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

Online Teams Meeting

24-25 November 2021

10.00am – 1.00pm (AEST)

MINUTES – MEETING 18

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 Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (TAS) Mike Richards, External Financial Consultant
Program Presenters	Graeme Dudgeon, General Manager Mel Blankenberg, A/Director Strategy 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 Jacqui King, A/Director, Invasive Plants and Animals Ross Wylie, Science Leader
Observers	Malcolm Letts, Chief Biosecurity Officer/Deputy Director-General, Biosecurity Queensland (DAF)
Secretariat	Kerri Nobbs, Senior Policy Officer (NRIFAEP)
Apologies	Anne Walters, Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT) Rae Burrows, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water 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 an apology from Anne Walters and Rae Burrows.

The Chair provided an overview of the meeting agenda for Day 1 and Day 2.

Minutes for the quarterly meeting held on 25-26 August 2021, and the extraordinary meetings held on 9 September, 16 September, 23 September, 30 September and 7 October 2021 were taken as a correct record and approved for publishing to the web. All actions have been completed, in progress or on the agenda for discussion with the exception of one item.

The outstanding action from the extraordinary meeting held on 30 September 2021, *'Forward the Strategy for the Control of RIFA in Australia, the NRIFAEP Eradication Program Response Plan and the Queensland Fire Ant Control Plan to the Review Panel for review'* was discussed and the Steering Committee suggested the review panel respond to the documents prior to the review panel chair addressing the Agriculture Ministers.

The Chair noted the pressures the Program is currently under, however, reiterated that the meeting papers are to be provided as per the Terms of Reference for future meetings.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** the minutes of Meeting 17, and the minutes of the extraordinary meetings held on 9 September, 16 September, 23 September, 30 September and 7 October 2021
- **AGREED** the minutes for the meetings can be published to the web.

Agenda item 1 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
1.	Minutes of the six recently held meetings to be published to the web.	Secretariat	31 December 2021	Completed
2.	Strategy for the Control of RIFA in Australia, the NRIFAEP Eradication Program Response Plan and the Queensland Fire Ant Control Plan to be forwarded to the review panel for response.	Andrew Turley	3 December 2021	

Agenda Item 2 - General Manager's Update and Omnibus

The General Manager provided the Steering Committee with an update on the Program, including the practical considerations for scaling up the Program for Option A and the risks and issues during the period before a decision is made/funding is available.

The Program is currently delivering as per the Work Plan. However, the current rain event could have an effect on treatment progress. Procurement for contracts for fuel, bait and extension of contractor staff has been progressed to the DAF Director-General for sign off. The General Manager thanked the cost share partner jurisdictions that have agreed to bring forward of funds. This will enable the Program to deliver against the Work Plan. However, the Work Plan may require some adjustment pending the available budget in the future.

There has been some loss of staff either due to career change or uncertainty with the future of the Program. The recruitment process has commenced for the Science Manager, Policy Manager and Remote Sensing



Project roles. Mel Blankenberg and Jacqui King have temporarily joined the Program to supplement the leadership team.

The Program is progressing with the recommendations from the 2021 Strategic Review, including the establishment of the Queensland Taskforce and negotiating with other parties, eg. the local government regarding suppression.

One of the risks of a full scale up as recommended in Option A of the Review is the staffing. This option would require a significant increase from 20 teams to around 94 field teams of 12 people (1,000 operations personnel, 1,500 for the full Program). A smaller scale up would require around 60 teams of 12 people. As field operations are undertaken in less-populated areas, availability of suitable employees in the labour market may also be a constraint.

Option A of the review also recommended an additional four to six remote sensing surveillance camera units. Discussions have been held with the current supplier, Outline Global. The supplier has advised that it would be difficult to scale up to that capacity in a short timeframe due to the special Defence Force restricted thermal sensors which come out of the United States, delays in shipping due to COVID constraints, and an additional 20 to 30 people, including photogrammetrists (a specialist skill) required to manipulate and process the vastly increased number of images.

Availability and affordability of bait could become an issue with the scale up of treatment. Discussions have been held with the sole supplier of corn grit, the base medium for fire ant bait. The supplier is based in the United States and is not planning on expanding to Australia in the near future.

New field depots will be required to accommodate a significantly expanded level of field operations in the western area and also possible sites in the north and south of the biosecurity zones. In the largest option, an extra 250 (approximately) vehicles will be required for field operations. Leases for the depots and vehicles will take around six months to secure and finalise.

The Program’s Policy team are currently working on policy details around human assisted movement and the powers local councils etc would have if involved.

Available on the Fire Ant website is a ‘Fire Ant Detection Map’ developed by the Program which provides more detail on where fire ants are being found and where treatment is occurring. The map shows some strong correlations with new residential developments and the later stages of new residential developments, consistent with human assisted movement and flight as a secondary spread.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the General Manager’s update on the Program, including the practical considerations for scaling up the Program for Option A and the risks and issues during the period before a decision is made/funding is available.

Agenda Item 2 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
3.	Fire Ant Detection Map and future maps to be circulated to the Steering Committee.	Program – Chris Hollingdrake	30 November 2021	

Agenda Item 3 – Financial Update

Sarah Mitchell provided an update on the financial position of the Program, including:



- the Program was underspent by \$54,000 as at 30 September 2021. Variances included overspends in Operations for field contractor expenditure, bait usage and aircraft hire, which is a timing impact of 'significant detection and clearance treatment activities' compared with the original treatment plan. There were underspends in communication and stakeholder engagement, remote sensing and IT discretionary expenses
- the Digital Field Capability Implementation Project was not identified as a capital item requiring specific steering committee approval in line with the Principles of Cost Sharing. Internally within DAF the software has been treated as capital with the Program paying amortisation since project completion and capitalisation in 2021
- a draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for engagement of an auditor to conduct a financial audit of the Program was provided to the Steering Committee for review drawn from the Principles of Cost Sharing. Suggested additions to the ToR included: cost share payment schedule, procurement, compliance, sample testing internal controls of credit cards and timesheets, and reference to the Financial Accountability Act 2009 under which Queensland operates. An amended version to be circulated to the Steering Committee for approval out-of-session.
- An out-of-session paper will be circulated to the Steering Committee regarding the lease of the current remote sensing surveillance (RSS) camera pod, seeking approval for the final payout figure of \$60 000.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the financial update and all attachments, including:
 - the Program's Dashboard as at 30 September 2021-22
 - the Capital Program update
 - the September 2021 YTD Financial Performance Report
 - the Program's status of milestone payments under Schedule D2
- **APPROVED**
 - the capital expenditure for Digital Field Capability Implementation Project

Agenda item 3 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
4.	Amend the Terms of Reference and send to Steering Committee out-of-session for approval.	Program – Sarah Mitchell	14 December	
5.	An out-of-session paper be prepared for Steering Committee approval of the payout figure on the lease of the current RSS camera pod.	Program – Strategy Director	December 2021	

Agenda Item 4 – Future of the Program

Graeme Dudgeon and Malcolm Letts provided an update on validating, developing and executing the plan for the options recommended from the 2021 Strategic Review of the Program. More detailed maps have been prepared, documenting assumptions and rules, eg. unsuitable habitat. Each assumption has an associated risk, risk of uncertainty, or evidence being used to make assumptions. The biggest driver of costs for eradication is



treating and surveying the 10km / 330 000 ha containment area. Costings have also been prepared for treating the inner 5km strip and surveying the outer 5km strip. Three variations for Option A were provided for discussion. It is anticipated that the full scale up model will be realised by the end of the third year. There was concern over reducing the 10km strip and whether significant detections over the last 5 – 10 years would have been within the 10km containment, 5km containment or greater than 10km containment.

Human assisted movement remains a risk in the southern containment area. The compliance aspects of the Program are critical. A full permitting system is being evaluated for feasibility for plant movement on a cost recovery basis.

It was suggested that the Strategic Review panel be given the opportunity to provide feedback on Option A variations and the rationale and risks associated with the changes.

It was proposed that the recommendation to the Agriculture Ministers is to support a variation of Option A and that there is an interim agreement that the Program has a proof-of-concept year to evaluate the effectiveness of the Taskforce, remote sensing surveillance, self-treatment pilots in heavily urbanised areas, heightened compliance measures and the 10km containment zone and provide a longer-term, evidence-based proposal and a detailed validated plan at the end of the first 12 months. The success of the Queensland Taskforce could also be evaluated in the proof-of-concept year in relation to compliance, treatment, and Local Government Authority and industry buy-in. Trigger points would be factored in and reports provided to the National Biosecurity Committee, the Agricultural Senior Officials' Committee and the Agriculture Ministers for cost share partners' reassurance.

In the proof-of-concept year, the Program would maintain the current effort and work towards validating relevant recommendations from the review. The Program would need commitment of funding to retain resources and procurement. At the end of the 12 months, the Program should have a greater level of confidence to ask Agriculture Ministers to sign off on a new response plan, with triggers built in. It was suggested that failure triggers should be linked to impressive performance milestone indicators.

The Steering Committee discussed and agreed to recommend Option A1 which differs from previous red imported fire ant programs in four respects:

- local government treatment of the residual area
- functional remote sensing capability
- self-treatment
- targeted industry compliance on carrier movement.

A five-year budget will be developed of which the first three years will be quite specific and funding being contingent on meeting annual performance KPIs for the nationally funded program and the Queensland Taskforce, both responsible for delimitation, eradication progress, suppression, self-treatment, remote sensing surveillance, taskforce development, human assisted movement and scaling up. A further major review at the end of the first three years will make recommendations on the future of the Program. Should performance KPIs not be met, the Program will revert to Option C.

It was suggested that the Program prepare a paper to engage an independent party to evaluate the risks associated with the recommended option.

The Steering Committee:



- **CONSIDERED** the future response options outlined in the paper
- **RECOMMENDED** Option A1 to be progressed for agriculture ministers' consideration
- **DISCUSSED** other information that may be required to be included in the response plan for the recommended option
- **AGREED** the Program prepare a paper on the engagement of an independent party to evaluate the risks of the recommended option.
- **SUGGESTED** that 'real time' interim figures from remote sensing could be included in the weekly report.

		Responsibility	Target	Status
6.	A paper be prepared for AGSOC outlining the Steering Committee's support of the proposed approach on the future of the Program.	DAF / Program	3 December 2021	
7.	Program to prepare paper to engage an independent party to evaluate the risk of the recommended option.	Program – Strategy Director		

Agenda Item 5 – Self-Management Update

Mel Blankenberg provided an update on the self-management initiative, noting that shared responsibility for eradication is very important. Community treatment projects currently underway include:

- Tamborine Mountain Community Treatment Project – building on last treatment season's community treatment blitz, encouraging residents to again collect a free fire ant treatment kit from the Visitors' Information Centre. The onus to register prior to receiving bait has been removed, making it easier to take part. There has been good community participation.
- Calamvale Ward Responsive Treatment Project – the Program's responsive treatment teams work directly with landholders to provide free fire ant treatment kits for at least two follow-up treatments on a property, by the landholder. Enabling routine treatment after the Program's initial response provides better protection against fire ants re-emerging as well as building new behaviours in the community around self-treatment. Two community hubs have also been stocked with fire ant treatment kits to provide to residents who want to undertake proactive treatment on their property.
- Gold Coast Community Suppression Project – is a new method of fire ant treatment in urban areas. Residents in six target suburbs are encouraged to put an easy-to-remove sticker on their letterbox to indicate they want a free fire ant treatment kit to treat their backyard. The Program's field teams will treat all roadsides and front yards in the suburbs and leave treatment kits at properties displaying stickers. Two rounds of treatment will be undertaken in November 2021 and February 2022. The participation rate is currently at 50-60 per cent.

The Program has been in discussion with the City of Gold Coast (CGC) to undertake fire ant treatment on land they own or manage across 10 suburbs, including six in which residents are treating their own backyards. The Program is willing to supply bait to the sum of \$100 000 for council to use on recreational land and other fire ant habitat. CGG advised it has limited resourcing to undertake extensive treatment this financial year.



The Program's engagement officers will work with the Taskforce and councils to achieve positive outcomes and increase participation rates. The next 12 months should give a greater level of confidence in this approach which will be key in relation to eradicating fire ants from heavily urbanised areas.

The Oxley Creek community are keen to participate with the Program. Organisations such as Oxley Creek Transformation, Archerfield Wetlands and AgForce are making contact with the Program to discuss putting fire ant management plans in place and the possibility of piloting a partnership approach to suppression activities. The Program is currently looking at the concept of this strategy.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the self-management initiative.

Agenda item 5 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda Item 6 – Surveillance and Treatment Update

Sharon Janssen shared a presentation on the progress of the Program's surveillance and treatment regime. Planned targets of surveillance for this season included 24 000 ha of ground surveillance by field teams and 40 000 ha of remote sensing surveillance. To date, 47 000 ha of remote sensing surveillance has been undertaken. Overall, the Program is well ahead of the planned target for surveillance.

Clearance surveillance was undertaken in Area 2 by ground teams and by remote sensing surveillance in Area 1, the Western Boundary, and in significant detection areas focusing on risk areas to protect eradication areas from reinfestation. Areas were selected based on scientific modelling. Post season RSS analysis will be carried out particularly focusing on false negative results. Initial analysis at Munbilla indicated that the nests that were not predicted, were small without much of a mound structure and were obscured. The Program is currently reviewing and refining RSS procedures with a view to transitioning from 'research and development' to 'business-as-usual'.

Targeted surveillance was undertaken around previous and new detections of importance, mainly with ground surveillance but also some remote sensing to ensure no residual infestation remained. Sentinel surveillance sites were also selected in the riskier areas outside the boundary. No new detections were made during sentinel surveillance. Responsive surveillance was carried out by field teams around new detections, focusing mainly on detections of importance, responding to public reports and to delineate the extent of new infestation. Six months after treatment, odour detection dogs visit sites in DOI and high-risk areas to confirm nests treated have been destroyed.

Treatment commenced in mid-September 2021. There is 337,550 ha of planned treatment, with extra contingency for polygyne areas, responsive treatment and self-management. The Program is currently ahead of schedule, however, the wet weather events in South East Queensland could be a challenge. A 34 per cent contingency has been built in the plan for lost days.

Planned treatment includes:

- Area 1 – 3 rounds
- Area 2 – 2 rounds
- Significant Detections – 3 rounds
- Eastern and Western Overlaps – 2 rounds



- Southern Suppression north – 1 round
- Southern Suppression south – 2 rounds
- Self-treatment at the Gold Coast – 2 rounds
- Port of Brisbane – 4 rounds (coinciding with the Commonwealth plan)
- Extra treatment at polygyne areas

Responsive treatment includes:

- responding to public reports with DNI/IGR or Toxicant/IGR
- delineation surveillance
- currently there is a seven-day response timeframe to public reports, with detections of importance and other high-risk detections prioritised.

The Steering Committee queried how many of the detections in Area 2 were found outside of the areas identified through modelling for clearance surveillance and how many significant detections were 5km and 10km from the nearest detections/operational boundary. An update on the 'success and refining the modelling for clearance surveillance' will be included on the agenda for the Steering Committee meeting being held in February 2022.

Investment in the 'Forage' system (tablet system) technology has had outstanding results for the Program, providing transparency for work allocation and movement of teams. There has been a significant drop in the number of complaints for 'response' timeframes. The Program is also proactively working on the 'no more gaps' strategy, dealing with organics and using the Queensland Police Service to gain entry to properties.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update and findings from Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication – Surveillance, including the Remote Sensing Surveillance Project
- **NOTED** the update on RIFA eradication – treatment.

Agenda item 6 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
8.	Determine whether significant detections over last 5-10 years would have been within the 10km containment, 5km containment, greater than 10km containment.	Program – Sharon Janssen	25 November 2021	Update provided at Day 2 of meeting. Further analysis will be provided out of session.
9.	Provide advice on whether detections from public reports are in the top 10 per cent riskiest clearance areas.	Program – Sharon Janssen	25 November 2021	Completed – update provided at Day 2 of meeting.
10.	'Modelling for clearance surveillance - success and refinement' to be added to the February Steering Committee meeting agenda.	Secretariat	December 2021	



Agenda item 7– Detections of Importance

Sharon Janssen gave a presentation on the detections of importance and provided an update on clearance, significant and boundary detections.

From the commencement of surveillance on 14 June 2021, there have been 142 confirmed detections of importance, 46 clearance detections, 41 significant and outside boundary detections, and 55 boundary detections. Each of these detections is assessed according to risk. 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.

To date there have been six new significant detections:

- Mount Tarampa – 326m from known infestation
- Kentville – 7.2km from known infestation
- Rothwell – 6.5km from known infestation
- Nerang – 5.1km from known infestation
- Nindooinbah – 4.2km from known infestation
- Roadvale – 4.3km from known infestation.

These significant detections are being treated, received extended surveillance to ensure all nests have been captured and investigated into the possibility of human assisted movement. In a recent case, foreign material came into a refuse tip, was mulched and mulch was given to at least one wholesale landscaper who took the load back into the middle of the larger infested area. Genetics showed that through human assisted movement, it spread back through the entire area of approximately 500 000 ha. The total number of new significant detections since the commencement of the Program in 2017 is 39. Since 2019-20, the Program has not moved the operational boundary out 5km beyond the known previous detection. Scientific advice is used to guide the appropriate response for new detections found two years post-eradication treatment.

The Program agreed to include two new columns in the monthly report, 1. distance from operational boundary (at that time) and 2. possible/likely source (if available).

A more detailed analysis of clearance detections (gaps in treatment) and significant detections, including the risk mapping and the top 10% of riskier sites, will be provided to the Steering Committee out-of-session.

Of the 55 boundary detections this financial year, 85 per cent were in the southern area selected for treatment. Genetic testing is continuing on these detections.

The Steering Committee were presented with an interactive spread map, with flashing lights showing the spread from 2001 to now. The map depicts how fire ants have spread over the years, the different strategies to get on top of it, the funding cuts and when funding was received. It was suggested the map could incorporate drought conditions, transport routes and new developments etc to analyse trends and the risks with movement. The map will be updated and circulated to Steering Committee members.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the latest information available on Program Detections of Importance.

Agenda item 7 – Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
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11.	Monthly report to be updated with two new columns relating to significant detections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> distance from operational boundary possible likely source. 	Program – Sharon Janssen	Ongoing	BAU
12.	Spread Map to be updated and circulated to Steering Committee members.	Program – Sharon Janssen	December 2021	

Agenda item 8 – Communication and Engagement Update

Chris Hollingdrake provided an overview of the progress of the Program’s communication and engagement, including three key updates on recent research results, the website and campaign development work.

Research Update

Every six months, the Program uses an external research agency to undertake a 15-minute survey with stakeholders across South East Queensland asking a range of questions around awareness, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour to assist with the communication and engagement strategy and more broadly, understanding stakeholders. It also helps to measure some of the KPIs. Generally, 800 people are surveyed, 550 community members and 250 business members across areas segmented into Areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and the Western Boundary.

The second survey was carried out in August 2021, analysed and a ‘120 page’ report provided to the Program. Results from survey one carried out in February 2021 and the second survey were compared for consistency, with similar results in a range of different categories, which gives confidence that the research is valid.

Results showed a high level of general awareness of fire ants, with a high level of willingness to help. However, results show this willingness is not translating into intention or behaviour ie only 50% have checked their yard.

A map has been developed to show people that fire ants are active in their community and with other forms of engagement it is hoped the results for behaviour of checking and reporting will rise.

Website Update

Phase 1 of the launch of the Fire Ant Website (FAW) went live on 30 July 2021. Phase 2 was completed and Phase 3 is progressing with additional content being drafted and the migration of the remaining content from the Queensland Government websites onto the FAW. The content on the FAW will be simple and in clear English. Redirections will be put in place when decommissioning the old sites to avoid loss of traffic. A new staff member has commenced with the Program to assist with this project for four months. The reporting tools have been simplified and training will be moved on-line. The FAW received over 35 000 views in October 2021 which is promising.

Campaign Update

The fire ant management campaign has been divided into four segments, a targeting of behaviour approach: Community Surveillance (community looking for and reporting fire ants); Operational Support (streamlined process for property access and building strong relationships); Community Treatment (currently very successful on the Gold Coast); and Movement Control (better discussion around movement instructions, old movement controls and not spreading fire ants).

The current campaign the team are working on is Movement Controls. The target audience is the building and development industry, primary producers and nursery businesses. The approach is to make it clear with



new web content and online training, make it easier with refinement to the online decision tool, make it personal by targeted advertising to make it front of mind and to make it real by coordinating with compliance engagement. This campaign will cost around \$360 000.

The advertising approach has been guided by three external agencies, the research agency, a creative agency specialising in developing messaging and the creative approach and a media buying (advertising) agency that have provided information on where it is best to invest money. These companies have access to huge databases of a variety of different advertising channels and a mass of research data and devise a formula to maximise the reach of the campaign into specific groups of people or stakeholders.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the information provided in the Communication and Engagement update which they found very encouraging.

Agenda item 8 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda item 9 – Sub-Committee Update

The Steering Committee were provided with briefing updates and minutes from previous minutes for the:

- Risk Management Sub-Committee
 - the briefing paper and minutes of the Risk Management Sub-Committee meeting held on 22 September 2021 were provided and accepted as the update.
- National Exotic Invasive Ant Scientific Advisory Group (SAG)
 - Ross Wylie, a member of the SAG, provided an update from the meeting held on 28 October 2021.
 - The main items on the SAG agenda for consideration were:
 - the Residual in Area 2 and whether the proposed strategy for treatment was supported
 - Remote Sensing Surveillance – to consider challenges and opportunities for the Program’s RSS
 - the Future Genetics of the Program – to provide advice on the Program’s conclusions and recommendations for the genetics program given the significant increase in the number of samples being generated.
 - There is currently a major backlog in genetics sample processing which is interfering with timeliness of analysis and intelligence provided. Future options being considered are reduced microsatellite testing and outsourcing of some testing and/or faster methods introduced; and/or the Program scales up its genetic analysis capacity. The SAG recognised the importance of genetics and reiterated that it would be extremely valuable if the Program can manage the backlog by triaging the number of samples. The SAG requested going forward that more information be provided on the Program’s genetics results. The Program is currently developing a proposed sampling strategy in response to the SAG’s advice.
- Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Sub-Committee



- The last meeting held was in August 2021 and an update provided to the Steering Committee at its August meeting. All recommendations were closed with the exception of Recommendation 29 – the Steering Committee request a follow up audit of operational planning, governance and procurement to be conducted in April 2020. This audit is on hold and will be added to the Program’s Business Improvement Register/Risk Register for monitoring.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the updates from the:
 - Risk Management Sub-Committee
 - Scientific Advisory Group
 - Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Sub-Committee.

Agenda item 9 – Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda item 10 – Regulatory Reform

Tom Roberts provided an update on the progress of regulatory reform and the proposed changes to the Biosecurity Regulation 2016 which are intended to provide clarity and remove ambiguity from the existing fire ant movement controls.

Following the release of the CSIRO report findings and feedback received during consultation to understand the impact on stakeholders should CSIRO recommendations be implemented, the Program has conducted an internal review of the movement controls.

The objectives of the review were to ensure measures in the Regulation are effective at reducing the risk of human assisted movement of fire ants in fire ant carriers, promote consistency and efficiency when handling fire ant carriers by prescribing risk mitigation measures in the Regulation, reduce ambiguity of the Regulation and provide greater clarity and options to stakeholders on what is required for movement of fire ant carriers and reduce the regulatory burden placed on stakeholders and the Program.

In summary, the internal review determined that the existing storage requirements needed to be better defined, disturbance via turning should be re-defined to provide more clarity as it currently says turning should be vigorous and often, to include current industry practices within the Regulation that provide more options for industry to mitigate the biosecurity risk of fire ants, and mandate proactive treatment for high-risk activities that create suitable fire ant habitat.

Preliminary advice was sought from Queensland Treasury to understand the consultation requirements for the proposed amendments. The proposed amendments that clarify and provide industry with more options are unlikely to need further consultation but measures that would require additional costs such as proactive treatment for creators of habitat would require further consultation.

The Program to progress discussions with industry around proactive treatment, seeking clarification on the development approval systems; assessing industry specific guidelines and consultation with local government agencies and state government agencies.



The Biosecurity Queensland Legislation and Strategy team will be assisting the Program with extra resources to assist with this process, acknowledging the engagement required with the construction industry as well as getting a better understanding of the development application process. Many of the construction industry will be invited on the Queensland Taskforce, like Master Builders.

The Steering Committee:

NOTED:

- the proposed changes to the Biosecurity Regulation 2016 are intended to provide clarity and remove ambiguity from the existing fire ant movement controls, whilst providing stakeholders with additional options for handling, process, and storing fire ant carriers that will be moved from within the fire ant biosecurity zones
- the Program will defer its own plans to make RIFA specific regulations until such time as it has had an opportunity to investigate new non-biosecurity based legislation to mitigate risk as part of discussions with council and other agencies
- that should Queensland Treasury advice change on consultation requirements, the Program’s strategy may change.

Agenda item 10 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda item 11 – Remote Sensing Surveillance

Should the Agriculture Ministers choose to take up the 2021 Strategic Review panel’s recommendation of Option A, the Program has determined that it would need to ramp up its remote sensing surveillance capacity from 50 000 ha to 220 000 (50 per cent of the total area suitable for any kind of surveillance).

The Program has to consolidate its position with the current camera, paying out the residual of the lease at \$60 000.

The Program has carried a substantial risk relying on one camera pod for surveillance on 50 000 ha. If the camera fails, then remote sensing would be out of action for the whole season. The service provider, Outline Global have recommended the Program acquires an additional RSS camera pod as a redundancy for the existing single camera pod, for operational use commencing in the 2022 surveillance season. This would double the RSS capability. However, if Option A is agreed to, the Program has determined that it would need two additional cameras.

Outline Global have advised they could not support more than two to three cameras in the coming year as they would not have the personnel with the expertise to process the data. The service Outline Global provides is bespoke with this equipment. To contract any other supplier, it would take them one to two years to come up to speed to provide the same service.

It was suggested the Program could commence the risk management and procurement process and seek endorsement from the DAF Director-General on a lease option for two additional cameras.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** (in principle) the acquisition of two additional RSS camera pods as redundancy for the existing single camera pod, for operational use commencing the 2022 surveillance season
- **NOTED** that the 2022 RSS will not commence until July 2022 (subject to 2022-23 funding) due to 2021-22 budget constraints.

Agenda item 11 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
13.	Program to commence the risk management and procurement process for two additional cameras.	Program – Strategy Director	January 2022	

Agenda item 12 – Agriculture Ministers Meeting

Malcolm Letts provided an update from the National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) meeting held in November 2021 and noted an extraordinary meeting with agriculture ministers may be held in the second week of December 2021 following a written request from the Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries. A copy of that letter was presented to the NBC at the meeting. There was good support from the jurisdictions regarding the recommended options following the Strategic Review of the Program and the bring forward of funding. The NBC were presented with a copy of the five minutes video of case studies from the United States of America (US). NBC members requested access to have direct contact with US experts to discuss fire ants.

Following Steering Committee discussion on the future of the Program and the recommended options, a paper will be drafted for tabling at the AGSOC meeting being held on 9 December 2021 seeking its support to progress the Steering Committee's recommended approach and support for a variation of Option A to Agriculture Ministers for approval, noting that Ministers will be asked to initially commit to continuation of funding for the Program for one year. If this approach is supported, a five-year Response Plan will be developed subject to annual review and will contain defined triggers.

It was suggested that the Chair of the Steering Committee and the Chair of the 2021 Strategic Review Panel be present for the meeting with the agriculture ministers.

In the event that Agriculture Ministers do not meet in December 2021, the Steering Committee will write to Ministers with a proposed approach.

Agenda item 12 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
14.	A Steering Committee meeting to be scheduled for 10 December 2021, following the AGSOC meeting.	Secretariat	26 November 2021	Completed.

Agenda item 13 – Other Business

Malcolm Letts provided an update on the bring forward of funds, acknowledging that Tasmania and New South Wales have agreed.

Agenda item 13 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

The meeting closed at 1.25 pm.



The next quarterly meeting will be held in February 2022.