



National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (SEQ) Steering Committee
Risk Management Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee)
Tuesday 18 February 2020
Brisbane, Queensland

MINUTES – MEETING 4

ATTENDANCE

Attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alan Millis, Chair• Irene Sitton, Independent expert• Wendy Craik, Chair, Steering Committee (by phone)• Karina Keast, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Commonwealth Government• John Robertson, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland• Bruce Christie, Department of Primary Industries, New South Wales (NSW)• 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)• Andrew Turley, Strategy Director (NRIFAEP)• Brett Turville, Operations Director (NRIFAEP)• Liz Williams, Science Manager (NRIFAEP)
Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kerrian Nobbs (NRIFAEP)



Agenda Item 1 - Introduction

The fourth meeting of the Sub-Committee was opened by the Chair at 12.15pm. Apology from Wendy Craik who was unable to attend the meeting in person but joined by teleconference.

The Chair introduced the two recently appointed Program Directors, Andrew Turley (Strategy) and Brett Turville (Operations).

Bruce Christie advised the Sub-Committee that he plans to retire in July 2020. Scott Charlton will be the NSW member moving forward.

In opening the meeting, the Chair provided a welcome and gave a brief overview of meeting objectives.

Minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and approved with a minor amendment as per below:

- Action item 7 – should read “Jacqui King to contact QHealth to determine if the number of fatalities and other reactions/presentations from fire ant stings is available”.

Follow up on actions:

- Action Item 4 – Risk Management Plan – propose to consider Risk Management Plan at this meeting at Item 4 and update with comments and amendments.
- Action Item 6 – Updating Risk Register – an update to be provided by General Manager at Item 5.
- Action Item 8 – Register of interactions between the Program and regular campaigners to be forwarded to the Sub-Committee members.
- Action Item 10 – Table of baits and toxicants used by the Program to treat RIFA – the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) approve any chemical for use to treat fire ants. The full list will be uploaded and available on the web.

The Sub-Committee

- **CONFIRMED** the agenda as previously circulated.
- **ENDORSED** the minutes of Meeting 3 with a minor amendment.
- **NOTED** the development of the Business Improvement Register and that it incorporates all program improvement actions.
- **AGREED** the Business Improvement Register will be circulated to the Sub-Committee members.
- **AGREED** a full list of baits and toxicants available to treat fire ants be uploaded to the web.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status	
1	Update Meeting 3 Minutes/Actions with minor amendments	Secretariat	March 2020	Completed
2	Register of “regular campaigners” to be circulated to Sub-Committee members.	Secretariat	March 2020	Ongoing
3	Full list of baits and toxicants available to treat fire ants is to be uploaded to the web.	C&SE Manager	March 2020	Ongoing
4	Business Improvement Register to be circulated to the Sub-Committee.	Business Manager/ Secretariat	31 March 2020	In progress



Agenda Item 2 – General Manager’s Update

The General Manager provided a brief summary of five strategic risks which, if not mitigated, could stop the Program being successful. He noted that these are risks, not current issues. These risks included:

1. Program funding

- The Program costs may have been underestimated in the initial model. This year’s expenditure could be up to \$12.6M more than what was allocated. Any additional funding required will be brought forward from later years. There are strategies in place for the program to become more efficient, including remote sensing surveillance and self-management to supplement eradication treatment and responsive treatments. The Program is working to deliver more for the same or less than current operations to ensure there are enough funds left for the later years. To assist with forward projections, a more detailed “Three Year Strategy” is currently being developed.
- A critical concern is that the initial funding model did not include proof of freedom. The proof of freedom model requires the Program to have good surveillance capabilities to find the ants during the whole 10 years. The first tool to assist with this is the Risk Heat Map, which will show where, if there are residual ants, it is most likely that they will be found.

2. Surveillance capability / capacity insufficient in the long run

- Our current tools for surveillance are not scalable to the large area we are working in.
- To complete our planned ground and responsive clearance surveillance next season, the Program will need to increase the number of odour detection dogs. However, this surveillance method is not suitable for the large areas needing clearance and can only be used selectively. Going forward, the Program will need to rely heavily on remote sensing, currently under development, to have the capability to do the surveillance to achieve proof of freedom. Evidence for proof of freedom needs to be gathered during the current 10 year funding period.
- We are also looking at how surveillance can better support eradication treatment. There is a risk that organic farming operations may lose their certification if their property is treated. We will be proposing surveillance as an initial alternative to treatment in scenarios where it is difficult to treat (treatment would still proceed should ants be detected during surveillance).

3. Climate/weather variability

- The Program may not be adequately accounting for the risk of climate/weather. Treatment targets this year may have been compromised due to:
 - aircraft not being available during the recent fires due to being required on the fire line
 - the drought has been causing dust problems for the aircraft and their ability to land
 - the recent rain event has also kept the aircraft on the ground
 - time contingencies planned at the start of the treatment season may not be sufficient.
- The Program is continually recalculating the loss of treatment time to better prioritise future treatment.
- For risk mitigation, the Program needs to plan for contingencies better and re-examine the risk of weather impacts using medium to long term forecasts.



- The Program is currently researching the use of more moisture resistant bait to allow treatment during periods of wet weather.
- The Program already utilises flexible start and end dates based on temperature and extreme weather conditions. However, there is a need for efficient procurement processes for getting field staff on the ground and having helicopters available at short notice in response to favourable weather conditions. This year's treatment season was the earliest start for a treatment season in the past five years.

4. Self-management

- Self-management needs to work for the program to achieve the goal of eradicating fire ants from SEQ.
- The Program is having success in engaging local government to consider partnering with the Program.
- There has been only limited engagement with the community regarding self-management to date. There will need to be more intensive communications and engagement for self-management projects to be successful in the future.

5. Containment strategy

- There would be a significant risk if we are not sufficiently containing fire ants to achieve eradication.
- It was noted that sentinel sites did not detect fire ants outside of our boundary last year – a good indicator that containment activities are working.
- However, there are some concerns that controls on human-assisted movement of fire ants may be insufficient to prevent the breaching of containment. These are being reviewed.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Program provided by the General Manager.
- **NOTED** that the Scientific Advisory Group will be focusing on new treatment products and delivery methods during the April 2020 meeting.

Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
Nil			



Agenda Item 3 – Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Report

The General Manager advised that Bernie Wonder, engaged to review the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Program and the Steering Committee operations, presented his report to the Steering Committee in November 2019. High priority recommendations were discussed at that meeting. The Program has provided responses to the recommendations to be presented to the Steering Committee's February 2020 meeting.

The Steering Committee's approach to finalising the response to the review is to go through priority and non-priority recommendations to assign responsibility and dates. The Steering Committee will also determine whether a Sub-Committee is required to oversee implementation of actions arising from the review. The review report will be made public, along with the recommendations and a public statement from the Steering Committee.

A number of the recommendations are already being implemented in the Program. Two recommendations have been highlighted as difficult to implement. The Program will do a feasibility analysis on these two recommendations:

- field staff payment is currently based on "time spend" – it was recommended that it could be "per hectare (output)". The potential risk is that increased output could be at the expense of quality
- containment risk – human assisted movement. The recommendation is to search every shipment of high risk carrier before it is sent. This would be difficult other than with dogs and would require complete unloading, and may not be feasible.

Recommendation 18 – revise Standard Operating Procedures as soon as possible – the Sub-Committee thought the recommendation is more focused than what was provided in the Program Response. The General Manager advised that the Program maintains a Controlled Document Register which lists all policies, protocols, operating procedures and work instructions. However, some are not formally signed off. The Program currently has good induction and training documents which are continually updated and improved.

Recommendation 21 – Communication Strategy – the General Manager reported that there are complications with who approves information for the public arena, with a national Program being delivered through a Queensland Government department. The Steering Committee Chair will make contact with the Queensland Minister and will provide regular updates to the Minister in relation to the Efficiency and Effectiveness Review and the implementation of the recommendations.

The Queensland Government Advertising and Communication Committee, a whole-of-Government committee formed to oversee all Queensland Government communication and media campaigns, will at times impact the Program's communications strategy.

Discussions were also held around:

- the Lifestyle Campaign currently being designed by the Program. The objective is to increase public awareness and participation in self-management of fire ants. Data has been collected on the awareness of fire ants and how they affect lives
- the amendment to the fire ant biosecurity zones and the risk mitigation strategies, which have not been changed since 2015. They are now in the first stage of being modified and will take effect in early May 2020
- issues in implementation of protocols at the Customer Services Centre during the Christmas period



- reporting of fire ant bites - discussions could be held with Queensland Health on what reporting structures can be developed on fire ant bites. There is concern about community complacency about fire ant nests and bites
- a proposal to distribute maps, outlining fire ant infestations suburb by suburb and getting the community to "own reporting" which will assist with proof of freedom (the Electric Ant Campaign in North Queensland was very successful, including involvement from the State Emergency Service and other emergency services for checking for electric ants in the neighbourhood)
- prosecution for not self-reporting fire ants
- reporting of fire ants and delays in response time, and the potential of self-management to help resolve these issues.

Recommendation 37 – the Risk Management Sub-Committee take on an audit responsibility. It may be difficult for the Sub-Committee to do that role, noting its dependence on the Program for information. It was suggested that the Sub-Committee could perhaps consider and endorse or approve an audit program developed between Internal Audit and Program management. Whether to approve or endorse for Steering Committee decision was an open question, noting the considerable overlap in the members of the Sub-Committee and the Steering Committee. Discussions on how audit arrangements could work will be held in the Steering Committee’s February 2020 meeting.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the Consultancy Report, Efficiency and Effectiveness Review of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program and the Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Report – Program Response.
- **NOTED** that the Steering Committee will be reviewing the Program’s response and it will be published with the Report in due course.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
5	Complete a review of potential statistical models to guide the number of compliance/ field staff required.	Operations Director / Policy	June 2020	In progress
6	Program to investigate prosecution for not self-reporting of fire ants.	Operations Director / Policy	June 2020	In progress
7	In response to R37 – the Steering Committee to communicate the outcome of the discussion on the RMSC taking on an audit committee responsibility.	Steering Committee Chair / Kerri	February 2020	Discussed at SC Mtg with an action.

Agenda Item 4 – Status of Risk Management Processes

The Chair advised that the draft Risk Management Plan had been updated with previous comments from members, proposed minor drafting amendments and sought clarification on the allocation of responsibilities in the draft Plan.

The General Manager advised that the Program follows the draft Risk Management Plan with slight variations of role responsibilities. Most importantly, the management team now own the risks and



regular conversations have been held about the risk mitigations and if they are adequate or require improvement.

The Chair proposed that the Sub-Committee endorse the Risk Management Plan, with the suggested amendments, for progression to the Steering Committee for approval.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update provided by the General Manager on the status of the risk management processes.
- **ENDORSED** the Risk Management Plan with suggested amendments for progression to the Steering Committee for approval.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
8.	Risk Management Plan to be updated with suggested amendments and provided to the Steering Committee for approval.	Strategy Director/ Business Support Manager/ Secretariat	March 2020	In progress

Agenda Item 5 – Risk and Issues Status

Quarterly Reporting

The Quarterly Risk Report was discussed. The Sub-Committee suggested there needs to be more clarification and the Actions/Status/Outcomes need to be more specific.

As a public communication strategy, there needs to be more consistency of language if the Quarterly Risk Reporting document is to be part of the NRIFAEP Quarterly Reporting, which is a public document.

The General Manager advised that the reporting structure of the Program has been reviewed and will be more aligned through the Quarterly Reports to the Annual Report.

Risk Register Review

The Risk Register is a living document and is regularly reviewed and updated. The Issues Register could be updated to include the impacts of weather and climate change, with actions to forecast early, whether the weather will have an impact on the full treatment regime and if the treatment area needs to be adjusted.

The Sub-Committee suggested checks of the risk assessment ratings (Likelihood and Consequence) for consistency with the Risk Management Policy and the Issues Register.

Reporting frequency - take snapshot after each reporting period to retain record of where risks were at in each interval. Provide Sub-Committee members with a summary of amendments to the Risk and Issues Registers quarterly.

Issues Register

Review and update the Issues Register with context to move some resolved items to the Risk Register. There is a need for a better sense of when items are closed out and it also requires a better sense of timeframes.



The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the Quarterly Report and suggested there be more consistency with other reports.
- **NOTED** the Risk Register and provided suggestions for more clarity.
- **NOTED** the Issues Register and suggested some issues be moved to the Risk Register and that timeframes be more specific.
- **AGREED** that a summary page of amendments to the Risk and Issues Registers be provided to the Sub-Committee members quarterly.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
9.	Provide Sub-Committee members with a summary of amendments to the Risk and Issue Registers quarterly.	Business Support Manager	Quarterly	Ongoing
10.	Transfer some issues to the Risk Register and ensure timeframes are more specific.	Program	As required	Ongoing
11.	Endorsed Minutes of the RMSC to be published to the web.	Secretariat	As required	Ongoing

Agenda Item 6 – Self Management Project Risks

A number of risks have been identified as not adequately addressed, in particular, coordinated community campaigns and transitioning self-management out of a project framework to being more integrated into main operations. This is delaying ability to scale the work going forward.

Legal review has raised some risk issues with regard to self-management, including providing bait to the community. A significant issue has been identified around legislation on who can apply insecticides. While insecticides are regulated by the APVMA, Queensland Health has legislation relating to who can apply insecticides. Currently, non-residential treatment of pests is limited to Pest Management Technicians. There has been discussion with Queensland Health and the legislation is being reviewed and is expected to be updated in September 2020.

Baits used for treatment – products available in department stores for self-treatment are relatively expensive. People may buy inappropriate cheaper products with no results. Government can't directly influence the insecticide market but the Program is now encouraging people to self-treat and there is a market opportunity for product development and market competition to drive prices down.

The Program currently has direct connections with a bait supplier, and they are offering the same price to Councils as an option for a lower price for quality product.

Baits – in the community led coordinated projects, the current product offered as an option is 500gms of bait for treatment, which may not be the most appropriate. The Program will work with the wholesaler to possibly supply a bait station or similar product.

To ensure success of community pilots/projects, a good communication model is necessary for engagement with the community, community leaders and local government to ensure they are supportive and aware of the project.

Assistance could be provided by the Electric Ant Program on how the successful community campaign was run in the north.



The Self-Management Risk Register outlines the plans and the risks associated with self-management. The register has been updated but it is recognised that the process will be ongoing, including escalating some of the risks and issues to the Program Risk/Issues Registers.

It was suggested an evaluation framework could be developed to link back to proof of freedom.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the Self-Management Project Risks agenda paper and the updated Risk Register.
- **AGREED** the Risk Register should be updated with reference to Recommendation 6 in the Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Report.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
12	Update the Risk Register with reference to recommendations in R6 of the Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Report.	Business Support Manager	April 2020	In progress

Agenda Item 7 – Proof of Freedom – Area Clearance

The Science Manager presented an update on the progress of the clearance strategy and proof of freedom framework. This strategy considers both the outline as per the Ten Year Plan, as well as recommendations from the Scientific Advisory Group. In particular, an area clearance strategy is proposed, which involves three main stages:

1. eradication
2. clearance (including search and targeted treatment)
3. area freedom, with decision points to transition between stages based on treatment history, monitoring data, and passive and active surveillance activities.

To transition to area freedom, information on the number of remnant infestation/s and search effectiveness will be used to determine a probability of freedom. It is imperative that data be aggregated from the first stage of eradication, to determine this probability of freedom, as well as to provide long-term evidence and confidence in eventual proof of freedom from fire ants in South East Queensland.

As per SAG's recommendation, an infestation risk heat map has been developed for eradication Area 1 and the Western Boundary to prioritise surveillance efforts and clearance activities in the coming years. This risk heat map combines various data and models, including known infestation, distance to known infestations, suitable habitat for fire ants, negative public sample data, number of rounds of treatment, intervals between treatment and the season of treatment. Additionally, further collaboration has been undertaken with Dr David Ramsey from the Arthur Rylah Institute on his tools relating to broadscale proof of freedom from invasive species, as per his peer-reviewed scientific paper.

Various challenges have been identified in the clearance strategy, primarily determining an acceptable level of risk to transition between stages, and the need to quantify a number of variables for the models (e.g. remote sensing accuracy). These will be further progressed within the Program and presented to SAG and the Steering Committee for endorsement.

The Sub-Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the development of the proof of freedom framework.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			



Agenda Item 8 – Summary and Close

The General Manager advised that there may be a significant detection to report just out of the operational boundary in the Gold Coast area. Genetic testing will determine if it was a result of human assisted movement.

The Sub-Committee requested more information be provided on the rafting of fire ants to understand risks related to water courses / flood events in South East Queensland.

A summary of the meeting was provided by the Chair, along with thanks to all for their attendance and contributions.

It was agreed that the minutes would be published for transparency as recommended by Wendy Craik, Steering Committee Chair.

The meeting was closed by the Chair at 5.00pm.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
13.	Further information to be provided to the Sub-Committee on the "rafting" of fire ants.	Ross Wylie	31 March 2020	
14.	Minutes of RMSC Meeting 4 to be published to the web following approval.	Secretariat	31 May 2020	
15.	Next meeting to be held in conjunction with the August Steering Committee meeting.	Secretariat	June 2020	In progress