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

Hybrid Online / Onsite Meeting

Wednesday 26 May 2021

9.00am – 2.30pm

Attendees	Wendy Craik, Chair John Robertson, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QLD) Jo Laduzko, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (Commonwealth) Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries (NSW) Nigel Ainsworth, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (VIC) John van Schagen, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA) Rae Burrows, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (TAS)
Program Presenters	Graeme Dudgeon, General Manager Andrew Turley, Director Strategy Brett Turville, Director Operations Liz Williams, Manager, Science Heather Leeson, Manager, Policy and Compliance Sarah Mitchell, A/ Manager, Business Support and Governance Mark Winter, Manager, Business Systems and Intelligence Sharon Janssen, Manager, Planning and Quality Management Chris Hollingdrake, A/ Manager, Communication and Engagement
Observers	Janine O'Donnell, Department of Primary Industries (NSW) Malcolm Letts, Chief Biosecurity Officer/Deputy Director-General, Biosecurity Queensland (DAF) Hendri Eddy, Senior Business Support Officer (DAF) Sonia Marsanic, Policy Officer (NRIFAEP) Brian Bond, Business Manager (NRIFAEP)
Secretariat	Camilla Wakefield, A/ Senior Policy Officer (NRIFAEP)
Apologies	Justine Clark, Chief Finance Officer, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QLD) Anne Walters, Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT) Kerrian Nobbs, Secretariat

MAIN DISCUSSION, AGREED OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

The meeting opened at 9.20am.

Agenda Item 1 - Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees, thanking those able to attend in person.

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Minutes for the meetings held on 24 February and 7 April 2021, were taken as a correct record and approved, with all actions either having been completed, ongoing or on the agenda for discussion.

Outstanding actions raised at previous Steering Committee meetings were reviewed:

- *Seek bring forward of funding from the Queensland Government and ensure it is included in the Cabinet Submission:*
Process currently underway, with further information about Program funding to be discussed within the meeting.
- *Provide a brief to the Steering Committee with an update on remote sensing surveillance:*
A brief was provided to the Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) during the May 2021 meeting, including a scientific update on the progress and application of the remote sensing project. A further update by the General Manager will be provided verbally within the meeting.
- *SAG to receive a copy of the CSIRO Review and provide advice back to the Steering Committee:*
A copy of the CSIRO report was provided for SAG review at its April/May 2021 meeting, with extensive discussion occurring over two sessions. SAG members have provided written comments out of session, to be collated into a summarised response by the Chair.
- *A media release be prepared from the Steering Committee in relation to the SAG and the CSIRO review:*
To be created following receipt of the summarised response from the SAG and the Program's amended consultation report.
- *Plan for a stakeholder engagement workshop to be held in August 2021:*
On-going, further update to be provided.
- *Program to contact the Queensland Government's Entrepreneur Program to explore if assistance could be provided to the Steering Committee:*
Currently placed on hold due to COVID-19.
- *Program to develop a model for responsive treatment that enforces the shared responsibility (between government, community and industry) for fire ants as per the Biosecurity Act 2014 and the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity:*
Moving to greater enforcement of General Biosecurity Obligation (GBO), with the policy recently being approved. The Program is seeking a clear statement of responsibilities under the GBO, with publication occurring through the Queensland system.
- *Provide Steering Committee members with clarity on the "99% confidence probability" outlined in the Clearance and Proof of Freedom Strategy presentation:*
To be discussed within meeting.

Additional discussion points requiring a follow-up:

- *Updates to the Queensland health legislation so that anybody can self-treat for fire ants:*
Queensland Health have begun work on this, with consultation held in April 2021. The Program is currently working on a proposal to provide to the department. Progress is underway; however, the Program has no control over the timing of this legislation change.
- *Sourcing cheaper bait through a competitive procurement process:*
Further work is required regarding the potential risks inherent in the Program's sole supplier contract for the supply of bait. However, the primary concern is that the cost of bait is hindering the roll-out of self-management. The retail cost of bait is around 10 times more expensive than the wholesale price paid by the Program. To mitigate this cost, investigation is occurring into whether the Program



has the capacity to provide bait directly to self-management clients. A proposal and initial costing for the distribution of bait to self-management clients is required and will be distributed to the Steering Committee at a future meeting.

- *Media response to be drafted by Steering Committee, in partnership with the communication and engagement team, regarding the Program's activation of a governance trigger:*
To be completed out of session.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** the minutes of Meeting 15 and the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 7 April 2021
- **AGREED** the minutes for both meetings can be published to the web, following the publication of the relevant media release
- **AGREED** to draft a media release out-of-session regarding the Program's activation of a trigger, with assistance from the Communication and Engagement team.

Agenda item 1 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
1.	The Program is to develop a draft proposal and cost analysis for the provision of bait to self-management clients.	Program – Strategy Director	August 2021	Closed – no longer applicable.
2.	Media release to be drafted by the Steering Committee regarding the Program's activation of a governance trigger.	Steering Committee / Manager – C&E	June 2021	Completed – Released 15/6

Agenda Item 2 - General Manager's Update and Omnibus

The General Manager provided the Steering Committee with an update on the Program, focusing primarily on the recent detections of importance located outside the operational boundary.

An overview for each of the recent detections was provided, as follows:

- *Tarome:*
Located 5.7 kilometres south of the operational boundary. The initial detection was found at an aquaculture farm, with further nests now detected at nearby cultivated properties. Genetic testing indicates human assisted movement was involved in the initial spread of ants to this region.
- *Mt Sylvia:*
Located 4.3 kilometres south west of the operational boundary with only a single, well established nest detected. The Program is currently investigating whether this nest was in place prior to the operational boundary being established.
- *Clarendon:*
Located 0.8 kilometres north west of the operational boundary. A cluster of nests was detected, including an established nest which suggests the possibility of further undetected nests in the area.
- *Wyralong:*



Located 0.25 kilometres to the west of the closest section of operational boundary, on the western shoreline of Wyaralong dam. The Program is concerned that recent heavy rains in the area may have led to water assisted movement of fire ants from these nests. As such, the treatment area around this infestation has been extended to include an adjacent area considered to be of high risk of infestation.

The General Manager requested the support of the Steering Committee to overspend the budget during the final two months of the treatment season, to allow for the immediate treatment of these recent detections of importance. Sufficient treatment of the detections is expected to result in an over-expenditure of almost \$1M during the 2020-21 financial year. The Steering Committee was advised that the effectiveness of treatment decreased significantly over the cooler months, due to a reduced uptake in bait, and that an urgent response to these nests would reduce the chance of further spread. The Steering Committee supported the bringing forward of \$1M from the 2021-22 budget in principle, pending clarification of how the additional funds will be sourced.

Concerns around the possibility of further detections were discussed, with the Program advising that recent extended wet weather and cooler days had resulted in increased visibility of nests and a higher likelihood of public detections in these areas, where low population density usually reduces the effectiveness of passive surveillance. Remote surveillance is planned for use in these areas during the coming surveillance season, to allow for coverage levels that could not otherwise be achieved on foot.

New detections in the east, specifically at Canungra and the Gold Coast, have been associated with the development of new housing sites. These developments provide excellent fire ant habitat, with the distance between satellite suburbs frequently aligning with known fire ant flight ranges. New responsibilities will be laid out under the updated GBO, with further requirements applied to the 'creators of suitable habitat', such as developers. The Program identified the need for a clear communication strategy with industry prior to the enforcement of these changes. The Steering Committee supported the rapid implementation of this communication program, noting that urgent action was required due to the significant financial cost of each new detection of importance.

The General Manager provided an update of Remote Sensing, including:

- Contractual issues that are continuing surrounding Intellectual Property concerns.
- Remote sensing is planned to be used in an operational capacity during the 2021-22 season, with approximately 50 000 hectares scheduled to be flown. Surveillance will be conducted within the Western Boundary and Area One clearance zones, in addition to the area surrounding the Tarome significant detection. Further training of the technology will occur towards the end of the period, by conducting surveillance in areas of known infestation.
- The forecasted cost of remote sensing in 2021-22 is \$4M, with an expected cost of as little as \$50 per hectare depending on the total area able to be flown. This can be compared to a cost of approximately \$250 per hectare for foot surveillance.



- A direct comparison of the sensitivity between remote sensing surveillance and foot surveillance can be complex, due to variability in the confidence level for each point of interest detected by the remote sensing program. Sufficient training and multiple nests in clusters increase the sensitivity of the technology.

The General Manager requested the endorsement of the Steering Committee to continue Program operations at a business-as-usual rate, acknowledging that this would exhaust the allocated 2021-22 budget around December 2021. The Steering Committee approved this proposal, agreeing that the progress to date could be eroded if operational activities were significantly reduced.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the General Manager's update on the Program, including the information provided within the Omnibus
- **AGREED** that approximately \$1M should be brought forward to the 2020-21 budget, to allow for the immediate treatment of recent detections of importance, subject to formal approval of a bring forward mechanism.
- **REQUESTED** that the Program provide information regarding the financing of funds brought forward
- **AGREED** that the Program should continue to allocate resources in the 2021-22 financial year on a business-as-usual basis, despite a reduced budget
- **NOTED** that in the event that additional funds are not brought forward, activity may be required to cease prior to the end of the 2021-22 financial year.

Agenda Item 2 - Action items	Responsibility	Target	Status
The Program to advise how the supported proposal of \$1M brought forward from 2021-22 budget will be facilitated.	CFO / Program	June 2021	Completed.

Agenda Item 3 – Financial Update

Sarah Mitchell provided an update on the financial position of the Program, as at 31 March 2021.

Discussions included:

- the main contributing factors to the Program's budgetary position, including operational overspends offset by a timing related underspend on bait
- the \$87 000 overspend relating to vehicle hire. This was clarified as an error in the budgetary area that the funds were costed to, and the Committee was advised that a transfer would occur to correct the variance
- the limitations of a 'snapshot' view of the Program's financial position. The General Manager advised the Committee that a new dashboard has been developed to provide a view of financial performance that accounts for the dynamic nature of the Program's expenditure. This calculates the cost per unit delivered by the Program (e.g. cost per hectare treated) and is being used to inform

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management decisions in real time. The Program will provide an example of the dashboard to the Steering Committee out-of-session

- the reconciliation report provided in Attachment D, with table four showing a comparison between the planned cumulative spend of each jurisdiction, as per the Ten Year Plan, and the actual contributions. This table accounts for the bringing forward of funds by the Queensland jurisdiction, with the repayment balance values assuming a cessation of the Program at 30 June 2021. The Steering Committee thanked the Program for the provision of this information and was advised that it will be provided as a standing agenda item in the financial report.

The Program requested the approval of the Steering Committee for the purchase of the 2021-22 capital requirements. The end-of-life replacement of a functional system plotter and a genetic analyser was endorsed by the Steering Committee for a total cost of \$398 515.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the financial update and all attachments, including:
 - the Program's financial dashboard for March 2021
 - the March 2021 YTD Financial Performance Report
 - the Capital Program update
 - the reconciliation report showing the reimbursement impact of clause 18.4 in the collaborative funding agreement
 - the Program's Capital Program Requirements for 2021-22
- **APPROVED** the Program's requested capital purchases of a plotter and a genetic analyser.

Agenda item 3 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
4.	The Ten Year Plan reconciliation document to become a standing agenda item, as per Attachment D.	Program - Finance / Secretariat	Ongoing	BAU
5.	The Program to provide an example dashboard for Steering Committee information out-of-session.	Program – Strategy Director	August 2021	In progress

Agenda Item 4 – Progress update on treatment

Brett Turville provided an update on the treatment progress for this season, including:

- The rate of responsive treatment as a result of public reports has increased by approximately 50 per cent compared to last treatment season, with approximately 15 000 reports responded to at the time of meeting. A recent procedural change has allowed the Program to avoid a backlog, with the average response time to public reports being between one and three days. A large percentage of public reports have originated from the southern suppression area, requiring teams to survey larger rural blocks and regularly treat large clusters of nests. Discussion was held on the ability to reduce load on the Program by incorporating self-treatment or council assistance, with both options currently under investigation by the Program.



- As at 26 May 2021, the Program had treated 274 000 hectares out of a total 311 000 hectares of planned treatment during the 2020-21 season. Planned aerial treatment has concluded, with helicopters redirected to assist with treatment gaps and detections of importance.
- 123 potential treatment days were lost from the aerial team, comprising of a combination of COVID shutdowns, mechanical issues, and inclement weather. Additionally, 51 potential treatment days were lost from ground operations, primarily due to wet weather.
- Treatment in Area 2 is progressing to schedule, with approximately 165 000 hectares completed out of a planned area of 170 000 hectares. All planned aerial operations have been completed, with ground treatment expected to complete planned work in the area on 11 June 2021. Approximately two per cent of the planned treatment area in Area 2 can be considered a 'gap', predominantly due to the permit's restrictions to treatment over a variety of crops or on sites with free-range poultry. The Steering Committee was advised that the provided figures for gaps within Area 2 are expected to be reduced significantly, due to an on-going manual review into areas that were unsuitable habitat during treatment due to flooding.
- During the 2020-21 season, the Program completed responsive treatment at nine significant detections and 55 clearance detections, which were identified within the Western Boundary and Area 1 clearance zones. A further 101 boundary detections were treated.
- The transition from paper-based documentation to a mobile application has been implemented, with initial reviews indicating operational efficiency increases of eight per cent. The online application is also delivering real-time treatment information to inform management decisions.

Discussion was held regarding the need to identify solutions for the treatment of problematic cropped areas, as this is an impediment to 100 per cent treatment coverage. The permit for the bait requires for some crop products to be washed prior to sale, which is causing barriers to treatment that need to be addressed with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA). The Committee agreed to support the Program in its work with the APVMA, and to support the expedition of required changes. Discussion was held around the possibility of interrupting cropping activities while treatment occurred, and the precedents within Biosecurity responses for the reimbursement of costs or lost income.

The Committee was advised that initial results from the toxicant baiting trial in Area 2 were showing little statistical difference regarding the addition of a toxicant round to standard eradication treatment. More nests have died in the areas that received a round of toxicant bait, but this was expected due to slow-acting nature of the Insect Growth Regulator (IGR) bait. Further analysis will take place after all trial areas receive suitable time for the IGR bait to reach full effectiveness.

Toxicant bait is approximately four times more expensive than IGR bait and would have to demonstrate significant benefits for the Program to routinely include it during eradication treatment. However, fast-acting baits have associated benefits related to the reduction in treatment time, such as reduced fixed costs and less time for the infestation to spread.

The Steering Committee:



- **NOTED** the update on treatment progress
- **AGREED** to provide assistance to the Program to facilitate changes to the existing permit, relating to the wash-down requirements for crops the receive treatment
- **NOTED** the operational achievements of the Program, given the difficulties that arose during the 2020-21 treatment season.

Agenda item 4 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
6.	The Program to provide data to the Steering Committee regarding the <i>Synergy Pro</i> field trials.	Program - Science	Sept 2021	In progress.

Agenda Item 5 – Detections of Importance Update

The Steering Committee was provided with a more detailed update on the Program's significant, clearance, and boundary detections.

Discussion points included:

- The importance placed on each of the detections of importance by the Program. The Committee was advised that each detection receives an urgent response, including a risk assessment, immediate treatment, and a communication strategy tailored to inform the local community of the detection.
- Two-kilometre treatment buffer zones have been planned to surround the detections at Mt Sylvia, Clarendon and Tarome. Wyaralong's treatment zone will be expanded to include the waterway to the west of the detection, which is considered a high-risk area. Genetic testing is being performed to confirm a suspected link between the Wyaralong detection and a new detection at Coulson.
- Genetic testing at Wyaralong, Canungra, Tamborine Mountain, and Tarome all suggest the involvement of human assisted movement in the spread of ants to these areas.
- Further investigation and community engagement is planned in Morang, as genetic testing suggests human assisted movement between this suburb and the Tarome detection. A recent compliance audit found the movement of hay between sites without proper compliance to the required movement controls. An advisory notice has been issued to the involved persons.
- Very few clearance detections since March 2021 are within the high-risk clearance zones that received additional eradication treatment during the 2020-2021 treatment season, indicating that the 'mop-up' eradication strategy was successful. The new detections outside these zones appear to be caused by a combination of treatment quality issues during eradication and reinfestation by remnant nests.
- 82 per cent of the 101 boundary detections found during 2020-21 have been located at the southern edge of the operational boundary. The Program recognises that there is a significant infestation in this area that poses a threat to containment of the infestation. Limited resources and competing priorities have constricted the Program from operating to adequately mitigate this risk in the 2020-21 season. Pilot projects for self-treatment are under-way in this region, which are anticipated to alleviate the need for Program-led treatment in high-density suburban areas.



- Only three detections have been identified in Area 2 since January 2021. While further detections are expected over the surveillance season, current data and limited treatment gaps in eradication suggests a promising clearance surveillance result.

Discussion was held regarding the current operational boundary and its continued utility, both as an indicator of the edge of the infestation and as a guide to treatment areas. The Steering Committee encouraged a review of possible alternatives or adjustments to the current boundary to be included in the upcoming Strategic Review.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the latest Detections of Importance
- **SUGGESTED** that the Strategic Review Panel include consideration of the Operational Boundary, and its interaction with Biosecurity Zones and the Interstate Plant Quarantine Boundary, in its review.

Agenda item 5 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda Item 6 – Program Funding

Malcolm Letts provided an overview on the Program's funding following the activation of a trigger, which necessitated Agricultural Senior Officials Committee (AGSOC) approval for the Program's continued operation. AGSOC was asked to approve the interim continuation of the Program, pending the finalisation of an independent strategic review prior to the end of 2021. Approval for this request was granted by AGSOC, with all jurisdictions responding favourably.

The Program anticipates that options for the Program's strategy, as informed by the Strategic Review, will be presented to the Agriculture Ministers (AGMIN) prior to the end of 2021. It is expected that the review will develop eradication and non-eradication options, including evaluating their cost / benefit for all jurisdictions. Members from each jurisdiction were asked to give advance notice to appropriate contacts regarding the possibility of bringing forward additional funds, including for the second half of 2021-22. Steering Committee members will receive information as it becomes available, regarding the possible costs of the Program's future operations.

Malcolm Letts proposed that contingent funding will be required to be brought forward to bridge a possible gap between the exhaustion of the 2021-22 budget and the commencement of any new funding agreement. The Steering Committee endorsed this proposal, understanding that the Program will work to meet set deadlines with the aim of preventing this scenario.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Program's funding
- **AGREED** to attend an August 2021 extraordinary meeting with the Strategic Review panel
- **AGREED** to discuss the possibility of additional funding for the Program with the appropriate departments within their jurisdiction, noting that:
 - an email will be circulated to clarify actions required following the AGSOC determination



- o additional information regarding the Program's proposed financial requirements will be provided to members as it becomes available.

Agenda item 6 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
7.	The National Biosecurity Committee to circulate email to jurisdictions clarifying the outcome of the AGSOC decision, and the actions required as a result.	Malcolm Letts	June 2021	Completed

Agenda item 7– Workplan 2021-22 Options

Andrew Turley provided the Committee with an overview of the proposed Work Plan options for the 2021-22 treatment season. It was acknowledged that the recent detections invalidated the options provided in the brief, as they proposed movement to a new area without appropriately consolidating the progress made to date.

The Program's \$5M contingency budget for the treatment of detections of importance in the 2021-22 season is expected to be fully expended by the response to the recent detections. Consequently, if eradication continues as planned there will be no resources available for the treatment of further detections found during the upcoming surveillance season.

To address this concern, Option Three proposes to:

- commence surveillance as planned, with remote sensing surveillance occurring in Western Boundary and Area 1 and targeted ground surveillance in Area 2
- Delay planned eradication treatment in Area 3 until January 2021, to allow collection and evaluation of surveillance data in the Western Boundary, Area 1, and Area 2 clearance areas.

Given surveillance data is favourable, Option Three proposes to:

- expand the two rounds of planned treatment in the Southern Suppression area from a 2 kilometre buffer from known infestations, to a 5 kilometre buffer
- apply four rounds of eradication treatment to Area 3 over 12 months, from January 2021 – January 2022
- retain the proposed treatment and surveillance activities in other areas, as detailed under Options One and Two.

Surveillance data will be considered favourable if the fire ants found in the clearance areas are limited, allowing for both clearance detections and planned treatment areas to receive eradication treatment within the constraints of the budget.

The Steering Committee approved the delay to treatment in Area 3, requesting that an amended Work Plan be provided out-of-session and include treatment options for both Area 3 and the Southern Suppression area. It was noted that the amended Work Plan will assume favourable surveillance data, as the Program will otherwise be required to remain within the existing clearance zones for the greater part of the season.

Discussion was held around strategic concerns, including:

- the ability of the Program to 'stop the spread' while two thirds of the operational zone was receiving no suppression or eradication treatment. Consideration was given to an 'outside-in' strategy, with



eradication treatment occurring along the full operational boundary to progressively contain and shrink the infestation

- the requirement for the Program to treat in cropped areas and further reduce the likelihood of human assisted movements
- the logistics of treating within suburban settings, and the difficulty and necessity of self-management and self-treatment
- the high resource cost to the Program of responsive treatment, given that it does not contribute to the overall eradication effort. It was noted that this treatment shields the public from the reality of life in an infested area, possibly contributing to an underdeveloped sense of urgency
- the requirement for a large-scale communication Program to encourage the public to engage with the Program and self-treatment, noting that a self-treatment rate of around 30 per cent would be required for a suppression effect
- a need for innovation into more efficient ways of suppressing or eradicating fire ants, such as further investigation into gene silencing. The possibility of federal innovation funding to encourage research was discussed, in addition to the work being performed by the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the information provided in the 2021-22 Work Plan Options brief and attachment
- **AGREED** that eradication efforts in Area 3 should be delayed until the extent of infestation in the Western Boundary and Area 1 clearance areas has been ascertained
- **NOTED** that further review would need to occur prior to the commencement of eradication treatment in Area 3
- **DISCUSSED** the hindrances to treatment in suburban areas, and the status of the alternative treatment options currently being considered
- **SUGGESTED** that further work is needed in the areas of communication and innovation to alleviate pressure on Program resources.

Agenda item 7 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
8.	SAG to meet with CSIRO representative and Andreas Glanznig to discuss rodent gene drive research currently underway.	Steering Committee – Chair/Secretariat	October 2021	In progress, tentative meeting date set.
9.	Program to provide an amended Work Plan to the Steering Committee out of session.	Director – Strategy	June 2021	Completed - meeting held 16 July.

Agenda item 8– CSIRO Report

Heather Leeson provided an overview of the CSIRO review of the Program’s scientific principles and controls, focusing on the report’s assessment of current movement controls. Improvements were suggested to the



management of selected fire ant carriers, to further mitigate the risk of human assisted movement. Based on this assessment, the Program will develop proposed amendments to movement controls for out-of-session consideration by the Steering Committee.

Following endorsement of the amendments, the Program will request members advocate for the measures within their own jurisdictions, as per the recommendation of the Queensland Plant Health Committee (PHC) representative. The Program will then seek agreement through the PHC for national adoption.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the Program's update on the progress of the CSIRO review into the fire ant movement controls and risk mitigation measures
- **NOTED** the key issues and proposed solutions to improve the existing risk mitigation measures prescribed in the Biosecurity Regulations 2016
- **AGREED** to review the proposed amendments to the current movement controls provided in an out-of-session paper.
- **REQUESTED** the Program provide an amended consultation report, including the Scientific Advisory Group's assessment of the CSIRO report, noting any comments provided by Committee members.

Agenda item 8 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
10.	Proposed amendments to movement controls to be sent to Steering Committee for out-of-session approval.	Program - Policy	June 2021	In Progress
11.	Members to send comments on CSIRO consultation report to the Secretariat, as required.	Steering Committee members	June 2021	No further comments were received.
12.	Revised consultation report, and SAG response to CSIRO report, to be presented to the Steering Committee for review out-of-session.	Program - Policy	June 2021	In Progress – uploaded to eHub website.

Agenda item 9 – Self Management update

Chris Hollingdrake discussed the status and learnings from the Program's self-management pilots.

The Steering Committee was advised that:

- three community self-management projects are currently underway, with random control trials occurring at Yarrabilba and the Gold Coast and a community distribution trial occurring at Tamborine Mountain
- Yarrabilba and Gold Coast trials incorporate zones treated by Program staff, to allow comparison of treatment effectiveness and resource costs. No Program treatment will occur during the Tamborine Mountain trial, with bait given directly to community groups and the local Chamber of Commerce for community access and distribution



- in all trials, partnerships were made with local business owners, councillors and community groups. Tailored communication strategies were applied, with media releases in local papers, targeted Facebook advertising and engagement at regional events
- engagement levels have been generally low, with between 10-15 per cent of the community registering to take part. However, engagement has increased with each successive trial as the Program uses learnings to streamline the registration process and reduce barriers to participation
- feedback has been very positive and indicates that people are both interested in treating fire ants and find it easy to do.
- additional self-management projects are ongoing, and are engaging education facilities, sports facilities and other key stakeholders.

The Program is planning to base the next self-treatment pilot in the Ipswich region, scaling up to 20 000 households and increasing participation to the 30 per cent engagement level required for suppression. Investigation is occurring into easier ways for residents to provide consent for the reception of bait, as required by Queensland Health.

A new project assessing the feasibility of community-led responsive treatment is planned for commencement, with trials occurring in Brisbane suburbs. In low-risk scenarios clients may receive bait for self-treatment or be provided with a 'follow-up' baiting kit following Direct Nest Injection (DNI) treatment. Further knowledge is required in this area to reduce the significant resource cost of responsive treatment to the Program.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the Program's update on the self-management pilots.

Agenda item 9 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda item 10 – Proof of Freedom and Clearance

Liz Williams presented the Steering Committee with a risk-based economic model, developed by the Program to assist in identifying and assessing Proof of Freedom (PoF) strategy options.

An overview of the model was given, as follows:

- The model can be used to identify and provide information about a PoF strategy, and can be constricted as required by each of the following factors:
 - the required clearance confidence level
 - the amount of surveillance to be conducted each year
 - the time available or preferred before a declaration of freedom
 - the available funds, or the preferred total cost.
- If there are no constraining factors, the model can instead point to the economically optimal amount of surveillance to be conducted over a given number of years, providing the confidence level that this would achieve.
- The tables used by the model are established in literature and would allow the Program to determine the PoF strategy options, and the predicted costs involved, for a given confidence level. It can also be



used as a risk assessment to determine the potential future costs of ceasing or reducing surveillance in a zone where fire ants may still be present.

- The model can include potential cost savings granted by additional early surveillance and incorporates a financial contingency for possible clearance detections based on a given eradication confidence level.
- The model determines PoF options based on quantitative data, but analysis of the given options will likely be based on qualitative factors such as risk aversion.

The Program advised that the economic model and related documents had not been finalised, and that an expert review will occur prior to implementation.

A discussion was held around the practical use of the model, noting that a demonstration of its outputs would assist in a better understanding of the concept. The Steering Committee accepted the use of the model as a decision-making tool by the Program, following expert review.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the updated Clearance and Proof of Freedom Strategy
- **NOTED** that the economic figures were not final
- **DISCUSSED** the information proposed by the attached document, including:
 - the usefulness of the model in determining an appropriate confidence level
 - the ability of the model to factor in non-economic considerations
 - the criteria for selecting the Proof of Freedom Strategy
- **SUGGESTED** that the outputs of the model be presented to the Steering Committee for consideration in the determination of a Clearance and Proof of Freedom Strategy.

Agenda item 10 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
13.	The Program to retrospectively apply model to the Western Boundary, to verify its accuracy.	Program - Science	July 2021	Completed – advice provided to Steering Committee.
14.	The Program to use model to generate recommended Proof of Clearance strategy options for the anticipated clearance zones, for Steering Committee review.	Director - Strategy	October 2021	In progress.

Agenda item 11 – Systems and Intelligence

Mark Winter provided an overview of the Program's technical architecture and advised the Steering Committee about upcoming projects.

The Steering Committee was advised that:



- existing systems currently in use by the Program, the Fire Ant Management System (FAMS) and the Community and Stakeholder Engagement System (CaSES), present barriers to the Program's agile operations and ongoing improvement
- recent advancements have identified constraints and opportunities within the existing systems, eg. the online mobility tool 'Forage' presents crucial improvements in the timeliness of Program data, but reporting ability remains limited by the Program's current platforms
- the Program's operations are shifting to focus on self-management, which places greater importance on stakeholder engagement. The CaSES Customer Relationship Management (CRM) portal must have the capacity to fulfil these increased demands and integrate with the other technologies in use
- increasing licencing fees and fluctuating levels of technical support services have been identified as risks to the Program.

To respond to these identified concerns, the Program plans to commission a systems architecture review to take place in 2021-22. The review will assess the existing systems in use by the Program and recommend improvements to better suit the Program's requirements going forward.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the Program's update on the technological changes that have occurred during the 2020-21 financial year.
- **NOTED** the requirement to contract an external review on the Program's existing information architecture and provide alternative solutions to identified problems.

Agenda item 11 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
15.	The Program to commission a systems architecture review in 2021-22.	Program – Business Systems and Intelligence.	June 2022	Review completed.

Agenda item 12 – Strategic Review Progress

The Committee Chair provided an update on the progress of the Strategic Review.

The Committee was advised that the review panel will have flexibility in setting the scope of the review and the areas of focus, with matters of significance suggested within the Terms of Reference. The central aim of the review is to assess feasibility of achieving the goals set out in the Ten Year Plan, and to provide a recommended strategy going forward.

The Panel will be chaired by Dr Helen Scott-Orr and will include Will Zacharin and Dr Monica Gruber. A draft report is expected to be submitted at the end of August 2021, with a final copy going to the National Biosecurity Committee by the end of September 2021, following peer review. Interaction between the panellists and the Steering Committee is recommended, with members encouraged to provide advice freely. Andrew Turley will work with the panel to provide support in the early stages, before using the panel's recommendations to draft a revised Work Plan. The creation of the Work Plan will run in parallel to the review process due to tight timeframes.

It was noted that an upcoming cost benefit analysis commissioned by the Program is likely to be of interest to the review. Contact between the Dr Megan Star, who will be conducting the analysis, and the review panel was recommended by the Steering Committee.



The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update provided on the progress of the Strategic Review.
- **NOTED** that Melanie Blankenberg will be acting in the position of Director of Strategy for the duration of the review.

Agenda item 12 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
16.	Secretariat to distribute Cost Benefit Analysis proposal to Committee members.	Secretariat	May 2021	Completed
17.	Secretariat support to be made available to review panel to ensure efficient use of time.	Program – General Manager	June 2021	Completed

Agenda item 13 – Other Business

An extraordinary meeting will be held face-to-face in August 2021, to facilitate discussion between the Steering Committee and the Strategic Review panel.

Discussion was held around the current status of the Program's activation of a governance trigger, and the need to release a media statement.

The Program agreed to provide the Steering Committee with information regarding the results of remote sensing surveillance in Tarome, as it becomes available.

The Steering Committee:

- **AGREED** that an extraordinary face-to-face meeting will take place in August 2021, to allow for consultation with the review panel and discussion of the revised Work Plan.

Agenda item 13 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
18.	Face to face meeting with the review panel be scheduled prior to the August Steering Committee Meeting.	Secretariat	August 2021	Completed – workshop held 26 August.
19.	The Program to update the Steering Committee on the results of the planned remote sensing surveillance around the Tarome detection.	Director – Strategy	August 2021	Covered in August Meeting Agenda # 7

The meeting closed at 3:25 pm.

The next face-to-face meeting will be held in August 2021.