



**National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (SEQ) Steering Committee
Risk Management Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee)
Tuesday 16 March 2021
Brisbane, Queensland
(Held by videoconference)**

MINUTES – MEETING 6

ATTENDANCE

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



Agenda Item 1 – Introduction

The sixth meeting of the Risk Management Sub-Committee was opened by the Chair at 9.00am, noting an apology from Jo Laduzko.

The Chair provided a brief overview of the meeting’s agenda and objectives and the agenda was confirmed.

The Chair noted the papers were late, and requested they be timelier to allow consideration of the papers prior to the meeting.

Minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated previously, approved out-of-session and published to the website.

Follow up actions:

- *Complete a statistical analysis of the model behind the amount of compliance/field staff required.*
 - Currently looking at other auditing and compliance programs to assist with the analysis. It was suggested to contact the Commonwealth regarding its ‘border control allocation’ program.
- *Program to investigate prosecution for not self-reporting fire ants.*
 - A reasonable level of reporting is received from the public. The current focus is on self-management and community engagement. Public reporting of significant detections is incorporated in quarterly reports and broadcast throughout the relevant areas via a communication campaign to be on the lookout and report.
- *Develop and maintain a set of responses and factual information for jurisdictions to share in response to queries about and comments on the Program.*
 - Public criticisms/praise and comments about the Program are recorded and responses prepared for distribution as required.
- *Provide a summary of changes to the Risk Register*
 - To be discussed in Agenda Item 3.

The Sub-Committee:

- **CONFIRMED** the agenda as previously circulated
- **NOTED** the minutes of Meeting 5 were endorsed out of session and published to the website
- **NOTED** the actions list and the update provided.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			



Agenda Item 2 – General Manager’s Update

The General Manager provided a summary on progress and the major risks and challenges within the Program, including:

Program Funding:

- the Steering Committee has determined that a threat to the Program objectives has been triggered as the cost of delivering the planned activities exceeds the proposed budget for delivering eradication. The National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) has been advised and an options proposal submitted for future funding. It will progress through the Agricultural Senior Officials Committee (AGSOC) to the Agriculture Ministers for a decision on the future of the Program.
- The Program was initially costed based on the review released in 2016, of which a major component was a modelling exercise based on a much smaller model area. The funds for the Ten-Year Program were not available until 2017, by which time things had progressed and now requirements do not align with the initial costings.
- There has been a new detection of fire ants at the Port of Brisbane. This detection is genetically different to the current infestation and has come from the United State of America through containers. The Commonwealth are currently leading the response to this detection as it is a border detection.
- Malcolm Letts, Chief Biosecurity Officer (DAF), Wendy Craik and Graeme Dudgeon have held individual meetings with cost share partners to discuss the future funding and requirements of the Program.
- The Steering Committee is currently selecting a review panel to undertake the second more strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness (E&E) Review of the Program and to review the future strategy, consider whether eradication is still possible, and separately commission some cost benefit analysis of the different options.
- Risks associated with the funding shortfall include misinformation in the public arena, staffing and contractual commitments within the Program.

Communication Constraints

- The Program’s communication strategy is currently constrained by Queensland Government processes, making it more complex and this could be an impediment for public awareness of fire ants. This could be a major issue for the Program by adding further costs and delays and will be raised within the Review by the Steering Committee Chair.

Remote Sensing Surveillance:

- Remote sensing is at a point where it is ready for full operational deployment this winter. However, there are some concerns in relation to the ownership of the intellectual property that sits behind it, between the Program and its contractor. DAF internal legal are providing advice on our current position in relation to the contract. The risk is the Program may not enter into the contract this year, which would delay remote sensing.

Southern Containment

- The current effort is to stop fire ants spreading further south. This includes self-management pilots on the southern boundary where the Program enlists residents to assist.



- Raised at the Environment and Invasives Committee recently, was whether there is any consideration of compulsory prophylactic treatment for fire ants by landowners at the time of ownership change over from developers.
- Use of the development approval process to impose fire ant mitigation at times of ownership change has been debated.
- The Program requires residents undertaking self-management to be in a routine of baiting and rebaiting until eradication. It is planned to start them with a round or two and they continue to self-treat.
- The Program is currently considering the provision of bait for self-management. Providing bait across the board would involve a substantial cost, with some offsets including reductions in treatment recalls. The cost of bait to the Program is approximately one quarter of the retail cost.
- Self-management will be built into the E&E Review.

The Sub-Committee:

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

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda Item 3 – Risk and Issues Status

Brian Bond provided an overview of the upgrades to the Risk Register, the reporting capability and the summary automatically generated from the Risk Register.

Enhancements suggested:

- include an 'introductory user guide' as the first tab of the Risk Register, and a tab 'summary executive view' with sufficient information to inform an executive audience (ensuring the summary report also summarises the changes made to the Risk Register)
- consider better alignment of internal and external reporting to support the evidence base for public reporting
- ensure there is a quarterly archive version of the registers aligned to the quarterly reports
- retain closed items in the registers for one meeting following closure to assist with continuity
- review and improve cross referencing between Risk and Issues Registers
- review definitional inconsistencies, with some "treatments" which could be "controls":
 - a. the supply of bait and related impacts from COVID
 - b. self-management
 - c. Principal Engagement Officer work
- incorporate lessons learned from COVID and the Western Australia incursion or other incursions.



To date, no findings in the CSIRO report¹ have been added into the Register, as the Program is currently analysing the report and responses from industry consultation following the report being published.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Risk and Issues Registers
- **AGREED** the live Registers will be sent to members on a quarterly basis by the Business Manager unless there is a significant trigger which should be sent immediately.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
1	Registers to be sent to members on a quarterly basis, unless there is a significant trigger which should be sent immediately. Secretariat to be cc'd into all correspondence.	Business Manager	Ongoing	BAU
2.	The current status dates in registers to be reviewed.	Business Manager	Ongoing	BAU
3.	Retain closed items in the Registers for one meeting following closure.	Business Manager	Ongoing	BAU

Agenda Item 4 – Business Improvement Register

Brian Bond provided an update on the upgraded Business Improvement Register and the related summary, incorporating actions captured from the E&E reports.

Actions and recommendations from the previous Pricewaterhouse Coopers external audit have been completed.

Enhancements suggested:

- capture changes made to the report in “blue” for easy recognition and tracking
- are there opportunities for improvements in relation to spatial strategy triggers and the extension of community self-management participation?

¹ Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, *CSIRO Fire Ant Report [website]*, <https://daf.engagementhub.com.au/csiro-fire-ant-report>



The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Business Improvement Register.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
4.	Follow up with C&SE team whether there are opportunities for improvements in relation to spatial strategy triggers and the extension of community self-management participation.	Business Manager/ C&SE Manager	April 2021	

Agenda Item 5 – 2021-22 Treatment Season

Andrew Turley provided an update on the 2021-22 treatment season, flagging challenges with planning due to insufficient funds currently being available. The \$33M assigned in the forecast budget for 2021-22 is insufficient to continue eradicating fire ants within South East Queensland. The Program expects it will require approximately \$60M, based on current costings, and has submitted a brief to the NBC to obtain members' endorsement for seeking the additional \$27M for the 2021-22FY.

A 2021-22 work plan has been developed based on the \$60M, with a contingency plan in case only \$33M is available. The work plan has been unitised to be scalable if some but not all of the additional funding required is received.

The funding shortfall does put at risk the eradication work to date and containment would need to continue, particularly the southern boundary and in Area 3. It is also important to not draw back on surveillance as it will be critical for future funding to be able to show efficacy. Overheads would have to be considerably scaled down.

Should the extra funding be approved, it would likely not be available until later in the financial year. There is discussion with the Queensland Cabinet Budget Review Committee to underwrite the extra funding until it is available.

Treatments are planned in 10-week blocks, so the Program is looking at delaying one block at a time as required to match available funding. The funding risk should be reviewed from a timing perspective following the planning and analysis of the funding situation.

The Sub-Committee

- **NOTED** the challenges in planning the 2021-22 Work Plan due to funding uncertainty.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			



Agenda Item 6 – Self Treatment

Andrew Turley provided an update on self-treatment and the Yarrabilba trial due to commence in late March 2021.

Planning for the Yarrabilba trial is progressing well. The Program has been doing community engagement to encourage residents to sign up and register to participate in the project. The participation portal closed on 15 March 2021, with 10 per cent of the community signing up, well below the target of 50 per cent. However, there was an issue with the sign-up portal rejecting email addresses of people previously engaged with the Program. That issue was rectified quickly but did have an impact on the initial sign-up. The Community Engagement team went out into the community to encourage participation and advising that the portal issue was rectified and operational again.

The Program is currently engaging with the Gold Coast City Council and local schools to self-treat, simultaneously with community self-treatment, to suppress fire ants near the Southern Boundary. Collaboration has also commenced with a Landcare community group at Mt Tamborine. Only a single round of treatment is scheduled for these areas, for suppression.

Discussions have been held with the Scenic Rim, Gold Coast, Redlands and Brisbane City Councils to encourage self-management of fire ants on land they manage, providing the fire ant bait at no cost for projects that are mutually beneficial to the Program and the respective organisation.

The Program has been engaging with the Queensland Department of Education and individual schools regarding self-treating fire ants in the schools. A message will be released in Term 2 by the Department of Education advising schools that they need to be treating fire ants as they treat other pests on their sites.

Risks associated with self-treatment include:

- the costs to treat fire-ants (Program will provide bait to councils and schools for some projects)
- councils and schools may not know that they are responsible for treating fire ants on land they manage (the *Biosecurity Act 2014* outlines the responsibility)
- communities, councils and schools may perceive self-management as shifting the costs of treating fire ants (messaging around the Program’s strategy will make it clear that stakeholder participation was always part of the plan and without it, eradication would not be possible).

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on self-treatment and the Yarrabilba trial to commence in March 2021 and the good focus on learnings to date.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

**Agenda Item 7 – Community Attitudes, Compliance and Enforcement**

CSIRO was commissioned to conduct an independent review into the Program’s movement controls and the scientific principles that underpin them. The Program received the final report in late December 2020 and it was published to a web-based engagement hub in January 2021 to obtain stakeholder feedback on the recommendations of the report. In general, the scientific principles were accepted with minor refinement for clarification. There were a number of recommendations on the Program’s movement controls, including improving the current mitigations.

Stakeholder feedback has now closed. The Program will now consider and analyse the recommendations of the review, stakeholder feedback and the Program’s learnings over the last four years to inform future changes to movement controls that govern fire ant carriers. The Science team is currently looking at the recommendations on research and analysis of data for those responses in relation to mitigation strategies.

The Program is currently engaging with individual industries in a targeted way, to ensure the communication restrictions do not affect the ability to communicate with them.

The Sub-Committee:

NOTED:

- the completion and publication of the CSIRO Review of the Red Imported Fire Ant Scientific Principles and Movement Controls
- the Program has started reviewing the existing movement controls to ensure the Biosecurity Regulations 2016 is effective in preventing the human-assisted spread of fire ants.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda Item 8 – Reporting and Communications

Communication constraints have been placed on the Program by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Queensland Government Advertising and Communication Committee (GACC) governance, requiring a change to its communication approach. Two major campaigns affected by these constraints include the “lifestyle” and “wildfire” campaigns as they could be considered alarmist or disrespectful. The Program is currently developing a new communication and engagement strategy to achieve the objectives needed to meet mobilisation KPIs.

A meeting held with GACC on 11 March 2021 was very positive, giving the Program a direct connection with GACC and a simple framework to work within which also accommodates the cost share arrangement. A meeting is scheduled with the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries next week to work out the parameters around the messaging for self-management.

There are learnings from the current self-management pilot (issues with the registration process) where the Program can improve to make it a practical and reliable process.



To assist with reporting delays, the Program has appointed a dedicated reporting officer and reviewed the reporting structure and detail in the reports. The Program is now providing weekly, monthly (by exception), quarterly and annual reports and reprioritising to meet deadlines.

The Sub-Committee:

NOTED:

- constraints on communications affecting the ability of the Program to meet mobilisation KPIs
- delays in reporting, and actions implemented to resolve them.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda Item 9 – Efficiency and Effectiveness Review 2021

Wendy Craik advised that an independent review of the Program and the Steering Committee's operations is to be conducted every two years as per the Ten-Year Plan. At its February 2021 meeting, Steering Committee members discussed and canvassed potential candidates to conduct the 2021 review. It was generally agreed that the panel would consist of at least two reviewers, with the possible addition of a scientist or with the Scientific Advisory Group assisting with the review.

The reviewers will build on the feedback from the 2019 review conducted by Bernie Wonder, with a greater emphasis on possibility of eradication, consider possible options for the Program and a cost benefit analysis of the future of the Program to be fed into NBC, AGSOC and the Agriculture Ministers. Having a panel conduct this review will likely cost more than the budgeted \$55 000.

The Sub-Committee:

NOTED:

- the bi-annual E&E review of the Program and the Steering Committee operations is to be completed during 2021
- the process to identify and engage the person(s) to undertake the review
- the expected budgetary requirement for the review and that it will likely cost more than the \$55 000 budgeted.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

**Agenda Item 10 – Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Implementation Update**

Wendy Craik, as Chair of the E&E Review Sub-Committee, provided an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the 2019 review. The Sub-Committee is now meeting quarterly. Most of the recommendations are complete and are now business as usual or included in regular reporting. The remaining recommendations are under way or being completed. A report has been published to the website on the progress of the implementation of recommendations from the 2019 review.

A further report will be prepared by 30 June 2021 on the progress of the 2019 recommendations.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update and the minutes of the E&E Review Sub-Committee meeting held in February 2021.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			

Agenda Item 11 – Proof of Freedom – Area Clearance

Andrew Turley provided an overview of the continued work by the science team to provide evidence of clearance in Area 1 and the Western Boundary through surveillance activities and to develop and update the Clearance and Proof of Freedom (POF) Strategy. The main progress has been around the structured expert elicitation process, designed to evaluate information gained by any further clearance surveillance in Area 1 and the Western Boundary, prior to its incorporation into future POF calculations.

The Program's modeller has been working on the POF modelling and how decisions can be made using that model. An internal working group has been established to discuss the Clearance and Proof of Freedom Strategy and to work on the model, for which many variables need to be validated.

Remote sensing is critically important and will help determine when to stop treatment and start surveillance.

The Program proposes to engage two independent experts to review the model and the Clearance and Proof of Freedom Strategy to ensure its suitability (proposal endorsed by the Scientific Advisory Group in 2020). The findings will be presented to the Steering Committee at its May 2021 meeting.

There are promising results from surveillance and no evidence to show what the Program is doing is not working.



The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the updated surveillance effort in Area 1 and the Western Boundary, and any new clearance detections
- **NOTED** the establishment of the Proof of Freedom Working Group and structured expert elicitation process
- **DISCUSSED** the changes to the Clearance and Proof of Freedom Strategy.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda Item 12 – Development of an Audit Program

At its September 2020 meeting, the Sub-Committee discussed additional responsibilities being given to it to develop and recommend an audit program. Program management was tasked to develop a draft and scope a follow-up audit to the 2018 internal audits of the operational planning, governance and procurement processes.

Brian Bond advised that he has liaised with PWC with regard to a follow-up audit and the costings, which would need to be met from the Program’s budget.

Sub-Committee members were provided with the PWC proposal. It was considered that, with the funding constraints and uncertainty with the strategic and operational planning, it was more important that there be a thorough cost-benefit analysis of the Program options to support cost share partners’ confidence in the Program delivery. The follow-up audit of operational planning, governance and procurement processes could be incorporated in the Terms of Reference of the upcoming E&E Review.

Clarification was sought on the draft internal operational audit schedule. The Committee was generally supportive of the visibility of the complete internal operational assurance plan. External reviews such as the CSIRO and E&E Reviews also give independent assurance.

Areas identified for further consideration include:

- contract management – IP issues and how they are being managed
- compliance program – the Program’s enforcement capability and how the Program is responding to the CSIRO report
- financial management
- public reporting – accuracy and accessibility.

Graeme Dudgeon provided an overview of the DAF internal audit program and the internal controls reviews which are normal internal scrutinies that occur regularly eg. procurement, managing finances, correct authorisations etc. The Auditor-General and the Ombudsman may also request reviews.

The Sub-Committee



- **DISCUSSED** the development of audits of program activities
- **NOTED** a draft of an internal quality management program
- **IDENTIFIED** areas which might be considered for external review and requested the Program flesh out those items, noting the E&E Review may incorporate them
- **AGREED** that the internal audit follow-up review of the December 2018 audits should not proceed
- **AGREED** that the E&E Review will assess whether the Program has appropriately addressed the recommendations from the December 2018 audits
- **AGREED** that the E&E Review Terms of Reference should reflect the above decision.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
5.	Seek clarity on allocation of departmental internal audits for the Program.	Program – Business Services Manager	April 2021	
6.	Provide further detail on items identified for consideration by external review.	Program – Business Services Manager	May 2021	

Other Business

The Chair summarised the meeting, including the actions and decisions made.

The next meeting is to be held in September 2021.