



National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program – South East Queensland Governance Plan

July 2017





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1. Program overview

1.1. Background

Red imported fire ants (RIFA) or *Solenopsis invicta* are one of the world's most invasive species. They can cause serious impacts for the environment, agriculture, social amenity, the economy, infrastructure, and human and animal health. If RIFA were to become widely established in Australia, these impacts could include human death from anaphylactic shock, reduced agricultural productivity, significant damage to electrical and communications infrastructure, and restrictions to trade. RIFA also pose a serious threat to Australia's native species and ecological communities and have been listed as a key threatening process under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

RIFA were first detected in Brisbane in 2001 and since then have been the target of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program, which is funded annually through a national cost-sharing agreement under the Agriculture Ministers' Forum. In 2016, an independent review concluded that a lack of secure funding over a number of years has created inefficiencies and operational constraints, and prevented the program from implementing long-term plans. The review also determined that the current program budget is insufficient to achieve eradication and that a significant increase in funding is required.

The review panel found that eradication of RIFA remains technically feasible, in the national interest and cost beneficial. This finding, plus subsequent modelling work, led the review panel to recommend an investment of \$38 million per year for 10 years to fund an eradication program. This investment would provide a 95 per cent probability that all fire ants will be eradicated within 10 years.

1.2. Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to provide a high-level overview of the 10-year eradication program.

1.3. Program objective, outcomes, principles and benefits

1.3.1. Key objective

The objective of the program is to prevent RIFA from establishing in Australia, and in doing this avoid associated social, environmental and economic impacts.

1.3.2. Outcomes

The desired outcomes of the program are:

- RIFA are eradicated from South East Queensland.
- New scientific techniques and technologies are available for the detection, diagnosis, treatment and surveillance of RIFA.
- Informed and educated community and stakeholder groups are reporting suspect ants to the program.

1.3.3. Principles

The program is to follow these principles:

- Biosecurity is best approached as a partnership between governments, industries and communities.



- The eradication response will be underpinned by the best available science.
- Improvements in available technology and treatment methods will be incorporated into the eradication response across the life of the program.
- Knowledge will be shared with other RIFA and tramp ant programs.
- Opportunities for research and development will be taken up as they become available.
- Ongoing monitoring, evaluation and reporting will be undertaken to facilitate operational and strategic improvements across the life of the program.
- Program activities will be consistent with the independent review report.

1.3.4. Benefits

The key benefit of the program will be the avoidance of impacts that are known to occur where RIFA are established. These impacts have been observed in the southern United States and include:

- the significant financial cost of ongoing management
- the cost of losses and management in agricultural industries
- the displacement and potential extinction of native species
- human health impacts due to the painful sting of RIFA, which can induce anaphylactic reactions and have sometimes been fatal
- damage to infrastructure, including electrical systems, buildings and roads
- reduction in tourism and damage to popular recreational facilities.

In addition, the program's investment in surveillance technologies and treatment methods will increase capacity to respond to any future outbreaks of RIFA and other tramp ants in Australia.

2. Implementation plan

2.1. Overview

This program and the new 10-year eradication plan (the 10-year plan) will replace the existing National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program—South East Queensland Response Plan 2013–18. They will commence in July 2017 and continue until June 2027.

As part of this transition, there will be a formal handover of responsibility from the Tramp Ant Consultative Committee to the program's steering committee. This will confirm ongoing engagement, given the close connection between the efforts of both committees.

The 10-year plan will be put in place for the enhanced 10-year program. Key components of proposed the plan include:

- treatment and surveillance
- containment and movement controls
- community engagement
- science
- systems and supporting functions
- assistance to other tramp ant incursions
- declaration of proof of freedom
- budget
- governance.



2.2. Path forward

The Queensland Government established a preparation taskforce to ‘ramp up’ activities before the program’s commencement in July 2017. These activities included:

- recruiting staff
- sourcing additional accommodation and supporting infrastructure
- commencing research into remote sensing technologies
- improving information management systems
- reviewing logistics and operational efficiencies for a larger operation.

The ramp-up activities will be funded from within the 10-year plan’s budget—\$0.917 million of Queensland’s contribution to the budget was brought forward into 2016–17. The Queensland Government endorsed this strategy.

The 10-year plan, endorsed in accordance with proposed governance arrangements, will be put in place for the enhanced program before the July 2017 commencement date.

Given the length of the program, the plan will be updated as needed and endorsed every 2 years.

There will be a staged approach in priority areas throughout the life of the program. These activities will be detailed further in the agreed plan.

There will be 4–5 proposed areas (see Figure 1), each of which will undergo phases of planned activity (including search, treatment and clearance) at different stages of the 10-year program. Responsive activities will continue for new detections.

The planned activities for each area are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1—The planned approach for each area

Phase 1 Search and suppress	Phase 2 Treat	Phase 3 Clear
Targeted surveillance in and around previous treatment areas Targeted surveillance around previous outlying infestation Market research—communication and engagement methods to reach target audience Suppression treatment	Planned treatment areas Communication to support treatment Monitoring of treatment General Biosecurity Obligation	Targeted surveillance and monitoring of sentinel sites Broadscale surveillance using Remote Sensing Surveillance—2 passes over suitable habitat and treated sites Targeted communication and engagement in all suburbs within area

The indicative time frames are summarised in Table 2.



Table 2—Time frames for activities

Area	2017–18 and 2018–19	2019–20 and 2020–21	2021–22 and 2022–23	2023–24 and 2024–25	2025–26 and 2026–27	Post plan
1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Cleared	Cleared	Cleared	Proof of freedom
2	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Cleared	Cleared	Proof of freedom
3	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Cleared	Proof of freedom
4	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Proof of freedom

An indicative map of these areas is provided in Figure 1. The number and location of priority areas will be developed in line with a progressive ‘rolling’ strategy that focuses eradication activities initially in infested areas on the outer south-western and southern perimeter of the operational area, and then shifts eradication effort inwards to areas with persistent infestation.

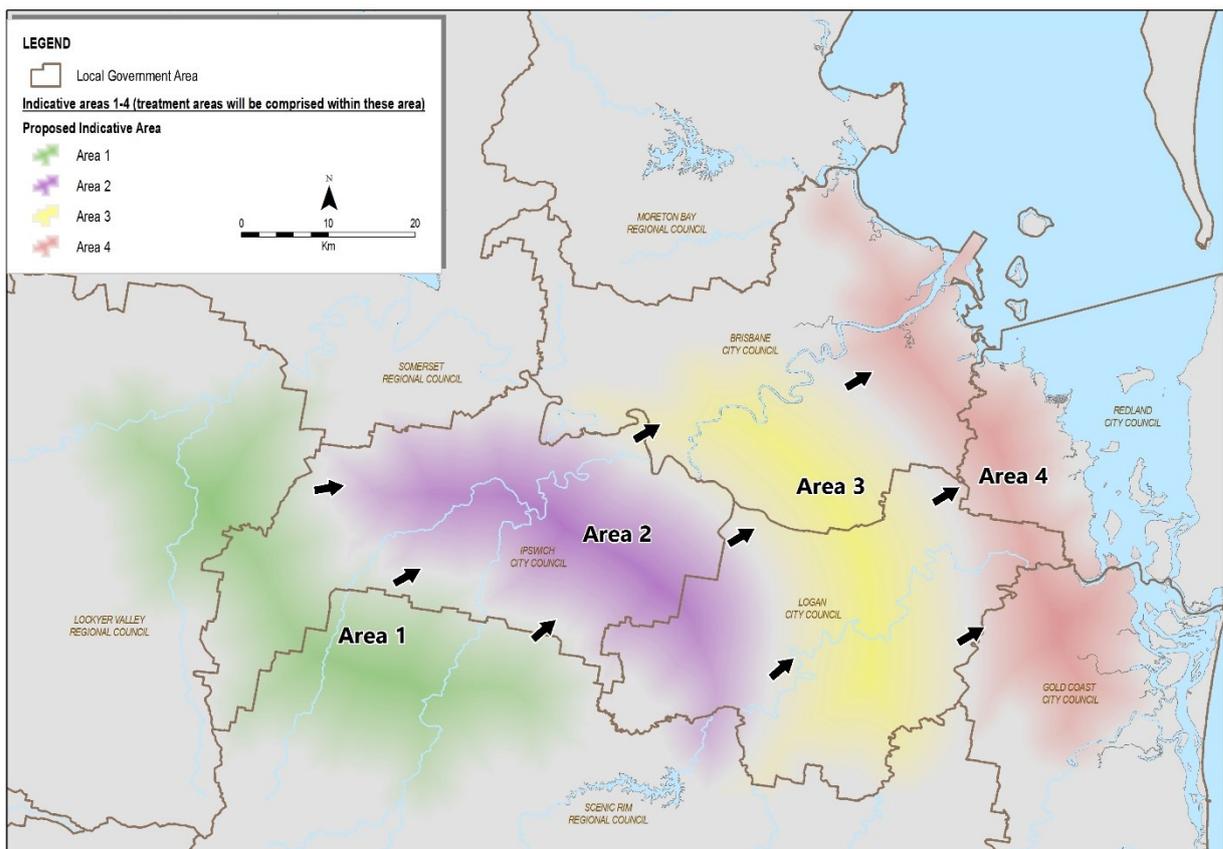


Figure 1—Indicative map of areas for phased activities



Following the 10-year program, there will be a 2-year declaration-of-freedom phase to confirm whether eradication has been achieved.

3. Governance

3.1. Governance structure

There is a high level of investment from the Australian and state and territory governments in this program. Therefore, it is appropriate for a separate governance body to be established to provide primary strategic oversight of the program. This will provide clear accountability and transparency, and will ensure the program receives the level of support and guidance required for its success.

This separate governance body will be the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program—South East Queensland Steering Committee (the steering committee).

3.1.1. Responsibilities

The steering committee will have responsibility for:

- providing leadership and guidance to the program's operational team
- making key decisions in relation to the program, including approval of the 10-year plan and detailed annual work plans
- considering and providing advice on technical issues relating to the implementation of the 10-year plan
- approving the annual program budget and necessary adjustments, and monitoring expenditure against budget
- monitoring and evaluating program performance
- preparing all national communications (such as national talking points)
- reporting to the National Biosecurity Committee and Agriculture Senior Officials Committee.

Guidance documentation will provide a clear delineation between steering committee and program delivery responsibilities.

3.1.2. Composition

Members of the steering committee will be representatives nominated by Australian and state and territory governments. To provide effective guidance on all program matters, members will have expertise in a range of subject areas including:

- reviewing and providing advice on technical matters relating to the 10-year plan's implementation
- financial management
- project management
- risk management
- compliance
- research and development
- communications.

The independent chair of the steering committee will be appointed by the National Biosecurity Committee and will have significant governance skill and experience.



Nominations for membership of the steering committee will be drawn from the heads of biosecurity agencies across all Australian governments.

In the first 6 months of its operations, the steering committee will assess whether the skill profile adopted is appropriate and if there are any gaps that should be addressed. Following this initial assessment, the committee will review skills composition as part of the annual evaluation of its operations.

3.1.3. Operations

The steering committee will be accountable to the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee (via the National Biosecurity Committee), who will endorse its terms of reference. Terms of reference for the steering committee will include:

- roles and responsibilities
- membership, including skills composition
- operational procedures, including meeting frequency, format and quorum.

The steering committee may form subcommittees from within its own membership to further consider specific matters as needed.

The independent chair will be contracted by the Queensland Government on behalf of the program.

Secretariat support for the steering committee will be provided by the Queensland Government and resourced by the program.

All governments will be expected to fund the participation of their respective steering committee members.

The steering committee will provide program updates (for information) to each meeting of the National Biosecurity Committee, and may seek advice from that committee.

The steering committee will conduct an evaluation of its operations annually. This will consider the overall effectiveness of the committee in delivering the program.

The proposed reporting structure is set out in Figure 2.





Figure 2—Proposed governance structure

3.2. Key roles and responsibilities

The key governance bodies relevant to program are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3—Key governance bodies

Body	Current and <i>proposed</i> role and structure
National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program	<p><i>Responsible for the operational delivery of the program.</i></p> <p><i>Provides monthly reports to the steering committee.</i></p>
National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program—South East Queensland Steering Committee (the steering committee)	<p><i>Key governance body with strategic oversight of the program. Responsible for providing leadership and monitoring efficiency, finances and progress of the program.</i></p> <p><i>Chaired by an independent chair appointed by the National Biosecurity Committee and comprised of representatives from Australian and state and territory governments. Members have expertise in a range of subject areas relevant to delivery of the program.</i></p> <p><i>Responsible for reporting to each National Biosecurity Committee meeting and annually to the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee.</i></p>
National Biosecurity Committee	<p>Provides advice on national biosecurity issues to the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee and the Agriculture Ministers’ Forum.</p> <p>Responsible for managing a national, strategic approach to biosecurity threats and the impact of these on agricultural production, the environment, community wellbeing and social amenity.</p> <p><i>Considers information provided by the steering committee on progress of the program and provides advice as required.</i></p> <p><i>Receives and considers reports from the steering committee.</i></p>
Agriculture Senior Officials Committee	<p>Comprises all department heads and CEOs of Australian, state, territory and New Zealand government agencies responsible for primary industries policy issues. Chaired by the Secretary of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.</p> <p>Provides for cross-jurisdictional cooperative and coordinated approaches to matters of national interest. Supports the Agriculture Ministers’ Forum in achieving its objectives.</p> <p><i>Receives and considers an annual report from the steering committee.</i></p> <p><i>Reports as needed to the Agriculture Ministers’ Forum on the progress of the program.</i></p>



Agriculture Ministers' Forum	Comprises Australian, state, territory and New Zealand government ministers who have responsibility for primary industries. Chaired by the Australian Government Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources. Enables cross-jurisdictional cooperative and coordinated approaches to matters of national interest.
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3.3. Financial management

The steering committee will be responsible for making expenditure decisions for the program within the budget agreed by the Agriculture Ministers' Forum. Yearly expenditure is expected to vary over the program due to changes in operational activities over time and ongoing research and development into new treatment and surveillance technologies.

Although government funding for the program will not exceed the budgeted total of \$380 million over 10 years (adjusted for inflation), the steering committee will consider yearly flexibility within the life of the program budget. This may include the carryover of unspent funds or increased investment balanced by offsets in the proceeding financial year.

Detailed program budgets will be prepared annually. In particular, the operational team will need to provide a strong business case to the steering committee for any program expenditure not related to treatment and surveillance activities.

The steering committee will be responsible for overseeing work related to the review panel's recommendation that alternative options for financial contributions from private beneficiaries and risk creators be further considered. This work will be resourced under the 10-year plan.

3.4. Reporting and other requirements

The program will submit monthly reports to the steering committee on program activities. The reports will include expenditure of funds, treatment, surveillance, research and development, and community engagement.

The program will submit quarterly reports and annual reports (in lieu of the fourth quarterly reports) to the steering committee.

The steering committee will provide these updates to the National Biosecurity Committee. The National Biosecurity Committee, which meets three times a year, will include a standing item on the agenda to consider these updates.

The steering committee will report annually to the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee, who will report as required to the Agriculture Ministers' Forum.

An operational efficiency and effectiveness review of the program will be undertaken every 2 years by an independent provider to confirm that the 10-year plan is being implemented effectively and is on track to achieve its objectives. A strategic review may also be conducted at the direction of the steering committee.

4. Communication and engagement

Community and stakeholder engagement is an important component of the program. For example, reports from the public have accounted for up to 70 per cent of new detections over the last 4 years.



The program will continue to build upon existing engagement activities and will include:

- communications to residents in the current treatment area
- targeted media promotion
- school education programs
- public displays and information briefings
- training for local governments, industries and landholders
- market research to help inform communication strategies
- development of a mobile application to assist the public with RIFA identification and surveillance
- social media campaigns and responses
- expansion of online functions such as webinars and e-learning modules.

As with all other components of the program, the steering committee will provide guidance to the operational team on the implementation of communication and engagement activities.

5. Risk management

A detailed risk management plan will be developed. It will consider a range of risk types, including community, environmental, health, legal, planning and implementation risks. The risk management plan will be monitored by the steering committee.

If the risk profile changes to such an extent that the program's objectives are compromised, this will trigger a review of the program by the steering committee. This approach is consistent with the recommendations of the review panel. Trigger points that the program must include are:

- the discovery of new infestation that is beyond the capacity of the program to treat (such as a large number of infestations in a local government area that has not previously been infested)
- a significant reduction in the efficacy of the baits used by the program, as demonstrated by science monitoring assessments, with no alternative effective baits available
- any event or circumstance that means the objectives and eradication targets of the 10-year plan are unlikely to be achieved within the agreed time frame or budget (detailed in the independent review report).

Following the activation of any trigger, the program will be discontinued unless, based on the advice of the steering committee, the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee decides otherwise.

The steering committee will be responsible for overseeing the transition to management activities should the program be discontinued.