

2023 Queensland Audit Office Audit: National Fire Ant Eradication Program

(response update June 2025)

Recommendation ID	Program Response	Status (April 2025)	Deliverable	Owner
07	Agree	In Progress	National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP or the program) assurance plan	Executive Program Director
Queensland Audit Office (QAO) Audit Recommendation				
<p>We recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen its approach for assessing the progress and outcomes of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program (Chapter 5). Decisions about what to do next should be guided by independent assessments grounded by scientific data and modelling. This should include periodically assessing whether it is technically feasible to eradicate fire ants from Queensland. 				
Initial Program Response (June 2023)				
Implementation Q1 2023/2024 (subject to acceptance of revised national response plan).				
Earlier Program Response (February 2024)				
<p>The NFAEP has expanded the scope of the previous risk management sub-committee to include assurance. The committee comprises independent experts who will oversee the program assurance plan and report to the National Fire Ant Eradication Program Consultative Committee (NFAEP CC) and the NFAEP National Management Group (NMG). A 3-line assurance approach is currently under development. The Fire Ant Response Plan 2023–27 outlines several assurance checkpoints and gates throughout the program’s duration to ensure the vision of eradication remains viable and technically feasible.</p>				
Previous Program Response (July 2024)				
<p>The NMG approved the NFAEP assurance plan in June 2024. Work has started on establishing the first lines of defence (operational-level risk controls) and sizing projects to determine what level of assurance is required, aligning with the Queensland Government Portfolio and the NFAEP and project assurance framework.</p>				

Assessing if it is still technically feasible to eradicate fire ants, and if the NFAEP is achieving its strategic objectives will form part of end of tranche one (Dec 2025) and end of tranche 2 (no later than Jan 2027) reviews.

Updated Program Response (April 2025)

Since 2023 the Program has been implementing eradication activities under the National Fire Ant Eradication Response Plan 2023-27 (the Plan). The Plan builds upon lessons learnt from past plans and expands delivery across eradication treatment, compliance and surveillance. The Plan also implements a change of governance to align with other National Biosecurity Emergency Response Arrangements (NEBRA).

This allows the Program to leverage established processes and procedures that improve accountability to the national cost-share partners and support efficient practice and robust decision making. The Program has adapted and continues to trial and implement innovative and efficient approaches, such as increasing the use of drones to deliver treatment product. The Program has also started utilising intelligence models and community education to address community negative sentiment and non-compliance.

The program utilises the technical expertise of the NFAEP Risk Management and Assurance Committee and an NFAEP Consultative Committee to test Program progress, including technical feasibility of eradication and provide expert guidance on managing risks and issues that can impact Program progress.

Recommendation ID	Program Response	Status (April 2025)	Deliverable	Owner
08	Agree	In Progress	Program business case	Executive Program Director
Queensland Audit Office (QAO) Audit Recommendation				
<p>We recommend the (Qld) Department of Agriculture and Fisheries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report its progress in eradicating fire ants from Queensland (chapter 5) and the outcomes of its activities. This should include developing and reporting regularly on performance measures that show how well the program is achieving its outcomes, such as the size of the fire ant infestation over time. 				
Initial Program Response (June 2023)				
<p>Implementation Q1 2023/2024 (subject to acceptance of revised national response plan). The NFAEP has started quarterly reporting via milestone reports endorsed by the Program Board and approved by the NFAEP NMG. The enhanced intelligence capability will facilitate the provision of more comprehensive information for progress monitoring and reporting.</p>				
Earlier Program Response (February 2024)				
<p>The NFAEP is currently enhancing its program-level reporting to ensure it meets the diverse needs of multiple stakeholder groups. An outline of this reporting approach will be provided as part of the NFAEP business case and 2024/2025 work plan approval at the May NFAEP NMG meeting.</p> <p>The NFAEP acknowledges the inconsistency in public reporting in previous years, which has contributed to public perceptions of poor performance, as reflected in the submissions to the Senate Inquiry.</p> <p>Therefore, the NFAEP will use all available tools, including behavioural insights models to ensure the complexity of the NFAEP's performance can be effectively communicated to meet the needs and interests of stakeholders.</p>				
Previous Program Response (July 2024)				
<p>In June 2024, NMG members received a program update which outlined the strategy to efficiently and effectively deliver the NFAEP work plan 2024–25. This plan includes tailored, localised approaches to operational controls, and further use of new and improved aerial treatment and surveillance methods on a larger scale.</p> <p>Members approved the introduction of an eradication treatment protection area, which involves the NFAEP conducting responsive treatment up to 2 km inside the planned eradication treatment area. This change will further strengthen the NFAEP's response to recommendation 6 of the Strategic Program Review (2021).</p>				



NFAEP is currently implementing a revised reporting model, focused on ensuring repeatable and reliable information that demonstrates the effectiveness and impacts of its efforts. All outstanding milestone reports are complete.

Updated Program Response (April 2025)

The Program has several mechanisms in place to measure and report progress and outcomes and assure independent expert advice and assessment of its' activities. This includes periodic public reporting against strategic review recommendations, quarterly and annual reporting on progress and outcomes, in addition to regular governance reporting on delivery progress, Program finances, risks and issues.

This year the Program is required to undertake an independent end of tranche review (otherwise known as a Gate 0 Strategic Review) to determine if the program is on track to deliver its strategic objectives and provide confidence to the cost share partners to release the next two years of funding to continue eradication efforts. The review is due to be delivered to the National Management Group by the end of December 2025.