



# The National Red Imported Fire Ant Program Efficiency & Effectiveness Review Progress Report - October 2020

Since the first detection of red imported fire ants in 2001, there have been 16 independent reviews of the successive versions of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Programs addressing various aspects including scientific, operational, technical and financial. The reviews were undertaken to ensure the Program achieved its objectives and was able to secure funding. All 16 of these reviews supported the continuation of the Eradication Program, with the 2016 independent review recommending the provision of long-term funding. This led to the creation of the Ten-Year Eradication Plan (2017–2027) that is jointly funded and governed by the Federal, state and territory governments Steering Committee.

Under the Program's Ten Year Plan there is a commitment that a review be undertaken every two years to provide evidence and assurance to the Program's cost-share partners that the Program is being conducted in an efficient and effective manner.

In August 2019, the Program's Steering Committee commissioned an independent external consultant Mr Bernard Wonder to undertake the review which commenced in September 2019 and concluded in December 2019. Mr Wonder made 37 recommendations and noted that the approach outlined in the Ten Year Plan is "a methodical and sophisticated approach" to eradication; and that the west to east rolling eradication strategy, with suppression treatment in those areas yet to receive eradication treatment, is "well-reasoned".

The Steering Committee and the Program agreed to the vast majority of recommendations noting that the Program had started working on over 80 percent of them with 14 given a high priority. The remaining recommendations from the review require further investigation and consideration in relation to the feasibility and associated costs for implementation. These processes are currently underway.

A summary of progress against each recommendation is attached. Highlights of progress to date include:

- Work has advanced on trials of the new helicopter-mounted remote sensing equipment which will better identify areas of infestation and allow more targeted treatment activities. This innovation could lead to substantial savings on bait and greatly reduce the amount of ground surveillance needed.
- Changes to the way the Program responds to Fire Ant reports using fast acting bait on first response has improved Program efficiency and labour productivity.



- The self-management initiative introduces the concept of shared responsibility for Fire Ant management between the Government, industry and the wider-community, and could also lead to significant cost savings and greater efficiencies.
- Enforcement of the regulations regarding human-assisted movement of fire ants has been enhanced. Ten penalty infringement notices have been issued since January for breaches related to fire ant biosecurity zones.
- The fire ant biosecurity zones were modified in May 2020 to minimise the likelihood of human-assisted movement of fire ants and re-infestation in the eradication area.
- Significant progress has been made with a mobile digital solution to enable field staff to capture and record relevant data electronically in the field. This will improve operational efficiency and streamline processes.

A copy of the efficiency and effectiveness review report and the Steering Committee's associated responses can be found on the [Department of Agriculture and Fisheries webpage](#).



## Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Status – November 2020

Recommendation Status Table	
Underway	19
Complete	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>

### Recommendation 1: The Steering Committee and Program consider commissioning Monash University to repeat its delimitation analysis.

#### Status: Underway

The Program commissioned Monash University to undertake modelling to estimate the impact of treatment on the invasion boundary, to develop a monitoring strategy for the western treatment zone and to provide advice on where to apply future treatment and surveillance. It will not specifically address delimitation until remote sensing is fully operational and supply extensive surveillance data.

In August 2020 Monash University met two of their four milestones through the provision of two reports. The first report on invasion spread analysis using the updated model and the second on the spatial monitoring strategy for Treatment Area 1 and the Western Boundary.

The final two reports have been delivered. These reports examine the impact of Program actions in treatment areas and contain recommendations for the eradication strategy. The Steering Committee and the Program will now consider the results of the modelling on acceptance of the final report.

### Recommendation 2: The Steering Committee and Program examine the design of suppression zones where they are meant to provide protection to areas treated for eradication against re-infestation.

#### Status: Complete

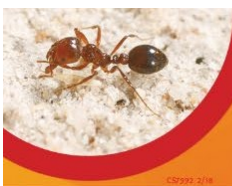
The Program has examined the design of the suppression zones and has included all of the infested areas adjacent to eradication areas into the treatment protocol and treatment plans. This is also reflected in the Program's annual Work Plan and Three Year Strategy.

### Recommendation 3 Priority: A new set of 'outcome focused' Program performance indicators for use by the Steering Committee, funding partners and community stakeholders be finalised as soon as possible with a view to deployment this financial year.

#### Status: Complete

The Program incorporated outcome focused performance indicators into its Three Year Strategy. This was approved out-of-session by the Steering Committee in June 2020. Given the Program is in its fourth year these KPIs are appropriately related to the Program's 10 year objectives. They are also reflected in the Annual work plan.

### Recommendation 4 Priority: The Steering Committee, in consultation with the Program, sets out business improvement measures to overcome barriers and impediments to treatment and surveillance identified in this Review.



### **Status: Complete**

The Program has implemented a number of changes to remove barriers to treatment and surveillance:

- ensuring adequate and timely supply of critical inputs such as contract labour, bait and aerial services
- using agile project planning methods to ensure on-time commencement of seasonal work
- developing explicit contingencies for known threats to work schedules, e.g. wet or windy weather
- frequent progress reviews to ensure rapid adjustments are made to treatment and/or surveillance plans should they be necessary.

The business improvement measures have also been incorporated into the Program's monthly and quarterly reports.

### **Recommendation 5: The Program accord a very high priority to necessary treatment and surveillance to deal with significant detections outside the Operating Area boundary.**

#### **Status: Underway**

The Program has reviewed and is updating its Management of Detections of Importance Protocol to ensure that the highest priority is given to treatment and surveillance activities related to significant detections outside the Program's Operating boundary. Additional response actions are being considered and will be implemented accordingly.

### **Recommendation 6 Priority: The Steering Committee and the Program clarify the nature of the shared public-private responsibility for eradication and suppression of RIFA at the earliest opportunity.**

#### **Status: Underway**

Extensive public awareness communications have begun to provide the community and industry with knowledge and understanding of the shared responsibility to report, treat and avoid moving fire ants.

The Program began the introduction of broad-scale self-management initiatives in mid-2019. Self-management aims to empower industry and the community to treat fire ants themselves, which will increase the amount of fire ant treatment conducted in our community and is a vital aspect of meeting the General Biosecurity Obligation applying to Queensland residents. The Program has also developed further guidelines for appropriate risk mitigation strategies for industries that move high risk fire ant carriers e.g. soil, hay.

### **Recommendation 7 Priority: The Steering Committee guide the Program towards the development of appropriate regulation aimed at internalising the cost to those responsible for the creation of habitat suitable for RIFA infestation.**

#### **Status: Underway**

The scope of this recommendation has impacts beyond the Program and, as such, further guidance has been sought from Biosecurity Queensland for departmental regulatory and non-regulatory measures. This process has been delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak and associated redirection of Biosecurity Queensland resources.



**Recommendation 8: That compliance officers employed by the Program make effective use of penalty infringement notices and, where appropriate, prosecution provisions, to improve compliance with movement controls.**

**Status: Underway**

The Program's compliance officers are issuing penalty infringement notices when warranted. This recommendation is also being considered broadly in Biosecurity Queensland review of compliance as part of Recommendation 7 (above).

**Recommendation 9: The Program make every effort to meet compliance check targets by keeping compliance staffing at funded staffing levels.**

**Status: Complete**

The Program makes every effort to ensure appropriate compliance staffing levels are met. This recommendation will continue to be monitored and progressed through the Program's business improvement register with updates provided in the monthly or quarterly reports.

**Recommendation 10: The Program seeks advice from appropriate sources with the necessary expertise on appropriate sampling numbers for the range of movements of RIFA carrier materials.**

**Status: Underway**

The Program completed a tender process in early 2020 for a review of the movement controls to be conducted. A final report is expected in October 2020.

**Recommendation 11 Priority: The Program, with guidance from the Steering Committee, examine the feasibility of introducing regulation requiring inspection of loads destined to cross the Operating Area boundary and cost recovery of the additional compliance effort.**

**Status: Complete**

The Program and the Steering Committee are in consultation with numerous parties in relation to this recommendation.

**Recommendation 12 Priority: The Steering Committee and the Program determine a strategy to urgently bring outstanding reviews concerning human-assisted movement of RIFA to fruition.**

**Status: Complete**

This recommendation is being addressed as part of the review of movements of RIFA carrier materials (as per recommendation 10).

**Recommendation 13 Priority: The Steering Committee and the Program initiate more detailed analysis of the efficiency options identified in this report for possible uptake as soon as possible.**

**Status: Complete**

The Program has undertaken a comprehensive analysis on the efficiency options and implemented changes to multiple areas of the Program through the business improvement process.



**Recommendation 14: That the Steering Committee and Program closely examine the potential for future savings from the use of tenders to procure aerial services and bait.**

**Status: Complete**

This recommendation has been integrated into and addressed within recommendation 13 and 16.

**Recommendation 15: That the Steering Committee and Program examine more closely the labour productivity of field teams with a view to raising labour productivity.**

**Status: Complete**

This recommendation has been integrated into and addressed within recommendation 16.

**Recommendation 16: That the Steering Committee and Program examine the introduction of revised remuneration arrangements for field staff based on an output rather than input measure of performance and/or invite tenders for specified areas of treatment or surveillance from labour hire firms.**

**Status: Underway**

Since January 2020 the Program has implemented changes to support and improve its aerial operational efficiency. During wet weather treatment interruptions, staff are allocated to surveillance work where possible and a better approach has been developed to advise staff when they are not required for a shift

The Program will continue to review operational performance and make any changes necessary to ensure delivery of the annual treatment and surveillance plans. This will include a key focus on better aligning aerial and field treatment and the benefit derived from increased deployment of all-terrain vehicles.

Discussions are underway on options of engaging a strategic procurement advisor to develop an options paper on the opportunities, benefits and cost effectiveness of revised performance based remuneration.

**Recommendation 17 Priority: The Steering Committee work with the Program to set a planning cycle to be made available to all staff and detailing required timing of work plans, treatment, surveillance and budget plans for approval by the relevant delegate.**

**Status: Complete**

Planning cycle has been included in the Program's three year strategy (refer to recommendation 3).

**Recommendation 18: The Program, with guidance from the Steering Committee, should work to revise the set of Standard Operating Procedures as soon as possible.**

**Status: Underway**

The Program has undertaken a review of more than 100 standing operating procedures. The number of documents continues to be refined to align with the existing and additional hierarchical documentation e.g. three year strategy, annual work plan and surveillance and treatment plans.

**Recommendation 19: The Steering Committee consider the benefits and costs of appointing a Deputy General Manager.**

**Status: Complete**



The Program appointed two director positions since December 2019 and to date improvements continue to be illustrated across the whole Program. The Steering Committee believes that the current approach is effective.

**Recommendation 20: The Steering Committee and the Program consider the potential cost savings along with the risks for RIFA eradication before deciding whether to proceed with fewer treatments.**

**Status: Complete**

The Program is trialling:

- reducing time and intensity of Eradication treatment by conducting only four treatments (compared to up to 5 previously) within one treatment season (September – May) in 2020.
- a modified treatment regime in the second eradication area that involves using rounds of different baits in combination, improving the overall efficiency and cost effectiveness of the Program's treatment activities.

**Recommendation 21 Priority: The Steering Committee consider the underlying themes of its communication strategy, particularly in the light of the Program launching the self-management component.**

**Status: Underway**

The Program has incorporated the communication information in its three year strategy. This will be presented to the National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network in October and their feedback will be integrated accordingly.

**Recommendation 22: The Steering Committee review the content of the Program's website and the Program develop a timetable to implement the Steering Committee's findings.**

**Status: Underway**

Stronger NRIFAEP branding has been agreed and efforts are underway to implement a Program website which will pull together all RIFA information.

**Recommendation 23: The Steering Committee design and adopt new badging recognising the national character of the Program and its funding by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories.**

**Status: Underway**

This recommendation has been incorporated into recommendation 22 above.

**Recommendation 24: The Program accord high priority to putting in place as soon as possible a real-time two way mobile data solution.**

**Status: Underway**

The Program has implemented its forage application to support field mobility. The initial trial occurred in August 2020 with positive feedback from field staff on its use. The first phase of this project is due for completion in December 2020.

**Recommendation 25: The Steering Committee monitor the adequacy of key Program intelligence systems, particularly the Fire Ant Management System (FAMS).**



**Status: Underway**

The Program undertakes changes to FAMs as required to adapt to the use of the forage application that is being rolled out to support field mobility. This will continue to be monitored and changed as necessary.

**Recommendation 26: The Program bring forward a Three Year Strategic Plan addressing the implications of decisions on key issues identified in this Review for consideration by the Steering Committee as soon as possible.**

**Status: Complete**

This recommendation is complete. See recommendation 3.

**Recommendation 27 Priority: The Program bring forward for Steering Committee consideration their proposed approach to management information to assist decision making.**

**Status: Underway**

Resourcing implications occurred as a result of COVID-19 causing delays in this process, which has now been resolved with an appointed resource allocated to the Program in mid-October 2020 to progress this recommendation.

**Recommendation 28 Priority: The Steering Committee request out of session monthly updates on progress with actions included in the Business Improvement Plan as well as a quarterly report to the Steering Committee.**

**Status: Complete**

In February 2020 the Program commenced its monthly reporting in addition to the quarterly reports including the Program's progress and business improvement updates.

**Recommendation 29: The Steering Committee request a follow up audit of operational planning, governance and procurement to be conducted in April 2020.**

**Status: Underway**

The Program sought advice from the department's internal audit on how to action and progress this recommendation. This has resulted in the Program having to fund this for which budget was not provided in 2019/20. . Discussions to take place within the Program to progress this further.

**Recommendation 30 Priority: The Steering Committee consider the findings and recommendations of this Review and determine a strategy for how to best address the issues requiring resolution over the next 12–18 months.**

**Status: Complete**

The Steering Committee established a sub-committee supported by a project officer who commenced in April 2020 to monitor and progress the review. The Committee has completed its work and further progress will be monitored through monthly, quarterly and annual reports.





**Recommendation 31 Priority: The Steering Committee review the expertise it needs to progress the issues at hand and seek nominations from the jurisdictions to address any identified gaps.**

**Status: Underway**

The Steering Committee discussed the skills composition of its members for the Steering Committee, Risk Committee and the Scientific Advisory Group at its February 2020 meeting. Two of the three recommended changes remain to be implemented.

**Recommendation 32: The Steering Committee consider the appointment of a Project Officer to support their work.**

**Status: Complete**

This recommendation is complete as per update in recommendation 30.

**Recommendation 33: The Steering Committee schedule additional and/or longer meetings to address the issues requiring attention over the next 12-18 months.**

**Status: Complete**

The Steering Committee have increased their meeting frequency online as opposed to the quarterly face to face meetings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Recommendation 34: The Steering Committee form additional sub-committees to help progress its work.**

**Status: Underway**

The Steering Committee established an Efficiency and Effectiveness Review sub-committee to progress these recommendations. The Steering Committee also seeks advice from the National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network in relation to improving the Steering Committee and Program's web presence.

**Recommendation 35 Priority: The Steering Committee establish its own communication strategy complementing the work of the Program, including as soon as possible its own website.**

**Status: Underway**

A Steering Committee website will be established on the Australian Government Biosecurity portal by the end of the calendar year.

**Recommendation 36: The Scientific Advisory Group develop a work program responding to science related issues the Steering Committee and Program face and adjust as necessary its working arrangements to address the needs of the Program.**

**Status: Complete**

The SAG Terms of Reference were revised and approved by the Steering Committee in August 2020.



**Recommendation 37: The Risk Management Group's Terms of Reference be amended to accommodate the initiation of Program related audits and monitoring of progress in management responses for advice to the Steering Committee.**

**Status: Underway**

Terms of reference were updated and approved by the Steering Committee in August 2020..