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

Wednesday 23 November 2022

9.00am – 2:30pm (AEDT)

MINUTES – MEETING 22

ATTENDANCE

Attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wendy Craik, Chair• Malcolm Letts, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), Queensland• Jo Laduzko, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Commonwealth Government• Rae Burrows, Biosecurity Tasmania, Department of Natural Resources and Environment (TAS)• Marcelle O'Brien, Biosecurity Tasmania, Department of Natural Resources and Environment• Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries (DPI), (NSW)• Nigel Ainsworth, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, (VIC)• John van Schagen, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA)• Miles Dixon, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (ACT)• Mike Richards, External Financial Consultant• Nathan Rhodes, Department of Primary Industries and Regions (SA)• Claire Morton, Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (NT)
Apologies	
Program presenters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lance Perry, Program Executive, NRIFAEP• Graeme Dudgeon, Head of Operations, NRIFAEP• Andrew Langford, Director Strategy and Science, NRIFAEP• Becca Hobbs, Director Business Services, NRIFAEP• Eddie Jebreen, Director, FAST, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QLD)• Ross Wylie, Science Leader, NRIFAEP
Observers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elissa Van Oosterhout, Department of Primary Industries, NSW
A/Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heather Jablonski



MAIN DISCUSSION, AGREED OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

The meeting opened at 10.12am (AEST) following a Steering Committee closed discussion.

Agenda Item 1 - Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees and observers, apologising for the delay in the meeting's commencement due to the closed discussion, noting there were no apologies.

Claire Morton was officially introduced to the Steering Committee as the new member for the Northern Territory, replacing Anne Walters.

The minutes from the Steering Committee Meeting 21 on 24-25 August 2022 were endorsed by all members.

The minutes from the Extraordinary Meeting 5 on 17 November 2022 were also endorsed by all members.

Members discussed the outstanding actions items and questioned the progress of the KPMG Report. This report is currently in the final stages of review and will be shared with members shortly.

The Queensland Audit Office review was discussed. A large volume of data has been provided to the QAO. The Program has not received a draft copy of the review to date. It was confirmed that this document would be tabled in Parliament along with the response.

The Chair requested the Program update the Action Register to close out any redundant items.

The Chair confirmed the objectives of today's meeting to include updates on the sub-committees, a financial update, the Program's scale-up, remote sensing surveillance and treatment and the compliance and governance documents.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** the minutes of Meeting 21, and the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 17 November 2022.

Agenda item 1 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
1.	Update Action Register to remove outdated action items	Program	Feb-22	Open

Agenda Item 2 – Risk Management Sub-Committee Update

Members discussed the outcomes of the Risk Management Sub-Committee (RMSC) held on 26 September 2022, noting the discussions around the Program's scale-up and associated risks. The Chair recommended that the Program provide the RMSC with the identified risks to seek their views Out-of-Session (OoS).

Members were advised that the RMSC made recommendations to update the Terms of Reference which should be provided to the Steering Committee for their consideration.

The Chair advised members that Ms Irene Sitton has ended her term on the RMSC and sought nominations from the Steering Committee for a suitable replacement.



The RMSC noted that some risks had been identified as closed once mitigation measures were in place, however the risk remains, therefore the risk should remain open. The Program Executive advised the Steering Committee that the Program is currently in the process of reviewing the Risk Management Policy. Once the document has been reviewed by the newly formed Extended Leadership Team and the Senior Leadership Board the document will be provided to the RMSC for review and feedback.

The Program Executive sought clarity on the ownership of the Program’s risk register to determine the level of content to be provided to the Steering Committee in relation to operational and strategic risks.

The Chair reiterated that the Program’s Risk Register is owned by the Program itself and is reviewed by the Steering Committee and its Risk Sub-Committee and that additionally it was important to notify the Steering Committee if the level of the risk changes, particularly if the risk increases.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** that the Risk Management Sub-Committee met on 26 September 2022 and the draft minutes of the meeting.

Agenda Item 2 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
2.	Provide the Program’s Scale-Up risks to the RSMC for feedback OoS.	Secretariat	Feb-22	Open

Agenda Item 3 – National Exotic Invasive Ant Scientific Advisory Group Update

The Chair welcomed John Robertson, the new Chair of the National Exotic Invasive Ant Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) to the meeting.

John provided members with an update on the SAG meeting held virtually on 18-19 October 2022. Updates included:

- Discussions around the technology and surveillance and the important role this played with the Program. John highlighted that a review of the SAG Terms of Reference may need to be updated to include emerging technologies and latest advances as a standing item on the SAG agendas.
- The updated Proof of Freedom Strategy detailing the eradication steps, targeted surveillance for clearance and the Steering Committee’s consideration of whether clearance should be increased to five years instead of the current four and that overall, it was a good document.
- Current baiting trials including IGR and toxicant baits and the review the Science team are currently undertaking to determine if the trials are still fit for purposes, the design of the trials and the incorporation of additional challenges, including wet weather, into those trials.
- Discussions around genetic sampling in the community suppression project being undertaken by FAST and the prioritisation of that sampling.
- The Detection Dog Validation Protocol and Quality Assurance documents to ensure the Program’s dogs are fit for purpose and to provide assurance of their ongoing performance. The documents provide daily measures and provide confidence between the handler and the dog. Both documents were endorsed by the SAG.



- The Program’s approach to no-more-gaps and the definition of what is considered a gap.

The next SAG meeting is scheduled for April 2023. Approval was sought from the Steering Committee to hold the meeting as a face-to-face meeting in Brisbane.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the National Exotic Invasive Ant Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) update
- **APPROVED** the proposed SAG face-to-face meeting in Brisbane in April 2023.

Agenda item 3 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil.			

Agenda Item 4 – Financial Update

A financial update was provided to the Steering Committee members detailing the current financial position of the Program.

Approval was sought from members to carryover the underspend from the 2021/2022 financial year. Members requested an addendum to the Work Plan to adjust the treatment.

Members discussed treatment options given the reduction in the budget. The Program advised that they would be looking at the strategy to determine where treatment can be reduced without sacrificing the current work currently undertaken.

Becca Hobbs presented the budget breakdown, detailing where the main expenses by the Program were incurred. Members discussed inflation and the costs of aerial treatment and adjustments.

The Steering Committee congratulated the Program on their achievement of efficiency gains.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** the carry forward of the 2021-2022 underspend of \$6,223,955 once the inclusion of an addendum has been included into the Work Plan to adjust the treatment plan
- **APPROVED** the 2022-23 Budget
- **NOTED** the October 2022 Financial Performance Report as presented at the meeting.

		Responsibility	Target	Status
3.	Addition of addendum to the Work Plan to adjust the treatment plan.	Business Services	Dec-22	Open

Agenda Item 5 – Program Executive Update

The Program Executive provided members with an update of the Program including the new governance structures that have been stood up with the establishment of the Extended Leadership Team and the Senior Leadership Board. Members were advised that a Workplace Health and Safety Working Group, People and



Culture Working Group and Innovation and Initiative Working Group were in the early stages of establishment with the Terms of Reference currently being drafted.

The Program is reframing its mission, 'Safe Eradication of Fire Ants for Australia', to ensure its safe for Program staff, the community and the environment.

Discussions were held in relation to workplace incidents and the development of the updated Personal Protection Equipment Policy that is currently being presented to staff. The Program Executive advised members of the work that is currently being undertaken to build one team within the Program to improve culture within teams.

The Program Executive updated members on the remote sensing surveillance trial currently being undertaken. The Program is currently investigating what other technology is in the market and what this means for the Program. Discussions were held in relation to the aerial surveillance technologies and the reliability to detect fire ants.

Members were advised of the new innovation and initiative framework within the Program for staff to submit ideas for improvements to the Senior Leadership Board detailing the criteria required to be met for the continuance of ideas, including gates, the discovery phase and pilot. The Program will document plans as they progress to ensure the alignment to strategic outputs and objectives.

The Steering Committee:

- NOTED the update by the Program Executive.

Agenda item 5 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil.			

Agenda Item 6 – Head of Operations Update

Graeme Dudgeon provided Steering Committee members with an update on the achievements of the aerial team to complete the first round of treatment before the grounding of the aircraft, noting that this was an important milestone given the inclement weather. Due to the wet weather, the ground team have completed two thirds of the planned treatment to date.

Adjustments of the 2022-23 Work Plan have been made to stay within budget representing approximately \$6 million. Reductions will occur predominately in Round 3 however some round two reductions may also be necessary, depending on time lost due to weather and other events.

Members were updated on the detections of importance occurring from residual nests or out from the current boundaries. Further analysis will occur through treatment and a strategy for next season will be developed to mitigate those risks. Marcelle O'Brien questioned the risks with reallocating treatments in areas where residual nests were located. Graeme advised that these were round three treatments and will be treated with a risk-based approach.

Discussions occurred around gaps in treatment, risks of human assisted movement, surveillance in comparison to completed treatment and the large number of detections since August 2022. The Operations team have been requested to draft a potential plan to reconsider the second half of the treatment season to align with the expected Response Plan. The draft plan will include treatment options for the north and south where



recent detections have occurred. The plan will be provided to the Senior Leadership Board for consideration once completed.

Marcelle O'Brien questioned the compliance of the local council in relation to the Summerholm outbreak. The Program is currently working with the CEO and Mayor of the local council to address these risks.

Graeme provided a communications and engagement update to members detailing plans to develop better customer service relationships with property owners and stakeholders. Members questioned how decisions are made in relation to which communications the Program or FAST deliver.

Eddie Jebreen advised that the Program was responsible for leading the broad community awareness while FAST has a targeted campaign for specific areas. FAST communications align with Program style guides to ensure the messaging is delivered as a program whole.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the treatment and surveillance progress against the 2022-23 Work Plan
- **NOTED** the proposed adjustments to the 2022-23 Work Plan
- **NOTED** the detections of importance
- **NOTED** the communication and engagement update.

Agenda item 6 - Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil.			

Agenda item 7– Queensland Fire Ant Suppression (FAST) Update

Eddie Jebreen presented an update on FAST to members. Collaborative agreements are being drafted with the City of Gold Coast Council (GCC). The GCC are currently treating council land prioritised by the Program, including sporting fields and parklands, using bait that has been purchased by the council through licensed technicians. A data sharing module has also been developed by the GCC to provide information to the Program about where and when they treat.

FAST is working with high-risk industries and collaborating with the Program to deliver suppression treatment through self-management.

Eddie updated members on the meeting held with Ipswich City Council attended by Malcolm Letts, Lance Perry and Eddie Jebreen to discuss the current self-management pilot project being undertaken. Ipswich City Council is currently reviewing a draft collaborative agreement. Registrations for the community suppression project currently underway in Ipswich closed on 20 November 2022 with 7,700 registrations received. The target for the second registration in February is 15,000.

Logan City Council have dedicated staffing resources to assist with fire ant treatment. FAST is meeting with the Logan City Council next week to discuss what priorities and challenges may look like. Currently in Logan, 16 suburbs account for more than 65 per cent of responsive treatment making this a priority for community suppression.



Discussions are occurring with state government departments and lease holders to gauge an understanding of who holds the responsibility to treat under the General Biosecurity Obligations.

A Memorandum of Understanding is currently being drafted between FAST and the Department of Education to self-treat schools. These summer school holidays, the goal is to have 50 schools within the prioritised areas of Ipswich, Logan and Gold Coast treated with a second round of treatment conducted in the Easter school holidays.

The current campaign material was presented to members, noting that FAST is using the same branding as the Program to ensure consistent messaging is being portrayed. An improved engagement strategy for FAST will be to target members of the public who have previously reported fire ants. In this first year FAST's goal is to have at least one community suppression, one large landholder and one high risk industry.

FAST is currently working with the CANEGROWERS to undertake fire ant treatment. This group includes up to 40 farmers owning approximately 6,000 ha of land where fire ant infestations have been detected. The CANEGROWERS are a high-risk industry, and the farmers are receptive to treating the fire ants with a business management plan in place.

Eddie advised members that the Chair of the Steering Committee is invited, as a member, to the FAST Taskforce meetings. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 1 December 2022.

The draft FAST plan is currently out with the taskforce for comment. It is unlikely that this document will be finalised in time for the upcoming AgSOC Meeting. However, there is a section in the AgSOC paper that will cover the commitments of FAST and how it relates to the Program. The monitoring and evaluation plan for the FAST KPIs is also being drafted. Eddie presented the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce commitments for 2022-23 and a high level / low detail plan through to 2025-26.

Members discussed the General Biosecurity Obligation in Queensland, who it applies to and understanding the variances in people's ability to meet the GBO. There is a fundamental shift with FAST and the way fire ants have previously been treated with messaging to be updated to reflect that under the GBO certain requirements need to be met. FAST will work with businesses, industries and communities to help them understand their mitigation strategies.

Members questioned whether directives can be pre-emptively issued or the ability to issue warnings on the failure to comply within high-risk industries such as developers. Discussions were held in regard to the issuing of penalty infringement notices and the success of prosecutions under the Biosecurity Act. Members sought clarity on the regulatory framework and mandated measures and questioned what happens when the Program ceases to supply fire ant baits.

Members discussed that in lieu of new legislation specifically in relation to red imported fire ants there is a need for clear messaging to ensure landholders are aware the onus will be on them to discharge their duty under the GBO. Clear messaging is to be provided that includes 'what this means for me' and updating the language on the Program's website to reflect that duty.



The Steering Committee requested that the Program increase communication around compliance, especially industry specific communication, in relation to how communities and industries can deliver their responsibilities under the GBO.

The Steering Committee discussed:

- the role FAST is playing in building capacity across all aspects of the community to self-manage fire ants including private residential, large private and commercial land, government and high-risk industries.
- The shift from a spatial boundary between the Program and FAST to a functional collaboration where FAST leads self-management means that FAST delivers this responsibility across the full extent of the biosecurity zones, including where the Program is undertaking eradication treatment.
- The absence of a spatial boundary between the Program and FAST simplifies communication messaging and the need to move boundaries and transition responsibilities to the Program as eradication efforts progress inwards and eastwards.
- While FAST is not planning to deliver responsive treatment how it has been done to date, there is an expectation that transitioning responsibility from the Program to landowners will have a significant benefit to the Program both through reduced demand for responsive and in delivery of eradication treatment and surveillance.
- The Steering Committee appreciated the clarification of the FAST role, and collaboration with the Program “you have just explained what we have all been waiting to hear”, and asked that this be clearly articulated in the FAST Plan.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the progress on key issues and projects for the Queensland Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce
- **NOTED** the learnings that have been made with current projects
- **NOTED** the future priorities for FAST.

Agenda item 7 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
4.	The Program to update its website to include clear advice about how the GBO applies in the case of red imported fire ants.	Policy Team	Dec-2022	Open
5.	Collaboration mechanism between FAST and the Program to be clearly articulated in the FAST Plan.	Eddie Jebreen	Dec-22	Open
6.	Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce Plan 2022-2023 to be provided to members	Eddie Jebreen	Dec-22	Open

Agenda item 8 – Compliance Strategy

The Chair noted that some compliance discussion occurred with the FAST Update agenda item.



Andrew Langford spoke to the draft Compliance Strategy 2023-27 and advised members that feedback previously received by the Steering Committee has been included. The draft Compliance Strategy links into the Eradication Strategy 2023-27. Andrew advised members that the Program were working at compliance targeting high risk industries and human assisted movement. The Program will have a strong focus on voluntary compliance and enforcement compliance.

The compliance framework details six principles:

1. Voluntary compliance
2. Communications and engagement
3. Reporting breaches
4. Higher standard of compliance
5. Fair, transparent, consistent, lawful and resource efficient
6. Proportionate to the level of risk.

The Program will review the Compliance Strategy after the discussions held today.

Members discuss whether the compliance strategy would be a public facing document and suggested the possibility of a ministerial launch to provide exposure of the changes to compliance under the new Program and articulate the zone changes. Members suggested this could be further supported with a dedicated webpage detailing recent prosecutions to inform the community of the consequences.

Marcelle O'Brien questioned comments made around the GBO only applying if fire ants are located on a landholder's property and sought clarification regarding whether material cannot be moved in a landholder is located with a movement control zone.

The Steering Committee:

- **DISCUSSED** the draft Compliance Strategy.
- **SUGGESTED** amendments be made to the draft Compliance Strategy
- **REQUESTED** that to assist in raising landholders awareness of their responsibilities under the GBO, industry specific communications be developed directed towards action required by them to eradicate RIFA on their properties.

Agenda item 8 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
7	Industry specific communications specifying GBO obligations to be drafted	Eddie Jebreen	Jan-23	Open
8.	Amendments to the draft Compliance Strategy	Policy Team	Dec-22	Open

Agenda item 9 – Governance Arrangements for the NRIFAEP 2023-27

Members discussed the amended governance framework for the Program and requested further updates.

The reporting structure for the Steering Committee, including Director-Generals and Ministers through AgSOC and AgMIN, accountability and endorsement authorities was discussed.



The Program Executive advised the Steering Committee of the establishment of the Senior Leadership Board (SLB) and the Extended Leadership Team within the Program. Eddie Jebreen, as the Director of FAST, is included as a voting member on the SLB. These establishments will assist to provide clarity around geographical versus functional overlays within FAST and the Program.

The Chair advised that she would review the draft Governance Arrangements and provide comments to members and the Program for review.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the draft Governance Arrangements and requested amendments after the Chair has provided comments.

Agenda item 9 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
9.	Review the Governance Arrangements and provide comments to members and the Program	Chair	Immediately	Completed

Agenda item 10 – Eradication Strategy

The Program Executive acknowledged that the Eradication Strategy is a strategy document and advised that after today's closed session the Program will draft a Response Plan, separate to the Eradication Strategy.

The information provided to members in the supplementary working papers for the Extraordinary Steering Committee meetings will be used to build a detailed response plan including functional boundaries. The Program will aim to provide this as soon as possible.

Members discussed the jurisdictional budget breakdown and requested the inclusion of the allocation to each jurisdiction in the response plan.

The Chair questioned whether AgSOC / AgMIN had noted the release of the Strategic Review. Malcolm Letts advised that he would follow this up with AgSOC.

The Steering Committee:

- **DISCUSSED** the Eradication Strategy and requested a Response Plan be drafted as a separate document.

Agenda item 10 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
10.	Follow up approval to release the Strategic Review	Malcolm Letts	Immediately	Open

Agenda item 11 – Other Business

The Chair provided an overview of today's meeting. In conclusion, the Chair confirmed the Response Plan will need to be clear about the roles of FAST and the Program to detail the roles, financial responsibilities and any boundary issues either geographical or conceptual.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions to the meeting.



Agenda item 11 – Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil.		

The meeting closed at 2.35pm

The next quarterly meeting will be held in March 2023.