



FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

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

Wednesday 7 April 2021

Teleconference

9.00 – 10.30am

ATTENDANCE

Attendees	Wendy Craik, Chair Jo Laduzko, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (C'wealth) Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries (NSW) Nigel Ainsworth, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (VIC) Rae Burrows, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (TAS), John van Schagen, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA) Sally Heaton, Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT) John Robertson, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) (QLD) Justine Clarke, Chief Finance Officer, DAF (QLD)
Program Presenters	Graeme Dudgeon, General Manager Andrew Turley, Strategy Director
Observers	Malcolm Letts, Deputy Director-General/Chief Biosecurity Officer, Biosecurity Queensland, (DAF) Heather Leeson, Manager, Policy
Secretariat	Kerri Nobbs, Senior Policy Officer, (NRIFAEP)
Apologies	Anne Walters, Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT)

MAIN DISCUSSION

The meeting opened at 9.00am.

REVISED SCOPE OF WORK PLAN FOR 2020-21

The Chair welcomed Steering Committee members, Sally Heaton on behalf of Anne Walters, Malcolm Letts and Program staff to the teleconference and noted Anne Walters as an apology.

The Chair provided an overview of the meeting's agenda and expressed that we are at a critical point in the Program, with restricted funding, the Program will need to operate on the existing \$58.5M in this year's budget with a revised 2020-21 Work Plan.



Graeme Dudgeon provided an overview of the current Work Plan and the treatment to date, including Area 2 which has received three of the four planned treatments and treatment has begun in the Southern Suppression and Eastern Overlap areas. Following recent advice that there will be no additional funds brought forward, the expenditure must be reduced by \$5M.

Andrew Turley presented the Steering Committee with three revised options to complete operations in 2020/21 within the \$58.5M available funding:

- **Option A**

- complete fourth round of eradication treatment in Area 2
- reduce Southern Suppression treatment to aerial only
- Eastern Overlap area to receive one IGR treatment and with no second treatment
- complete clearance treatment
- no impact on strategic projects ie website, remote sensing surveillance and self-management
- maintain high level of responsive treatment
- critical to complete clearance treatment
- reduce winter surveillance
- complete self-management trials.

The advantage of Option A is it completes the eradication treatment in Area 2, which will give confidence that Area 2 can go to clearance. However, reduced treatment in the Southern Suppression area increases the risk of the ants moving further south.

- **Option B**

- a 10 per cent reduction across the strategic projects
- Eastern Overlap area to receive one IGR treatment and cancel second treatment
- complete four rounds of treatment in Area 2
- maintain high level impact of Southern Suppression treatment – aerial only, no ground treatment
- maintain high level of responsive treatment
- complete clearance treatment
- no further surveillance in 2020/21
- KPI for mobilisation won't be met.

This will be a trade-off of strategic objectives to get an extra 13 000 ha of suppression.

- **Option C**

- Eradication Area 2 will not receive 4th round of treatment
- Western and Eastern Overlap areas will receive two treatments each
- Southern Suppression area will receive one treatment, both ground and aerial.



This is the best option for suppression. However, eradication treatment will not be completed and future IGR (ie. FY21/22) would not be cumulative on FY20/21 treatments and evidence of new eradication treatment regimes would be incomplete.

Discussion followed on the benefits and implications, including the consequences of aerial treatment only in the Southern Suppression area, the risks of ants flying further south, the possibility of self-treatment in the Southern Suppression area to work in with aerial treatments and targeted awareness communication with residents to check yards.

The Steering Committee:

- **REVIEWED** the options for reducing the scope of work to deliver 2020/21 program operations within the \$58.5M budget constraint
- **APPROVED** that Option A be implemented immediately, acknowledging that targeted communications commence with a focus on self-management (focusing on yard checks) in the Southern Suppression area.

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Terms of Reference

Steering Committee members were provided with a draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the 2021 Strategic/Efficiency and Effectiveness Review of the Program, which will include a focus on the original Ten Year Plan, work completed to date, the changes made and reasons for making them and also the strategies the Program is pursuing and the likelihood of effectiveness in terms of the Program's objectives. The review panel will also assess whether there is a reasonable chance of eradication and alternative strategies/options to consider.

Discussion followed on the content of the ToR, including the inclusion of requesting the panel "more explicitly examine the feasibility of eradication as an objective".

Review Panel Members

Steering Committee members previously provided suggestions for candidates to undertake the review.

It was agreed that Ms Helen Scott Orr would lead the panel (pending availability) and discussions followed on who would be the best fit to assist on the panel, preferably with an understanding/scientific knowledge of fire ants. Members agreed Mr Phil Lester, a newly appointed member of the National Exotic Invasive Ants Scientific Advisory Group would be an appropriate person to be considered as a scientist on the panel. Mr Lester has not attended any SAG meetings to date, so would still have an independent view.

Two further recommended candidates will also be contacted to undertake the review, following input from the Victorian jurisdiction.

Malcolm Letts advised the Steering Committee that the Program has a wealth of knowledge that is quite unique in relation to fire ants and it would be beneficial to have the panel consulting closely with Program staff. It would also be beneficial to have a Program officer support the panel at a higher level. That officer could be supported by a small team to assist with secretariat and logistics.



Graeme Dudgeon advised that the intention is to take Andrew Turley, Strategy Director of the Program, offline and he would be the first point of contact for the panel. Andrew would then analyse the output of the review and implement recommendations into a revised Response Plan.

The Steering Committee:

- **REVIEWED** the ToR and suggested amendments
- **AGREED** the Chair will amend the ToR and circulate to members for endorsement
- **AGREED** the Chair would contact Helen Scott-Orr and Phil Lester seeking agreement to undertake the review.

Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
1.	Amend ToR to reflect suggestions from SC members	Chair	9/4/2021	Completed
2.	Circulate amended ToR to SC members for endorsement.	Secretariat	9/4/2021	Completed
3.	Victorian jurisdiction to provide preference for review panelist.	Nigel Ainsworth	12/4/2021	Completed

Meeting concluded at 10.00am.