagement with increased stakeholders; supply of increased quantity of bait; availability of fit-for-purpose helicopters and capacity of labour market field staff.

Business improvement within the plan for more cost-effective eradication and suppression services include procurement-led expense reductions – issue of sole suppliers; negotiating and securing more cost-effective contracts for larger quantities of bait; improved business intelligence; improved supervision of field staff; improving fire ant movement controls to reduce human assisted movement and investing further in research and development for example, new baits and the use of drones.

The transition to the suppression program will commence by March 2022 including self-management programs and pilots, and responsive treatments in the suppression area. Pending funding approval, the responsive treatment to public reports will be funded by the suppression program as of 1 July 2022. The suppression program has attracted some funding this financial year to supply bait in the self-management pilot programs.

Brett Turville provided an update on planned efficiencies, improved performance in field operations and the cultural change journey. Program operations is also leveraging off new tablet technology in the field which has reduced paper base reconciliation, provides better real time visualisation and observation, centralised scheduling despatch in the field team and the government and hire car vehicles are now equipped with 'Logbook Me' which provides GPS data. These improvements will drive performance and efficiency to achieve more effective outcomes.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the General Manager's update on the Program, including the Program scale-up and the review of KPIs and the plan for next financial year
- **AGREED** an extraordinary Steering Committee be scheduled to discuss and make a decision on the National Program Plan and inform Agriculture Ministers.
- **AGREED** that the incremental planned scale up for 2022-23 be referred back to the Independent Review Panel for review and consideration on whether Option A is achievable under the proposed plan.

Agenda Item 2 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
2.	Refer back to the Independent Review Panel for review and consideration on whether Option A is achievable in the proposed incremental planned scale up for 2022-23.	Andrew Turley	15 March 2022	Completed
3.	Confirm endorsement of the 2021/22 Work Plan.	Secretariat	February 2022.	

Agenda Item 3 – Financial Update

Graeme Dudgeon and Sarah Mitchell provided an update on the financial position of the Program, including the material underspends in RSS, community and stakeholder engagement and information services which were slightly offset by the overspend in aircraft expenditure mostly due to aircraft hire price increase under the contract. Also included in the overspend was field contractor and bait expenses due to treatment being ahead of target in the treatment plan, as weather has not impacted treatment as much as anticipated.

John Van Schagen provided an update on the bring forward of funding for Western Australia.

Following approval of the terms of reference for the financial audit, the Program will engage a financial auditor through the Queensland Government Standing Offer Arrangement. It is hoped this will be completed by 30 June 2022. However, the process will be limited by the availability of auditing services and their capacity to perform the review.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the financial update and all attachments, including:
 - the Program's December 2021 YTD Financial Performance Report
 - the Financial Dashboard 2021-22 as at 31 December 2021
 - the Capital Program update
 - the status of the Program payment milestone with the Commonwealth under Schedule D2
 - the current fiscal limit for the 10 Year Plan
- **APPROVED**
 - the Terms of Reference for the Financial Audit.

Agenda item 3 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
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Agenda Item 4 – AGSOC / Bring Forward of Funding Update

Wayne Hall advised that the Program is currently operating to a budget between \$29.1 to \$33.3 Million, with processes in place to manage the uncertainty on the bring forward of funding for the 2021-22 financial year.

It was suggested the deadline for responses from the Agriculture Senior Officials’ Committee (AGSOC) on the bring forward of funding for the 2022-23 financial year be revised and extended further to mid-March 2022 to enable them to make an informed decision following receipt of the 2022-23 Work Plan.

New South Wales confirmed its bring forward of funding for the 2022/23 financial year.

The Steering Committee:

- **AGREED** that AGSOC be formally advised that the date for responses to the bring forward of funding for the 2022-23 financial year be extended from 15 February to mid-March 2022.

		Responsibility	Target	Status
4.	Formally advise AGSOC of an extension to date for responses to the bring forward of funding for 2022/23.	QDAF	28 February 2022	Completed

Agenda Item 5 – Governance Changes

The Steering Committee previously agreed to the 2021 Strategic Review recommendation to progress consideration of strengthened national governance arrangements currently in place and approved by the former Agriculture Ministers’ Meeting, including the addition of an Epidemiologist to the membership of the Steering Committee.

In 2021 following the activation of a trigger, AGSOC approved for the Program to continue while a revised eradication response plan is developed and subject to AGSOC approval of the bring forward of funds for 2022-23.

The Review also recommended involvement of councils, communities and land managers in the suppression area. The newly formed Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce, chaired by the Director-General of QDAF comprises of representatives from other State Government agencies, the national Program, local governments, Commonwealth Government agencies, private land holders and industry representatives.

The Steering Committee discussed the national Program governance arrangements and the plan for it to remain as per the existing arrangements for the remainder of this financial year and for the 2022-23 financial year. Governance arrangements will be reviewed and revised for years 2023-24 – 2027-28.

Issues raised for consideration included:

- the provision for the Steering Committee to sit within the Commonwealth Government within an existing committee structure
- Steering Committee members having a high level of delegation to make critical decisions, including financial



- availability of such senior officers to regularly attend meetings
- Steering Committee meetings being high level conversation and decision making
- a member of the FAST attend Steering Committee meetings as an observer
- reporting relationship of the FAST with the national Program and the Steering Committee, noting the FAST will have strict financial accountability to Queensland Treasury.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** that the Steering Committee previously agreed to the Review recommendation to give consideration to strengthening national governance arrangements with the cost-sharing partners
- **DISCUSSED** if the current governance arrangements with some minor amendments should continue until a new four-year plan is approved and whether linkages with the FAST should be informal in nature during 2022-23, recognising there needs to be formal KPIs for the FAST program built into the national Program
- **DISCUSSED** timing of, and options for, revision of governance arrangements
- **APPROVED** key elements of, and timelines for changes to, governance arrangements for further development by Biosecurity Queensland
- **AGREED** the existing governance arrangements will continue for the 2021-22 and the 2022-23 financial years
- **AGREED** to commence the process to add an epidemiologist, a senior FAST representative as an observer and potentially other observers eg. from local government to the membership of the Steering Committee
- **AGREED** for the Chair and the Commonwealth to commence engagement with QDAF on a governance proposal post 2022-23.

Agenda item 5 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
5.	Commence process to engage an epidemiologist, a senior FAST representative as an observer and potentially other observers from local government to the membership of the Steering Committee.	Chair / Program	May 2022	Ongoing
6.	Draft a national program governance proposal post 2022-23	Chair / Commonwealth / Program	May 2022	
7.	Draft a proposal for the governance of the Steering Committee for the next 18 months for Steering Committee consideration.	Chair / Program	May 2022	

**Agenda Item 6 – Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce Update**

Further to the written update provided and advice provided in Agenda Item 2, Wayne Hall advised that the QDAF Director-General will chair the first FAST meeting on 24 February 2022 to progress the development of the Queensland suppression program. Attendees at the first meeting will include key state and local government representatives.

An overview of the FAST was provided to the Steering Committee out of session and will be discussed further at the extraordinary meeting to be arranged.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update provided in relation to the FAST activities.

Agenda item 6 - Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda item 7– Surveillance and Treatment Update

Brett Turville provided a presentation with an update on the work plan progress, including treatment rounds in Areas 1 and 2, significant detections, Eastern and Western Overlaps, Southern Suppression north and south, extra treatment at polygyne areas, self-treatment at the Gold Coast and the Port of Brisbane, a joint operation with the Commonwealth Government in relation to the latest incursion in 2021.

The current treatment plan for 2021-22 is 343 290 ha down from the original plan of 347 660ha, with extra contingency for polygyne, response and self-management built in.

Treatment progress is currently sitting at around 98% due mainly to refusal of entry, and cropping and livestock issues. The team have been engaging with landholders to negotiate access and in some instances the Queensland Police Service has been engaged to assist with compliance.

The Program has responded to over 9000 public reports of suspect fire ants. There has been an incremental growth in calls to the Program with 540 calls in the past week. Response times are being monitored, with the Program contacting the customer within a day or two and five to 10 days for treatment, with urgent issues responded to immediately.

Ground surveillance is currently higher than planned, due to high levels of wet weather days, allowing additional surveillance to be undertaken. The major challenge for surveillance is maintaining staffing in the labour market. The Program is currently doing fortnightly inductions of 8 to 10 people and offering staff to work on their rostered days off.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED**
 - the Program’s surveillance progress update on planned and responsive activities
 - the Program’s treatment progress update and changes to the Work Plan.



Agenda item 7 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda item 8 – Detections of Importance Update

Sharon Janssen provided a presentation and an update on the detections of importance, noting there have been no new significant detections outside of the operational boundary since the last Steering Committee meeting held in November 2021.

There have been 168 confirmed detections of importance since the start of the 2021-22 year, 48 significant and outside boundary detections (6 new areas); 58 clearance detections and 62 boundary detections, with each detection assessed according to risk. A risk analysis will be undertaken on the likelihood that spread had occurred prior to treatment, including assessing any treatment gaps and delays.

The criteria considered in the risk assessments includes the nest density, distance between nests, DNI brood survey, number of treatment rounds, timing of treatment rounds and geography. Final treatment areas and the number of rounds of treatment will be determined based on the information from the analysis.

The operational boundary is now defined around suburb boundaries to assist with dealing with Councils, the FAST and communities, and also to align with biosecurity zones which are implemented at a suburb wide level and allow movement within the same zone. In some cases it will sit beyond the 10km of the containment ring that was a recommendation of the recent strategic review.

It was suggested reporting of significant detections be refined in appendices provided.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Program's Detections of Importance.

Agenda item 8 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda item 9 – Remote Sensing Surveillance Update

Erin Wallace and Mel Blankenberg provided an update on RSS. Wet weather and flooding issues late in the surveillance season restricted access to some sites preventing validation by ground surveillance. Riskiest key areas that didn't have ground surveillance and have a risk of remnant ants have been flagged for desktop surveillance and the predictions will be checked against what has been captured with aerial imagery.

The current service delivery contract ends on 30 March 2022, with an option to extend to 30 September 2022, enabling surveillance to be undertaken from May to September 2022. Corporate governance currently underway includes standard operating procedures to ensure the Program can operate the service independently if required; risk management; gateway reviews to show the project health and finalising an Intellectual Property Register.

An out-of-session paper will be provided to the Steering Committee regarding the options for the acquisition of two new cameras that were approved (in-principle) for immediate purchase (finance lease or purchase

outright) at the November 2021 meeting. Due to procurement delays and COVID constraints, the cameras will not be in use for this season.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED**
 - the progress and updates around RSS
 - the risks pertaining to delays in camera acquisition and what this will mean for achieving surveillance in the outer 10km containment zone, as recommended by the review panel
 - an out-of-session briefing paper will be circulated to the Steering Committee outlining the options for the acquisition of two new cameras.

Agenda item 9 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
8.	Out-of-session briefing paper to be circulated to Steering Committee members for decision.	Andrew Turley	February 2022	Complete

Agenda item 10 – Movement Controls and Interstate Market Access

Tom Roberts provided an update on movement controls, interstate market access, harmonisation principles, and the importance of achieving human assisted movement controls to prevent the spread of fire ants. There are already existing domestic intra and interstate quarantine arrangement to assist with this. However, there are a number of issues which need to be addressed due to inconsistencies between the intrastate arrangements established by the Program within South East Queensland and interstate movement controls implemented by each State and Territory. These issues include the inconsistency on the agreed area within which movement controls are applied, inconsistency on agreed fire ant carriers, inconsistency of risk mitigation measures and inconsistencies in requirements of biosecurity certificates for movement of fire ant carriers.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** there have been a series of efforts for a prolonged period to have the matter raised in this paper resolved through the Sub-committee on Domestic Quarantine and Market Access (SDQMA), without success
- **NOTED** the General Manager of the Program met with key members of the nursery and garden industries in late December 2021 to discuss ways of harmonising the movement controls applied to both interstate and intrastate movements of nursery stock
- **AGREED** that Queensland write to the National Biosecurity Committee with the endorsement of the Steering committee seeking agreement to harmonise movement controls in relation to fire ants.

Agenda item 10 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
9.	Draft an out of session brief to the NBC with the endorsement of the Steering Committee seeking agreement to harmonise movement controls in relation to fire ants.	Queensland DAF / Program	April 2022	Ongoing



Agenda item 11 – Self-Management Update

Chris Hollingdrake provided an update on current self-management projects and activities, including the Gold Coast Community Suppression Project, the Tambourine Mountain (Phase 2) Project, the Calamvale Ward Responsive Treatment Project and the Oxley Creek Transformation Project.

The Gold Coast project is continuing with the second round of council, community and Program treatment underway. Current participation rate is 33%, with positive feedback received from all involved. An increase in participation is expected following the second wave of communication material having been distributed. A key learning has been the importance of mailbox delivery for residential participation. The City of Gold Coast Council (CGCC) has been very supportive and continues to support the Program. The CGCC have committed to treatment 200 hectares of its land in this financial year, mostly high-profile public spaces, parks and sports fields.

The Chair received a letter from the CGCC in relation to supply of bait. It was agreed the letter will be referred to the Queensland Fire Ant Taskforce to respond. The Chair will acknowledge receipt of the letter advising the letter has been redirected for response.

The Tamborine Mountain Phase 2 Project is a smaller community project led by the Program’s community partners, Tamborine Mountain Landcare and the Tamborine Mountain Visitor Information Centre. Local residents are invited to collect their free treatment kits to conduct two rounds of treatment from the Visitor Information Centre. Participation has decreased from Phase 1 which had a much larger promotional campaign. It is evident that Program involvement has increased the participation rate.

The Calamvale Responsive Treatment Project continues in a small-scale pilot of the high infestation areas. Following Program responsive treatment, a treatment kit is left with residents to conduct two follow-up treatments to their property to reduce the Program cost of return visits to properties in high infestation areas. Positive feedback has been received from residents.

The Program is in consultation with the Brisbane Sustainability Agency and the Brisbane City Council in relation to fire ant management of the Oxley Creek Transformation Project, a large piece of land that runs through the highly infested Oxley Creek Reserve and surrounding land. The agency is keen to play a coordination and support role in treating the land. The Program is also engaging with major land holders, including the Archerfield Airport.

Engagement is also continuing with Education Queensland in relation to management of treatment for fire ants within schools, ie. training and logistical support.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the self-management update.
- **NOTED** the Chair will acknowledge the letter from the City of Gold Coast and refer it to the FAST for consideration and response.

Agenda item 11 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
10.	Respond to City of Gold Coast, acknowledging letter and that it is referred to the Queensland Taskforce.	Chair	February 2022	Completed
11.	The FAST to consider and respond to the City of Gold Coast in relation to supply of bait.	FAST	February 2022	Completed

**Agenda item 12 – Communication and Engagement Update**

Chris Hollingdrake provided a presentation including web presence, stakeholder training, campaigns, internal communication and monitoring of media. All media is monitored, with a lot of recent local media engagement across the infested areas and different parts of Brisbane, with the vast majority being positive.

The fire ant campaign continues, with the fourth wave “Don’t Spread Fire Ant” campaign focusing on movement controls. Filming and photography for the creative material is underway and the advertising campaign will commence in April 2022. The advertising channels to raise awareness will include billboards on main highways heading west out of Brisbane; television and radio broadcasts, industry publications; social media and mailbox delivery. This will be the largest advertising campaign and will be aligned to the ‘ramp up’ recommended by the recent review of the Program.

The Program’s website redevelopment project continues into Phase 2, with all content to be migrated from the Queensland Government website by the end of this financial year. The site is innovative which will provide a very good user experience, eg. one click email subscription to the monthly newsletter; built-in forms currently in use for self-treatment projects enabling the Program to collect treatment reports; and ‘pop-up feedback surveys’ across the entire website providing real time collection of feedback. User experience is being assessed using Google analytics and Hot Jar tracking software to monitor site usage and feedback on the new website.

A trial has commenced in the automation of fact sheets using HTML, moving away from PDF factsheets stored on Sharepoint. Field staff will also use HTML pages and will have the ability to email links to stakeholders, reducing workloads.

A new approach to stakeholder fire ant training is being implemented through the ‘training and tools’ section on the website. Currently there is one live training course available developed by the Program. The ‘Rise 360’ software will take the participant to the course and return them to a page to complete a survey enabling the Program to assess the effectiveness of the training programs, collecting feedback on the content of the course and if it provided them with what they were looking for.

There is an increase in requests for training for large groups. A request has been received from Queensland Transport and Main Roads to facilitate 20 to 30 face-to-face training sessions with 30 to 50 participants in each session. A more streamlined approach will be delivered with the transition to on-line webinar training for large groups. Quarterly “Train the Trainer” workshops may be introduced for larger organisations such as Education Queensland and Queensland Transport and Main Roads providing them with the skillset to lead their departmental training sessions.

Scott Charlton queried whether the website supports reporting of suspect fire ants from within New South Wales and integrating the Queensland biosecurity reporting tool model with the New South Wales biosecurity reporting tool to provide consistent national coordination and messaging. Elissa Van Oosterhout (NSW) will contact the Program to explore integration.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the information provided in the communication and engagement update.

Agenda item 12 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			



Agenda item 13 – Other Business				
Thanked the Program staff for the briefing papers, in particular, good to see analysis and treatment of detections and the great work on communications.				
Agenda item 13 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

The meeting closed at 1.00 pm.

The next quarterly meeting will be held in May 2022.