

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

Extraordinary Meeting 01/2023

Thursday 15 June 2023

Teleconference

(AEST) 10.30am – 11.30am

ATTENDANCE

Attendees

- Rachel Chay, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QLD)(Chair)
- Bertie Hennecke, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Commonwealth Government
- Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries (NSW)
- Nigel Ainsworth, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (VIC)
- Rae Burrows, Department of Natural Resources and Environment (TAS)
- Marcelle O'Brien, Department of Natural Resources and Environment (TAS)
- Ron Shepherd, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA)
- Megan Wyllie, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (ACT)
- Nathan Rhodes, Department of Primary Industries and Regions (SA)
- Claire Morton, Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (NT)
- Mike Richards, External Financial Consultant

Program Attendees

- Ashley Bacon, a/Program Executive, NRIFAEP
- Graeme Dudgeon, Head of Operations, NRIFAEP
- Tom Roberts, a/Director, Strategy and Policy, NRIFAEP

Observers

- Elissa Van Oosterhout, NSW
- Ian Turnbull, NSW
- Pauline Lenancker, NSW
- Carmel Kerwick, QLD

Secretariat

- Heather Jablonski

Apologies

- John Robertson, Independent Interim Chair
- John van Schagen, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA)

The meeting opened at 10.31 am (AEST).

MAIN DISCUSSION

The acting Chair welcomed members to the extraordinary Steering Committee meeting 01/2023, noting apologies from John Robertson (interim Chair) and John van Schagen (WA). Ashley Bacon was introduced as the new Program Executive. Lance Perry's work during his tenure with the Program was acknowledged.

An acknowledgement to country was shared with members.

The objective of the meeting to update members on the Work Plan 2023-24, requested by the National Biosecurity Committee (NBC), provide an update on the Response Plan 2023-27 and discuss the significant detection of importance at Highfields (Kleinton) was confirmed.

Work Plan 2023-24

The Chair advised members that the NBC had requested the Steering Committee to review the Work Plan 2023-24 and provide advice on any technical concerns. The Work Plan has been built to the current budget of the Program. Members sought advice on the reduced budget and work that would not be completed until the approval of the Response Plan. The Program advised that amendments to the Work Plan had been made on risk-based assessments and once the Response Plan has been approved the Program will ramp up as soon as possible to avoid any further delays to the treatment.

Scott Charlton sought advice on the limited information contained in the Response Plan in relation to the surveillance expanding into New South Wales. Graeme Dudgeon advised that once the Response Plan was approved the Program would work with NSW to readjust the plan. Currently the uncertainty regarding the approval of the Response Plan is the main concern for the Program.

Response Plan

Members were advised that there have been no content changes to the Response Plan. However, it has been restructured to ensure that it is easier to read. The Commonwealth were thanked for their assistance in providing feedback on the Response Plan. No further amendments were requested from the Steering Committee.

Detection of Importance – Highfields (Kleinton)

Members were provided an overview of the Program's actions to date in response to the significant detection of importance at Highfields. The Program is proposing a similar approach to the one undertaken for the Beerwah detection. To date, two nests have been located. The Program will extend surveillance and treatment out to incorporate approximately 2 100 properties. It is expected that this may take another 10-14 days to complete.

Compliance activities and tracing activities have occurred and samples have been taken for genetic testing to determine where the nests may have come from. It is highly likely that this detection is a result of human-assisted movement. Engagement has occurred with all levels of government and the community with positive responses.

Members raised the following questions in relation to the outbreak at Kleinton:

1. whether the Program was going to impose biosecurity measures to place pressure on suppliers to do the right thing?

2. length of time taken to diagnose the sample
3. proposed treatment for the detection at Innisplain
4. whether the Program will apply a movement restriction within these sites rather than expanded the zones.

Graeme Dudgeon detailed how the detection was located at Kleinton and that the Program's processes will be reviewed. The Program does not intend to impose regulations at this point, if further evidence of non-compliance is found this will be reviewed. The draft Response Plan has contingency to treat detections outside the operational area.

The Chair opened the floor for further questions. Elissa Van Oosterhout sought advice of the detection of importance standard operating procedures and how it is applied. Tom Roberts advised that the document doesn't currently align with the Work Plan and draft Response Plan and is currently being reviewed. Once this has been updated, the document will be sent to members for review and comment.

Next steps

The Chair advised that the Response Plan and budget will formally go through Agriculture Senior Officers Committee (AGSOC) and Agriculture Ministers Meeting (AMM) for approval noting that each jurisdiction will have a treasury process to complete. The Program will seek endorsement from the AMM to commence those processes to provide surety that the Plan is progressing. Members will be provided updates on the progress as soon as available.

Carmel Kerwick sought clarity on the changes to the Response Plan and the process moving forward. The changes required include recognition of the implications of operations (surveillance) entering NSW, and inclusion of the management of outlier populations. It was agreed that Carmel would make the necessary changes and would progress the documents to AgSOC with a copy to be provided to members.

Bertie Hennecke asked if the Program has a frequently asked questions page that members could refer people too when requesting comments on the Program. It was agreed that talking points would be circulated to members for their information.

The meeting closed at 11:33am.

The Steering Committee:

NOTED that at the request of the National Biosecurity Committee, the Response Plan 2023-27 has been restructured to consolidate documents, to align with National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA) requirements and to include a detailed Work Plan 2023-24.

DISCUSSED and ENDORSED the Work Plan 2023-24 with no material changes.

NOTED that an out-of-session paper is being progressed urgently to the Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee (AGSOC) to request that senior officials endorse a request to Agriculture Ministers' Meeting (AMM) to bring forward previously approved funding to fund the Program in 23-24.

NOTED that a second AGSOC paper is planned that will request endorsement of the Response Plan 2023-2027 and in-principle endorsement of the budget subject to jurisdictional budgetary processes.

NOTED the Response Plan 2023-27 will be amended with agreed changes prior to progressing to AGSOC for endorsement.

NOTED that national support for continuation of work towards the next phase of response is sought to provide some level of surety to the Program to allow procurement, staff retention and recruitment and to recognise that further delays in approval increases risks that impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the Program.

| Action items | | Responsibility | Target | Status |
|--------------|---|----------------|--------|--------|
| 1. | Circulate media talking points to members | Secretariat | Jun-23 | Open |
| 2. | Update Response Plan and circulate to members | Tom Roberts | Jun-23 | Open |

Table 1: Action items