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

Teleconference

Wednesday 24 February 2021

12.30pm – 4.00pm

## MINUTES – MEETING 15

### ATTENDANCE

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Attendees          | Wendy Craik, Chair<br>Jo Laduzko, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (C'wealth)<br>John Robertson, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) (QLD)<br>Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries (NSW)<br>John van Schagen, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA)<br>Nigel Ainsworth, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (VIC)<br>Anne Walters, Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT)<br>Rae Burrows, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (TAS)<br>Justine Clark, Chief Finance Officer, DAF (QLD) |
| Program Presenters | Graeme Dudgeon, General Manager<br>Andrew Turley, Strategy Director<br>Brett Turville, Operations Director<br>Liz Williams, Manager, Science<br>Sarah Mitchell, A/ Manager, Business Support and Governance<br>Heather Lesson, Manager, Policy  |
| Observers          | Malcolm Letts, Deputy Director-General/Chief Biosecurity Officer, Biosecurity Queensland, (DAF)<br>Hendry Eddie, A/Business Support Officer, Finance  |
| Secretariat        | Kerrian Nobbs (NRIFAEP)   |

### MAIN DISCUSSION, AGREED OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

The meeting opened at 12.30pm.

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## Agenda Item 1 - Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting, welcomed all attendees and advised that Lloyd Klumpp has resigned from his position in the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, Tasmania and from the Steering Committee. Rae Burrows is currently acting in the role and will sit on the Steering Committee to represent Tasmania until the position is filled. The Chair welcomed Rae and expressed her thanks for her contribution over the last few months.

The Chair provided an overview of the day's agenda and objectives and advised that Keith McCubbin, ex Program Leader was invited to the meeting. Mr McCubbin provided his views on the Program's strategy, treatment program and surveillance. The Chair thanked Mr McCubbin for taking the time to provide his paper and brief the Steering Committee and reiterated that his views would be taken into consideration when the bi-annual review is undertaken later this year.

Discussion followed regarding the distribution of bait, which is regulated under the Pest Management Act, owned by Queensland Health. The Program has been working closely with Queensland Health to update the act to enable people, other than residents, primary producers and licenced pest managers, to apply the bait. Building and developers, who can currently use licenced pest managers to mitigate the risk, will then be able to use their own unlicenced employees. An update will be provided to the Steering Committee at its May Steering Committee meeting and support and feedback will be requested from the review being undertaken later this year.

The Chair, Malcolm Letts and Graeme Dudgeon have held briefings with the Northern Territory, South Australia and the Commonwealth jurisdictions regarding bring forward of funding and reviewing the Ten-Year Plan. Other jurisdictions have also been offered the opportunity to discuss and meetings are currently being scheduled.

The Steering Committee's Terms of Reference was circulated to members for review prior to the meeting as part of the annual review. It was agreed that the Steering Committee should be reviewing the progress of the Program and that the Steering Committee endorse variations to the Ten-Year Plan and AGMIN approve variations.

The Chair reminded jurisdictions to provide their approval/comments on the Annual Report so that it can be submitted to the Commonwealth as part of a milestone commitment.

Minutes for Meetings held on 18 and 24 November 2020, 14 December 2020 and 19 January 2021 were taken as a correct record and approved, with all actions having been completed, ongoing or on the agenda.

Outstanding actions:

- *The Program to provide the Steering Committee members with clarity on the 99% confidence probability outlining the clearance and proof of freedom strategy* – a meeting has been held with the modeller who is looking at the economic model of how decisions are made based on economics, when to stop treating and appropriate risk levels. Following a second meeting to be held in March, the paper will be updated and provided to the Steering Committee at its May meeting.
- *Revised Work Plan options* – a National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) brief has been prepared for approval to bring forward funding from national cost share partners.



- *CSIRO Report* – compiling stakeholder general feedback from the review for the Steering Committee – feedback is currently being compiled and will be provided to the Steering Committee at its May meeting.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** the minutes of November 2020, December 2020 and January 2021 meetings.
- **AGREED** the minutes for these meetings can be published to the web.
- **AGREED** the paper provided by Keith McCubbin will be circulated to Steering Committee members.
- **AGREED** Steering Committee members will forward comments on the Terms of Reference to the Chair by Friday 26 February 2021.
- **AGREED** Steering Committee members will provide approval/comments on the Annual Report as soon as possible.

| Agenda item 1 - Action items |  | Responsibility              | Target        | Status               |
|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| 1.                           | Minutes of November, December 2020 and January 2021 meetings to be published to the web.                         | Program - Secretariat       | March 2021    | Completed            |
| 2.                           | Circulate McCubbin paper to Steering Committee and Scientific Advisory Group members for review and comment.     | Program - Secretariat       | February 2021 | Completed            |
| 3.                           | Forward comments on the Terms of Reference to the Chair.   | SC Members                  | February 2021 | Completed            |
| 4.                           | Provide approval/comments on the Annual Report.  | SC Members                  | February 2021 | Approved - Completed |
| 5.                           | Outstanding actions to be added to the agenda and updates provided to the Steering Committee at its May meeting. | Program - Strategy Director | May 2021      | Completed - Ongoing  |
| 6.                           | An updated Clearance and Proof of Freedom paper will be provided to the Steering Committee at its May meeting.   | Program - Science           | May 2021      | Completed            |

#### Agenda Item 2 - General Manager's Update and Omnibus

Steering Committee members were provided an Omnibus, including an update on:

- *NSW bring forward of funding for 2020-21* – the Program is one to two weeks away from having to commit to put on the fourth round of treatment in Area 2, dependent on bring forward of funding. As it is critical to do the fourth round to complete the trial in Area 2, it was suggested a letter be sent from the Queensland Minister to the New South Wales Ministers and also seek bring forward funding from the Queensland Government. Assurance was also given that it would be included in the Cabinet Submission being prepared for the Queensland Cabinet.
- *Future Funding* – to be covered in Agenda Item 6.



- *Program Reporting* - a weekly report is currently being provided to the Steering Committee. The monthly report has been reduced to an exception report, focusing on key performance indicators, with detail provided in quarterly reports.
- *Remote Sensing Project Update* - remote sensing this season will be a juggling act from a costing perspective. The cost for this winter will be approximately \$3.5M, with approximately \$1M to be spent this financial year, which is currently not in the budget. This would require using some of the bring forward funding, which will require a contract to be drawn up, with the support of the Steering Committee. Without operational remote sensing this winter, it would delay it another year and the information would not be included in the funding forecast for the updated Ten-Year Plan. Unit costs of remote sensing surveillance is less than a quarter of the ground-based surveillance, so some funding could be transferred but only a portion. Further information will be provided to the Steering Committee, including the Intellectual Property issues around the remote sensing contract.
- *Self-Management Update* – working with councils and making good progress. A paper was put to the Local Government Association of Queensland by the Gold Coast City Council to supply the chemicals to do the treatment. Baits are provided to the current pilot participants. The Yarrabilba pilot has commenced. Local meetings have been held with developers, the schools and the community. A progress report will be provided to the Steering Committee at its next meeting on the success of engaging the community in this pilot.
- *Major Campaigns* – are currently on hold due to concerns around campaign messaging of insensitivity and sensationalising. New concepts are being developed.
- *Campaign Website* – is under development. Still working through how independent the underlying website engine can be from what is in the Queensland Franchise model.
- *KPI Research* – the KPI market research for measurement of mobilisation strategies has been completed and a report was received on 23 February 2021. The results will be circulated to the Steering Committee when finalised and will be included in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Report.
- *Rebranding* - Julie Fullerton gave a presentation and an explanation of the seven branding options to the Steering Committee members. These options were developed and presented to the Program Management Team, DAF Business Leadership Team and DAF Communications previously.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Program in the Omnibus
- **AGREED** a letter will be sent from the Queensland Minister to the NSW Minister regarding bring forward of funds
- **AGREED** that the Program will seek a bring forward of funding from the Queensland Government
- **AGREED** to branding Option 2.

| Agenda Item 2 - Action items |   | Responsibility              | Target     | Status    |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 7.                           | Draft letter to NSW Minister seeking bring forward of funding.  | Program – Strategy Director | March 2021 | Completed |
| 8.                           | Seek bring forward of funding from the Queensland Government and ensure it is included in the Cabinet Submission. | Program – Strategy Director | March 2021 | Completed |



|     |  |                             |            |           |
|-----|--|-----------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 9.  | Program to progress with branding option 2.  | Program – C&SE              | March 2021 | Completed |
| 10. | Provide a brief to the Steering Committee with an update on remote sensing surveillance. | Program – Strategy Director | March 2021 | Completed |

### Agenda Item 3 – Financial Update

Sarah Mitchell provided an update on the financial position as at 31 December 2020 (advising a new report will be available within the next two weeks), the capital acquisitions report (only two active acquisitions, Wacol facilities and the forage project) and requested if any members have any additional feedback on the dashboard, if they could forward that through.

A standing note will be provided in the dashboard for future papers explaining the revenue categories and the text will be enlarged in the explanatory notes of the capital program. Increased cleaning costs are associated with COVID requirements.

Graeme Dudgeon provided an overview of the overspend/underspend and how the Program is spending compared to the progress being made. The overspend was mostly in operations, and that figure has dropped due to less operational activity over the Christmas period. To bring it back on track, savings need to be made elsewhere, ie. the Program is now looking at more short-term 'local' landing sites to cut back on unproductive aerial hours from flying back and forth between treatment areas and the current landing sites and also the efficiencies in the ground teams.

COVID driven costs will be reduced when the risk is low eg. vehicle hire costs will decrease as three people will be allowed per vehicle. Some restrictions are still in place.

Bait costs are still high but are driven by bait usage. This year, a large portion of the bait cost has been from the trial with the toxicant, which is far more expensive than the IGR. The unit bait costs for IGR are around \$21 (retailing for 5x that amount). The procurement team are currently working on a competitive process in the market.

The Steering Committee:

- NOTED the Program's financial dashboard for December 2020
- NOTED the Capital Program update
- NOTED the December 2020 YTD Financial Performance Report
- NOTED that the Program will come in on budget and is confident that the major elements of the program will be delivered.

| Agenda item 3 - Action items |   | Responsibility    | Target  | Status              |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 11.                          | Add standing note in dashboard for revenue categories and enlarge print of explanatory notes. | Program – Finance | Ongoing | Completed - ongoing |

### Agenda Item 4 – Progress update on treatment

Brett Turville provided an update on the treatment progress for this season, including:

- There is currently an overspend in the operational budget. This is due to the Program only experiencing nine lost days of treatment and surveillance due to wet weather. Generally, the program allows for lost



time of 30 per cent. Field operations had a total staff of 286 at the start of treatment season and this has reduced to the current number of 236. Treatment is on track and the Program has completed a total of 27 000 hectares of surveillance against a planned total of 19,000 hectares. The program will take all steps to manage to budget.

- There has been an increase in lost time that is attributed to the Christmas shut down period and inclement weather. The program is still on track to complete the treatment season by the end of May 2021.
- The program continues to address gaps in treatment which is primarily due to cropping, livestock and consent issues. Officers continue to negotiate with impacted land and property owners to arrange a suitable time for treatment that will align with treatment rounds.
- Additional administrative support has been allocated to the depots (Muddapilly, Laidley and Wacol). This is to support the field staff in the transition onto the Forage mobility platform. There has been a very good take up in the mobile tablets in the field and the feedback from staff has been positive.
- Further training and assistance is being provided to the field staff to ensure powers of entry are utilised to enter and treat properties. There is a continued focus on treating properties on the first visit.
- The Program is identifying and making use of mobile landing sites for aerial treatment. Mobile sites have significant cost savings due to a reduction of ferrying time for the aircraft to reload bait.
- This financial year the Program has responded to 10 180 public reports to February 2021. There are currently 48 reports outstanding and the Program has maintained an average response time of 3-5 days, with the exception of rain events which can push this time out to 10 days. Most of these reported sites are direct nest injected. The relationship between the response times for the requests and the overall suppression effort should have an impact on the spread risk.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on treatment progress.

| Agenda item 4 - Action items |     | Responsibility | Target | Status |
|------------------------------|-----|----------------|--------|--------|
|                              | Nil |                |        |        |

#### Agenda Item 5 – Update on Surveillance of Area 1 and the Western Boundary

Liz Williams provided an update on the surveillance activities of Area 1 and the Western Boundary (A1/WB). There has been substantial additional surveillance performed, with the rate of detection of remnant fire ants noticeably declining.

From June to September 2020, 3.7 per cent of A1/WB was surveyed, with a number of detections being found. From October 2020 to mid-February 2021, a similar amount of area was searched with the detection rate massively declining. It is more optimal to do surveillance in winter, however, surveillance teams have been conducting surveillance during the recent rain events as it tends to bring ants to the surface.

The Program has developed and implemented a protocol on how to address eradicating all A1/WB detections. When a new detection is found, an initial assessment of the immediate surrounds is undertaken,



100m radius from the identified nest. Results of the assessment are used to profile the risk in a flow chart, outlining how many nests are in the area and what is in the nest to help determine if the nest has spread. These results help determine what sort of treatment and surveillance is needed, depending on the infestation and the risk of spread.

This follow up shows that the initial advice provided in the statistical analysis was valid.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the updated surveillance effort in Area 1 and the Western Boundary and the new clearance detections.

| Agenda item 5 - Action items |     | Responsibility | Target | Status |
|------------------------------|-----|----------------|--------|--------|
|                              | Nil |                |        |        |

### Agenda Item 6 – Process for Bring Forward of Funding

Graeme Dudgeon advised that the Program submitted an out-of-session proposal to the National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) advising that the Steering Committee has determined that a threat to the Program objectives has been triggered. The NBC are currently considering the proposal and the Steering Committee will be advised of the recommendation when received by the Program. The NBC next meets in April 2020.

Following conversations with the Commonwealth, the NBC brief was updated to include the benefits the Program will provide for future responses and how the technology that is being developed will benefit biosecurity efforts in Australia.

AGSOC were advised of the trigger in a previous meeting and will await further advice.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** that the NBC has been advised that a threat to the objectives of the Program has been identified and provided with a submission suggesting two possible future funding options for the Program.

| Agenda item 6 - Action items |     | Responsibility | Target | Status |
|------------------------------|-----|----------------|--------|--------|
|                              | Nil |                |        |        |

### Agenda item 7– Update on CSIRO Report and Feedback

Heather Leeson provided an update on the engagement process following publishing of the CSIRO Report on the Review of RIFA Scientific Principles and Movement Controls, on the eHub on 22 January 2021. The Program released the report on the eHub to directly engage specific industry stakeholders involved in the review, high risk industries more broadly, SDQMA and the general public. The Program is seeking feedback on the findings of the review, particularly on the recommendations that might result in changes to current movement controls. A link was also included in the 'Fire Ant News' e-newsletters via email and promoted through media release.



The consultation period has closed. A feedback summary report has been received and will be analysed to compare the recommendations and the current movement controls.

Following recent negative correspondence in relation to the review relating to allegations that the Program ‘is chasing the wrong fire ants’, the Steering Committee will put out a media release defending the competence of the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG).

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the publication of the CSIRO review of the RIFA Scientific Principles and Movement Controls
- **NOTED** the engagement process and communication strategy to obtain feedback from the stakeholders involved in the review, high-risk industries more broadly and the general public
- **AGREED** the summary report and recommendations will be available for the next Steering Committee meeting in May 2021
- **AGREED** that SAG receive a copy of the review and provide advice to the Steering Committee
- **AGREED** a media release be prepared in relation to the SAG.

| Agenda item 7 – Action items |  | Responsibility           | Target     | Status    |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------|------------|-----------|
| 12.                          | Present the summary of the report and recommendations to the Steering Committee at its May 2021 meeting. | Program - Policy         | May 2021   | Completed |
| 13.                          | SAG to receive a copy of the CSIRO Review and provide advice back to the Steering Committee.             | Program – Secretariat    | May 2021   | Completed |
| 14.                          | A media release be prepared from the Steering Committee in relation to the SAG.                          | Program – Communications | March 2021 | Completed |

#### Agenda item 8– Bi-annual Efficiency and Effectiveness Review

The bi-annual efficiency and effectiveness review of the Program and Steering Committee’s operations is due to be conducted this year. This review’s recommendations will be built into the revised Ten-Year Plan.

Discussions followed on nominations of reviewers to undertake the review and the possibility of having at least two people on the review panel, to provide a different perspective. The review should not be unreasonably constrained by funding.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the bi-annual efficiency and effectiveness review of the Program and the Steering Committee’s operation is to be completed during 2021
- **AGREED** members will forward CVs of proposed nominations to the Secretariat for circulation to Steering Committee members for a selection process to commence
- **AGREED** the successful nominees will be contacted.

| Agenda item 8 – Action items |  | Responsibility | Target | Status |
|------------------------------|--|----------------|--------|--------|
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| 15. | Forward CVs of proposed nominations to the Secretariat.                                    | Steering Committee members | February 2021 | Completed |
| 16. | Circulate nominations and their CVs to Steering Committee members for a selection process. | Program – Secretariat      | March 2021    | Completed |
| 17. | Contact successful candidates to seek agreement to conduct the review.                     | Chair                      | March 2021    | Completed |

#### Agenda item 9– Other Business

The May meeting will be held face to face COVID restrictions pending.

A stakeholder engagement workshop is to be held in August 2021, COVID restrictions pending.

Malcolm Letts advised that he will be raising within the April NBC meeting, the engagement of the jurisdictions in relation to conversation around the future of the Program within Steering Committee meetings and the ability for members to make decisions.

| Agenda item 9 – Action items |   | Responsibility | Target   | Status                   |
|------------------------------|---|----------------|----------|--------------------------|
| 18.                          | Plan for a stakeholder engagement workshop to be held in August 2021. | Program – C&SE | May 2021 | Cancelled due to Covid19 |

The meeting closed at 3.45pm.

The next face to face meeting will be held in May 2021.