



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

Teleconference

Wednesday 18 November 2020

10.00am – 1.00pm

Tuesday 24 November 2020

1.00pm – 4.00pm

MINUTES – MEETING 14

ATTENDANCE

Attendees	<p>Wendy Craik, Chair</p> <p>Jo Laduzko, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (C'wealth)</p> <p>John Robertson, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) (QLD)</p> <p>Scott Charlton, Department of Primary Industries (NSW)</p> <p>John van Schagen, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA)</p> <p>Nigel Ainsworth, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (VIC)</p> <p>Anne Walters, Department of Primary Industry and Resources (NT)</p> <p>Justine Clark, Chief Finance Officer, DAF (QLD)</p>
Program Presenters	<p>Graeme Dudgeon, General Manager</p> <p>Andrew Turley, Strategy Director</p> <p>Brett Turville, Operations Director</p> <p>Liz Williams, Manager, Science</p> <p>Sarah Mitchell, A/ Manager, Business Support and Governance</p> <p>Francois Van der Merwe, A/Business Support Officer, Finance</p>
Observers	<p>Malcolm Letts, Deputy Director-General/Chief Biosecurity Officer, Biosecurity Queensland, (DAF)</p> <p>Heather Lesson, Manager, Policy</p>
Secretariat	<p>Kerrian Nobbs (NRIFAEP)</p>
Apologies	<p>Lloyd Klumpp, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (TAS)</p>



MAIN DISCUSSION, AGREED OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

The meeting opened at 10.00am.

Agenda Item 1 - Introduction

The Chair opened the 14th meeting and welcomed all attendees, noting Lloyd Klumpp as an apology.

Due to COVID-19 and time constraints, the meeting was condensed to a three hour teleconference meeting and discussion was on agenda items 1 – 4. Agenda items 5 and 6 to be discussed on Tuesday, 24 November 2020.

The Chair provided an overview of the day's agenda and objectives and expressed that we are at a critical point in the Program and there are some important discussions and decisions to be made.

Minutes for Meeting 13, held on 20 August 2020 were taken as a correct record and approved, with all actions having been completed, ongoing or on the agenda. The Steering Committee is to receive a copy of the final CSIRO report and the University of Melbourne Modelling Report out of session.

The Chair advised that Bill Magee's term as Chair of the National Exotic Invasive Ant Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) expires on 31 January 2021 and sought member's endorsement to offer a further two year contract to Bill Magee to Chair the SAG.

The Steering Committee:

- **APPROVED** the minutes of Meeting 13
- **AGREED** the minutes for Meeting 13 can be published to the web
- **NOTED** the Steering Committee will receive a copy of the final CSIRO report and the University of Melbourne Modelling Report out of session
- **AGREED** to offer Bill Magee, Chair of the SAG a further two year contract.

Agenda item 1 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
1.	Minutes of Meeting 13 to be published to the web.	Program - Secretariat	December 2020	Completed
2.	Program to prepare a two year contract for Bill Magee to continue as Chair of the SAG.	Program – Procurement	December 2020	Completed
3.	Provide a copy of the University of Melbourne Modelling Report to the Steering Committee.	Program – Strategy Director	November 2020	Completed, sent to SC 18/11/20.



Agenda Item 2 - General Manager's Update and Omnibus

Steering Committee members were provided an Omnibus, including an update on:

- Containment Update 2020-21
 - Human assisted spread mitigation
 - Boundary Containment
 - New infestation beyond the 2019-2020 operational boundary
 - Planned surveillance progress
- Review of the Program's Operational Boundary
- Update of 2020-21 Work Plan.

The options available to update the Work Plan were discussed in Agenda Item 4.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the update on the Program in the Omnibus
- **AGREED** to discuss the update to the Work Plan in Agenda Item 4.

Agenda Item 2 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

Agenda Item 3 – Financial Update

The Steering Committee received an oral update from Graeme Dudgeon on the finances and the management of the cash flows against the budget.

Francois Van der Merwe gave a summary of the financial results for September 2020, including overspends and underspends. Additional expenses were incurred due to COVID-19 in relation to hiring extra vehicles to limit passengers in the vehicles as per restrictions.

Costings of the Work Plan to be discussed in Agenda Items 4 and 5.

The Program's Financial Dashboard was provided to Steering Committee members for feedback out of session.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the Program's draft Financial Dashboard and **AGREED** to provide feedback out of session
- **NOTED** the Capital Program update
- **NOTED** the September 2020 YTD Financial Performance Report, also noting the variances
- **NOTED** the Program's breakdown of the 20-21 budget
- **NOTED** and **AGREED** to the 2020-21 Contributions by Cost Sharing Partners

Agenda item 3 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
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4.	Provide comments on the Program's Financial Dashboard provided at Attachment A.	Steering Committee Members	4 December 2020	Comments received.
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Agenda Item 4 – Results of Surveillance of First Eradication Area

Graeme Dudgeon provided an overview of the surveillance results of Area 1 and the Western Boundary, the extra treatment required and the resulting implications for the 2020/21 Work Plan. Results and patterns are currently being analysed to determine if the Program has done enough to have a high level of confidence of clearance in the future. Final clearance results will not be delivered in a short timeframe, it will take a number of years.

There have been learnings from the first three years of the Program and the eradication in Area 1. The Program has changed its approach for eradication in Area 2.

Liz Williams provided a presentation on the:

- Five phases of the clearance and proof of freedom strategy:
 - Phase 1 – Containment – areas that are not currently in the eradication area receive responsive treatment to limit the fire ants moving to uninfested zones
 - Phase 2 – Eradication – large contiguous areas receiving broadscale treatments, applied at the correct intervals over 1 – 3 years depending on the eradication treatment approach
 - Phase 3 – Clearance – Area 1 and Western Boundary are now in the clearance phase. Currently gathering data to get to point of having an understanding of the probability of being clear of ants
 - Phase 4 - Clearance Zone Freedom – surveillance in clearance zones (2 500 ha) until proof of freedom (in process of being defined) is reached (1-5 years)
 - Phase 5 - Area Freedom – when the overall probability of Freedom is $\geq 99\%$; > 5 years for the entirety of SEQ infestation.
- Certainty of Eradication – currently still in the early phase of clearance, not expecting to have sufficient data for a number of years.
- Clearance Surveillance – 2 500 hectare 'Clearance Zones' serve as the basic units for determining local eradication. Surveyed the highest priority areas in terms of risk based on a range of criteria eg. how well the area had been treated and the known infestation. As at 8 November 2020, 7 000 ha have been surveyed, with remnant fire ants detected in 17 of 93 clearance zones. Only 2% of sites surveyed had RIFA detected. Future models could take into consideration the different habitat or terrain.
- 13 Risk Priorities Categories - percentage of infestation and how each of the 1 ha grid cells were surveyed. Adjustments are needed in how the risk categories and level of risk is being assigned.
- Eradication treatment evaluation - approximately 4% of Area 1 and the Western Boundary has been surveyed to date, with the majority of the infestations found relating to cropping areas. A Project Officer has been recruited to assist with facilitating treatment in cropping areas. The RIFA population in Area 1 and the Western Boundary has been substantially reduced, and possibly eliminated from a



number of clearance zones. More surveillance must be conducted to increase statistical certainty that fire ants are absent where there have been no recent detections. Surveillance will also locate remnant RIFA for immediate targeted treatment. The model will continually be adapted as data comes in and results are analysed.

Andrew Turley and Graeme Dudgeon provided an overview of the possible options and the recommended amendments to the 2020-21 Work Plan, to complete the work within the budget allocation of \$58M and/or bring forward of funding to address the southern containment spread this treatment season.

In relation to the proposed work program, the first major assessment of the results of recent surveillance was that additional targeted eradication treatment in Area 1 and the Western Boundary is critical. The demonstration of treatment innovation is also critical, particularly around the four planned treatments in Area 2. Discussion of the risk in the Southern Containment Zone in relation to stopping the spread south and into the Gold Coast area generated debate about whether funds should be brought forward to treat that area now.

The Program recommended Option 3:

1. Area 1/WB – three IGR treatments 2km from infestations detected during clearance surveillance
2. Area 1/2 overlap – reduce to one IGR treatment
3. Area 2 – maintain at four treatments using combinations of IGR and Toxicant baits
4. Area 2/3 overlap – Maintain at two IGR treatments
5. Reduce self-management treatment in the Gold Coast to one IGR treatment
6. Western Boundary – Reduce to nil treatment – but increasing communications and engagement to encouraging surveillance and self-treatment.

The Chair suggested consideration of Option 4, bringing forward \$9M to enable treatment of Area 1 and the Western Boundary without needing to modify the existing approved Work Plan. Issues to consider include the likelihood of funds being available this financial year given the approvals processes and the logistical issues of getting the bait down, time to hire extra staff, aircraft availability and hiring of extra vehicles (adhering to COVID-19 restrictions).

The Steering Committee noted that the National Biosecurity Committee (NBC) needs to be advised of any proposals to change funding, timing etc

There is a high probability that the upcoming treatment season will also be impacted by the forecast of wet weather, which could result in a reduction in costs this year due to not being able to treat. The Program does factor in contingencies for disruptions from natural disaster events.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** and **DISCUSSED** the update provided on the Results of Surveillance of the First Eradication Area and the options for amendments to the 2020-21 Work Plan
- **AGREED** in principle that the Work Plan needed to change in response to clearance detections and to the Program adopting option 3 until revised Work Plan options that include treatment of the Southern Containment area are developed and discussed
- **AGREED** the Program will provide a paper to include the options, recommendations and feasibility of Work Plans the include treatment of the Southern Containment area in 2020-21



- **AGREED** that Steering Committee members will investigate the possibility to bring forward funding for subsequent reallocation to other jurisdictions over time for treatment of the Southern Containment Area
- **AGREED** that the Program is heading in the right direction and it is important to continue with eradication.

Agenda item 4 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
5.	Program to provide a paper on a preliminary assessment of the feasibility on the options and recommendations and the ability for ground treatment in the Southern Containment Zone in 2020-21, including contingencies for weather events.	Program – Operations	24 November 2020	Completed
6.	Investigate the possibility for jurisdictions to bring forward funding for this financial year to incorporate treatment of the Southern Containment Zone.	Steering Committee members	24 November 2020	In Progress
7.	Program to provide Steering Committee with a summary of extra costs due to COVID-19.	Program – Operations	December 2020	Completed
8.	Provide Steering Committee members with clarity on the “99% confidence probability” outlined in the Clearance and Proof of Freedom Strategy presentation.	Program – Science	February 2021	Completed
9.	Presentation to be circulated to Steering Committee Members	Program – Science / Secretariat	November 2020	Completed, sent 20/11/20.

The meeting closed at pm 1.10pm



WEDNESDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2020

Agenda Item 4 – Results of Surveillance of First Eradication Area - Continued.....

Graeme Dudgeon provided an overview of the “options paper” outlining the treatment and funding options to include the Southern Containment Area, with built in weather contingencies at 40%. For treatment of the Southern Containment Area, groundwork will be the biggest challenge due to recruitment of field staff and hire of vehicles.

Discussions followed on scheduling of the treatment options and additional funding that would be required for each option. Consensus was that bring forward of funding for this treatment season from cost share partners would be difficult as most Governments will be funding core business only. However, the Steering Committee agreed that some form of treatment should commence in the Southern Containment Area this treatment season to avoid movement of RIFA into New South Wales; continue with surveillance and treatment in Area 1 and the Western Boundary; and planned eradication in Area 2.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the Options Paper provided by the Program
- **AGREED** that the Program will develop and provide more options that would fit within the existing budget.
- **AGREED** that at this stage, the Program will continue with the current Work Plan.

Agenda item 4 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
10	Update the Options Paper to include more options to fit within the existing budget.	Program - Operations	4 December 2020	Completed

Agenda Item 5 – Update of Ten-Year Plan and Timetable and Process for Updating NBC/AGMIN

The Program provided the Steering Committee with a draft update of the Ten-Year Plan which reflects the experience and learnings of the past three years of operation. Discussion followed and it was agreed that the Ten-Year Plan have an immediate update to include costings and the spread of RIFA, and a further update following results of surveillance, self-management pilots, spread modelling etc.

Early in 2021, the NBC/AGMIN should be updated on the learnings and progress of the Program, the changes in strategy, the potential options and a revised Ten-Year Plan.

The Steering Committee:

- **AGREED** to the immediate updating of the Ten-Year Plan
- **AGREED** Steering Committee members will provide comments on the update of the Ten-Year Plan
Out of Session
- **ENDORSE** the redrafting of the Ten-Year Plan when results are available from surveillance, pilots and modelling.

Agenda item 5 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
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11	Update the Ten-Year Plan as drafted and include costings and spread.	Program – Policy	February 2021	In Progress
12	Provide comments on the update of the Ten-Year Plan to the Secretariat.	Steering Committee members	February 2021	Completed

Agenda Item 6 – Update from Sub-Committee Meetings

Risk Management Sub-Committee (RMSC)

The RMSC met by video-conference on 15 September 2020, receiving a project update and discussing key strategic risks relating to:

- the 2020-21 treatment season
- funding
- surveillance capability and proof of freedom
- weather impacts
- self-management and community engagement
- containment strategies.

The RMSC also completed its annual review of the Risk Management Policy and Plan and approved the updated document; and reviewed the Risk and Issues Registers; the Business Improvement Plan and Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Implementation plans and progress.

The RMSC initiated work to develop a proposed program of audits to assist Program management and provide assurance to the Steering Committee.

National Exotic Invasive Ant Scientific Advisory Group (SAG)

The SAG met by video-conference on 20 October 2020. The primary objective was to review and analyse the results of surveillance in Area 1 and the Western Boundary and to discuss the final report on spread-modelling work submitted by Monash University and the University of Melbourne.

The SAG agreed that surveillance and eradication activities must continue in Area 1 and the Western Boundary and that the Southern Containment Area remain a management priority for the Program.

Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Sub-Committee (E&ERSC)

The E&ERSC met by video-conference on 23 November 2020. Further recommendations from the review were added to the completed list. Other recommendations are progressing, with more being added to the Business Improvement Plan, which will also be included in the quarterly and monthly reports and reported against the KPIs. Some recommendations are incomplete in relation to communication arrangements, the campaign website and the subsequent delays.



The next E&E review is due to commence in the second half of 2021. The Steering Committee will discuss this item in the February 2021 meeting.

The Steering Committee were provided with the E&E Review Progress Report for endorsement for publishing.

The Steering Committee:

- **NOTED** the updates from the:
 - Risk Management Sub-Committee
 - National Exotic Invasive Ant Scientific Advisory Group
 - Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Sub-Committee
- **AGREED** for the October 2020 Efficiency and Effectiveness Review Report to be published
- **AGREED** to discuss the 2021 E&E Review in the February 2021 meeting.

Agenda item 6 - Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
13	Advise the E&ERSC Project Officer that the E&E Review Report can be published to the web.	Secretariat	November 2020	Completed
14	Add 2021 E&E Review to the February 2021 Steering Committee meeting agenda.	Secretariat	February 2021	On Agenda

Agenda item 7– Other Business

- The Chair advised that the February 2021 meeting would be held as a two day 'face to face' meeting in Brisbane, COVID-19 restrictions permitting.
- The Program updated the Steering Committee on the progress of the collaboration with the University of Queensland around 'wetttable' bait, which is currently going through commercialisation and intellectual property. It is hoped a product will be available for next treatment season.

Agenda item 7 – Action items		Responsibility	Target	Status
	Nil			

The meeting closed at 2.30pm.

The next meeting will be held on 24 February 2021.