



## 2021 strategic review recommendations – National Fire Ant Eradication Program response update

Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
01	Partially adopted	Pending approval	The National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP) governance model, including updated Terms of Reference (ToR)	Executive Program Director
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
<p>The Steering Committee is progress consideration of strengthened national governance arrangements with the cost-sharing partners, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>expanding the expertise of the Steering Committee either by a larger membership or subcommittee of Queensland Government representatives; and</li><li>strengthening the independence of the Steering Committee by providing a small part of the Commonwealth contribution directly through Department of Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to fund the Steering Committee's Independent Chair and two project officers</li></ul>				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>While governance arrangements will be reviewed, additional governance structures have been implemented both within the NFAEP and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF).</p>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>An updated governance structure has been designed and is subject to final approval at the NFAEP National Management Group (NMG) meeting on 22 February 2024. Partial acceptance pertains to the recommendation regarding funding DAFF to provide for the Steering Committee Independent Chair and 2 project officers. The governance structure has been revised with the retirement of the Steering Committee, and the NFAEP has established a Program Office and provides national secretariat functions.</p>				





Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
02	Not adopted	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Queensland Government form a RIFA Interdepartmental Committee to coordinate intrastate management of RIFA partnership with the National Program and to report regularly to the Steering Committee on its performance against agreed milestones.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
The existing NFAEP already reports performance internally to QDAF, Chief Biosecurity Officer (CBO), DAF Leadership Board (DLB) and the Director-General (DG), while providing information to the national Steering Committee and seeking approvals of Agriculture Senior Officials Committee (AGSOC) and Agriculture Ministers Meeting (AGMM). Creating such a structure would result in unnecessary duplication. It's worth noting that the NFAEP has implemented a new internal governance structure that enhances accountability and reporting against planned objectives. Additionally, one of the core functions of the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce (FAST) is to engage and collaborate with government departments across different levels (local, state and federal).				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
The updated NFAEP governance outlined in Recommendation 1 allows for cost-share partner involvement in the Program Board and further contributes to strengthening the Board's independence.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
03	Noted	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
Other jurisdictions, especially NSW, develop a whole-of-government approach to RIFA similar to Queensland, including broadscale communications, local government engagement, RIFA high-risk carrier movement control compliance and RIFA incursion preparedness.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
Responsibility rests with individual jurisdictions. The NFAEP will support individual jurisdictions by providing expertise, policies, communication materials, and highlighting technological or innovative approaches as needed.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
NSW has confirmed that it is implementing a whole-of-government approach in its responses. This is formalised through the State Emergency Management Committee and through engagements across all departments and local governments. Departments such as Service NSW, Transport for NSW, Police and Education have been very involved. NSW has also closely collaborated with the Redevelopment Authority and Public Works in relation to the Wardell incursion. Engagement with local government, through councils and joint organisations, has proven to be useful in delivering the communication and engagement strategy.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
04	Adopted	In Progress	National communications strategy	Director, Customer Experience and Engagement
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Program be responsible for implementing the national communications strategy approved by the Steering Committee, and for producing national advisory material to improve community awareness of RIFA risks and encourage passive surveillance and preventative behaviour - particularly for urban and peri-urban areas across SEQ and northern NSW - with state contacts and local arrangements for reporting and managing RIFA inserted as required.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
The NFAEP is developing and implementing a communication and engagement strategy to support its objectives. Additionally, the NFAEP will collaborate with the National Biosecurity Communication and Engagement Network (NBCEN) to ensure coordinated key messaging and engagement across all jurisdictions, and that materials are available as noted in Recommendation 3.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
The NFAEP has developed and begun implementing a national communication and engagement strategy to support its objectives. The NFAEP are currently consulting with NBCEN to ensure coordinated key messaging and engagement across all jurisdictions.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
05	Adopted	In progress	National Communications Strategy	Director, Customer Experience and Engagement
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Queensland Government strongly support RIFA risk communication and engagement by the Program, with specific messages from the Program customised for different sectors through QDAF and other government agencies on a whole-of-government basis, emphasising the potential seriousness of RIFA across all sectors and how to recognise, report and manage them in different situations.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>The NFAEP's communication strategies run year-round based on an annual plan and focus on key priority areas, organised into 4 pillars. Each pillar is designed to contribute to program objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Look for and report fire ants</b> – encourage stakeholders in target areas to check their properties and report fire ants.</li><li>• <b>Let our fire ant teams in</b> – build stakeholder trust and support for the NFAEP to help eradicate fire ants in the community.</li><li>• <b>Don't spread the fire ants</b> – empower stakeholders to understand and comply with fire ant biosecurity zones and associated material movement controls.</li><li>• <b>Treat fire ants yourself</b> – encourage stakeholders to proactively treat properties they own or manage for fire ants.</li></ul> <p>The NFAEP will leverage communication channels available across the Queensland Government. Additionally, FAST will directly engage with all levels of government to communicate the seriousness of the threat posed by RIFA. Communication methods may vary from rural to peri-urban to urban areas to achieve the best results.</p>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
The NFAEP continues to run a year-round campaign consisting of communication, engagement, and marketing deliverables, focusing on 4 key pillars. Each pillar is designed to contribute to the overall NFAEP objectives and encourage stakeholders to adopt fire ant-safe behaviours. The campaign operates in regular intervals and uses a range of communication and engagement channels to deliver relevant messages to the right audience at the right time. This includes sharing materials with government, industry, and community stakeholders for distribution across their networks and available communication channels.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (Feb 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
06	Partially adopted	In progress	Treatment strategy	Director, Treatment and Surveillance
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
For Option A or B, the Program conduct ongoing suppressive treatment at least 10km outside and 2km inside the revised operational boundary for some years to prevent further creeping RIFA spread.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
The treatment strategy proposed will treat areas 10 kilometres out from known infestation.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>The Steering Committee has adopted this strategy. However, delays in funding have led to partial implementation to date. Specifically, during 2023–24, the treatment strategy includes broadscale treatment in the outer 5–10 kilometre area of the 12 kilometres (approximately) eradication treatment area. The objective is to achieve &gt;99.00% confidence that no viable fire ant nest is present. To achieve this, the area may receive up to 6 rounds of treatment consecutively over multiple years. The commencement of these rounds has been staggered during 2023–24 and in future years.</p> <p>Note: the term ‘suppressive treatment’ is now replaced with ‘eradication treatment’.</p>				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
07	Noted (alternative treatment options proposed)	In Progress	Treatment strategy and responsive strategy	Director, Treatment and Surveillance
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
For Option A, the Program continue broadscale treatment across all agricultural parts of the Operational Zone, with on-ground follow-up as needed to address any gaps.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>The NFAEP has prioritised the need to contain and delimit the RIFA infestation. The scale-up activities (optimal hectares) aim to cover 299,000 unique hectares annually (equivalent to 897,000 hectares after 3 rounds of Insect Growth Regulator (IGR). Effective treatment is planned in an eradication treatment area around the infestation, aiming for &gt;99% confidence that fire ants will not be present after the completion of eradication treatment activities. Broadscale treatment is scheduled to conclude by 2031–32.</p> <p>Responsive treatment will continue to detect, treat, and accelerate eradication of polygyne-form fire ants across the region following the current protocol (Direct Nest Ingestion (DNI) + IGR to 500m).</p>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>Due to delays in funding certainty, the NFAEP is currently focusing on an updated 5-kilometre eradication treatment band, which amounts to approximately 158,229 hectares of treatment (unique). This equates to 387,664 hectares after 1 to 3 rounds of treatment planned for different areas in 2023–24).</p> <p>Effective treatment is planned in an eradication treatment area around the infestation to achieve &gt;99.00% confidence that no viable fire ant nest is present. This may require up to 6 rounds of IGR treatment per eradication treatment area, with broadscale treatment predicted to conclude in 2031–32.</p> <p>The 2024–25 workplan will focus on achieving outcomes that will lead to &gt;99.00% confidence that no viable fire ant nest is present across the 299,000 unique hectares in the eradication treatment area.</p>				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
08	Adopted	In progress	Seasonal bait trial, sequence bait trial, wettable bait testing, and eDNA detection field trials	Manager, Science
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Program review and strengthen its guidelines for surveillance and treatment around newly found infestations to maximise the likelihood of eradicating them in one season.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>Previous scientific monitoring by the NFAEP suggested that using baits with different modes of action from IGR treatment reduces the time needed to achieve eradication of fire ants, compared with the standard treatment regime of 3 IGR treatment applications per year over 2 years (i.e., 6 IGR applications total).</p> <p>A large-scale science trial in the 2022–23 season will continue to evaluate eradication efficiency (in terms of time) by adding a round of Advion fire ant bait to annual treatment regimes. These results will inform future NFAEP planning and cost analyses.</p> <p>The use of environmental DNA (eDNA) to expedite the detection of fire ants and/or confidence in their eradication is another area under investigation by collaborators. Early research shows promise, and the program aims to move to the testing phase in the short to medium term as a novel surveillance method.</p>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>A large-scale bait sequence trial to test the addition of a toxicant (Advion) to the current treatment regime and reduce the eradication period was planned for the 2022–23 season. However, this trial was unable to proceed due to the unexpected loss of aerial bait deployment capability. The trial has been redesigned to ensure progress and is rescheduled to commence in 2024.</p> <p>In support of this recommendation, a seasonal bait trial was initiated in 2023 to assess the efficacy of IGR treatment during the winter months compared to the warmer months and to explore options for reducing the eradication period. The trial will be completed in early 2024.</p> <p>A trial of the feasibility of using bait in a wettable matrix will be undertaken in early 2024 to determine if this can support treatment during the summer rainy season.</p>				





NATIONAL

## Fire Ant Eradication

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Research into the use of eDNA to enhance detection and surveillance has progressed with the development of a fire ant-specific genetic assay in collaboration with the University of Canberra. In early 2024, the program will commence field testing in collaboration with James Cook University to assess the feasibility of detection. If successful, further refinement will follow.



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (Feb 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
09	Adopted	In progress	Polygyne eradication strategy to be approved	Manager, Science
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
A more aggressive polygyne eradication program be implemented throughout the Operational Zone, with best practice intensive treatment and follow-up surveillance for all known polygyne sites.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
A polygyne eradication strategy is being developed to accelerate the detection, treatment, and eradication of polygyne fire ants. Consistent with this draft strategy, planned treatments against known polygyne infestations are being applied by the NFAEP in the 2022–23 treatment season with the aim of locally eradicating most or all of these within a single season. This strategy includes follow-up surveillance to evaluate treatment success and progress towards proof of freedom.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
An aggressive polygyne eradication program continues to be implemented throughout the 2023–24 treatment season for all known infestations, with follow-up surveillance. The polygyne eradication strategy has been developed to ensure the ongoing prioritisation of polygyne treatment and is being aligned with the fully funded Response Plan 2023–27 for executive approval by 30 March 2024.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
10	Adopted	Completed	Additional resources appointed	Manager, Science
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
Laboratory resources be urgently refocussed to prioritise polygyne detection and reduce the backlog of samples, with research into more rapid genetic tests for polygyne and tracing.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
N/A				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>Laboratory processes continue to prioritise genetic analysis of ant samples suspected of being polygyne to ensure delivery of an aggressive treatment response. Reducing the sample backlog has remained a challenge due to the geographical expansion of the program's efforts.</p> <p>In 2023, genetic analysis equipment with enhanced capability was purchased to more rapidly process polygyne testing. With the support of the Response Plan 2023–27 funding, additional technical laboratory staff have been engaged to resolve the final backlog in early 2024.</p>				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
11	Adopted	Project initiation	Remote Sensing Surveillance (RSS) Project	Director, Science, Strategy and Innovation
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The national Program be resourced to purchase sufficient RSS units and develop in-house analytic capacity in time to cover the areas designated for 2022 and later years' surveillance seasons.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>To achieve eradication, RSS is a critical tool of conducting surveillance. Therefore, the program needs to confirm which surveillance objectives RSS will be used for, as it is the most cost-effective surveillance tool. The existing RSS capability has not delivered the confidence required. The NFAEP is currently conducting a market scan feasibility study for alternative surveillance and treatment technology. RSS includes a range of technologies and software, including aerial vehicles such as traditional helicopters, fixed wing aircraft, drones, ground-based systems, other robotic and autonomous systems (RAS), and satellites.</p> <p>The draft eradication strategy acknowledges the importance of advancing RSS, along with other technologies, using advanced multispectral imagery and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance the success of the program in the next stages of eradication.</p> <p>However, it is important to note that the treatment surveillance plan has been costed based on a scaled-up business as usual model. For example, broadscale treatment still relies on a distribution of 90% helicopter-based and 10% ground-based methods. Surveillance primarily uses ground teams, detection dogs, and the RSS platform in the first year, followed by a similar approach in subsequent years. Any new technology introduced will only serve to enhance the eradication effort. Early investment in improving RSS and exploring other potential innovations has been included in the indicative budget for FY23–24 and FY24–25 at one million annually over 2 years.</p>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>The RSS surveillance system was grounded in March 2023, as further analysis was deemed necessary to determine its ongoing operational feasibility. Progression of this assessment was initially delayed due to funding uncertainty. The project recommenced in October 2023 with a focus on optimising the current-form RSS to confirm its suitability as part of a broader surveillance capability. Work is underway to determine the most suitable areas for RSS use along with confirming the optimal conditions for success. This includes collaboration with ground surveillance teams, image processing, data storage, and incorporation of the product into operational planning. It is important to note that, due to the significant expertise required in both hardware and software, data analytics and image processing will not be developed in-house during this surveillance season. If the current-form RSS proves successful, the feasibility of creating in-house analytics capability will be analysed. Additionally, the NFAEP has extended treatment capability to fixed-wing aircrafts and drones. NFAEP will continue to explore options for using these platforms for future RSS systems should they become available.</p>				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
12	Adopted	N/A	Links to Recommendations 3 and 5	N/A
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Program make available its Guidelines and SOPs for ground surveillance in different settings and for follow-up reporting and other action, to other jurisdictions, industry groups and the public, for their own QA and RIFA detection and reporting programs.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
Links to Recommendations 3 and 5.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
The NFAEP has provided guidelines and SOPs to NSW stakeholders.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (Feb 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
13	Partially adopted	In progress	Spread modelling, detailed compliance plan, risk based compliance model, and industry education and communication	Director, Legislation and Compliance  Director, Customer Experience and Engagement  Director, Science, Strategy and Innovation
Strategic review recommendation				
Biosecurity Queensland implement a wider RIFA Biosecurity Zone in SEQ, at least south to the NSW border and west to the Great Dividing Range, and urgently scale up communications, engagement, and compliance activities throughout the expanded zone.				
Previous program response (December 2022)				
<p>The operational area has expanded by 10 kilometres from known infestations although it has not reached the extent suggested in the recommendation. Nevertheless, this increase in operational area is significant. The biosecurity zones have recently been updated to accommodate recent detections beyond established boundaries. These zones undergo biannual reviews or as required. Under the draft eradication strategy, delimiting surveillance will extend a further 5 kilometres beyond the 10-kilometre containment boundary to identify the extent of RIFA spread, reaching up to 15 kilometres from all known last detections. According to spread modelling within the NFAEP, this distance is considered conservative, indicating a low risk.</p> <p>A detailed compliance plan has been prepared, evaluated, and determined to be best implemented in coordination with the program, integrating communication, engagement, treatment, and surveillance operations. These efforts collectively work towards fostering human behaviour change and ensuring compliance.</p> <p>The NFAEP has developed and will introduce a risk-based compliance model across local government areas (LGAs) in SEQ. This model facilitates planning and intelligence-based targeting of high-risk industries and activities. Compliance activities are prioritise based on industry risk levels, with industries ranked according to their compliance performance. Adjustments to compliance rates and activities are made accordingly, allowing for targeted efforts towards industries with lower compliance rates. Additionally, this approach enables the program to focus communication and education efforts on industries requiring increased awareness.</p>				
Updated program response (February 2024)				



The NFAEP has committed to more frequent updates (monthly), transitioning from alignment with suburb boundaries to adopting the update schedule of the Interstate Plant Quarantine (IPQ) boundary, which entails a 5-kilometre radius around a detection. The NFAEP is strengthening its risk-based approach to effectively manage outlier detections, including implementing movement controls and thus the expanding the zone. The objective is to establish a unified process for identifying areas in Australia at risk of fire ant spread, necessitating controls.

The NFAEP has finalised a new Compliance and enforcement strategy 2023–27 to provide a framework for making consistent and transparent compliance decisions, ensuring activities align with the objective of preventing fire ant spread through human-assisted movement.

Over the past 12 months, the NFAEP compliance team has expanded its capability, completing the first recruitment phase (personnel increase from 10–27) for new officers. The onboarding of new officers is currently underway, with the second recruitment phase (14 personnel) just beginning. The compliance team is projected to reach capacity (41 personnel) by 30 June 2024, to fulfil the compliance activities committed to in the response plan.

The following actions have been undertaken in communication and engagement:

- Industry team expansion: The industry engagement team has grown from 1 to 3 members, focusing on working with industry to increase voluntary compliance with movement controls.
- Advertising growth: The advertising budget has increased to raise awareness of biosecurity zones and encourage voluntary compliance with movement controls. The advertising expenditure in 2022–23 was \$ 733,186.58.
- Industry forums: Quarterly industry forums have been established to engage with industry stakeholders. Two meetings have been held to date, with the third scheduled for mid-March 2024. These forums have been attended by approximately 30–40 industry and local council representatives.
- Fire ant training: Training for industry stakeholders on fire ant management has increased. The introduction of online training alongside face-to-face sessions has significantly boosted participation, with the number of people completing training rising from 1,869 in 2021 to 8,106 in 2023.
- Website enhancements: Online tools have been developed to facilitate understanding and implementation of movement controls for industry stakeholders transporting fire ant carriers. Key tools include the fire ant compliance tool and the online application process for biosecurity instrument permits.



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
14	Adopted	Delayed	Pest risk analysis completed by SMART	Director, Legislation and Compliance All jurisdictions
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
States / Territories work through Plant Health Committee to harmonise their interstate movement controls on RIFA carrier materials as the Queensland RIFA biosecurity zones and RIFA carrier movement requirements are reviewed and implement suitable compliance checks at destination of high-risk carriers such as nursery materials.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
The NFAEP is committed to working with the PHC to standardise movement controls. The program has developed and will introduce a risk-based compliance model across LGAs in SEQ. The model allows planning and intelligence-based targeting of high-risk industries and activities.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>On 7 March 2023, a workshop was convened with representatives from the PHC, members of NFAEP, and the Greenlife Industry Association (GIA) to address RIFA movement controls associated with greenlife industries, including plant nurseries and related industries.</p> <p>The PHC referred this matter to the Sub Committee for Market Access, Risk and Trade (SMART) to conduct a pest risk assessment with the following instructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Develop a nationally agreed pest risk assessment for RIFA, clearly identifying and agreeing upon movement pathways, carriers, and associated risk levels.</li><li>2. Based on the pest risk assessment, identify and agree upon appropriate risk mitigation measures and determine the necessary movement controls and entry conditions, if any, to effectively manage the spread of RIFA.</li></ol> <p>As of February 2024, SMART has not yet completed the Pest Risk Analysis due to competing priorities, including Varroa Mite response. However, the priority for the pest risk analysis has been expedited following the detection of RIFA in NSW, highlighting inconsistencies regarding appropriate risk mitigation measures.</p>				





Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
15	Partially adopted	In progress	Collaboration with NSW	Director, Legislation and Compliance Director, Customer Experience and Engagement
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Queensland and NSW governments implement coordinated RIFA communications, surveillance, and movement compliance programs in LGA's bordering the expanded RIFA Biosecurity Zone.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
Queensland through the NFAEP or FAST will work with NSW by offering expertise and sharing insights to support communications and compliance efforts as needed. It is important to note that the biosecurity zones will not extend to the NSW border.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>The NFAEP has established a Queensland and NSW communication coordination working group with representatives from each jurisdiction. The working group meet monthly to coordinate and share resources, enhancing awareness and understanding of fire ant surveillance and movement compliance in regions along the state borders. This arrangement has been further expanded and relied upon as outbreaks occurred in NSW.</p> <p>Regarding compliance developments between Queensland and NSW, both jurisdictions are engaged in dialogue regarding appropriate mitigation measures to ensure compliance. The outcomes from Recommendation 14 will contribute to a more consistent approach in adopting justified mitigation measures, leading to improved consistency in compliance approaches for interstate and intrastate movements.</p>				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
16	Adopted	In Progress	Increased compliance team, risk based compliance model, and strengthened regulation and provide guidance on general biosecurity obligation (GBO)	Director, Legislation and Compliance
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Program work with key industries and the government agencies regulate them to strengthen and expand existing controls preventing human-assisted movement of RIFA carrier materials out of and within the Biosecurity Zone.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
The NFAEP will increase resources in compliance and strengthen regulations to ensure compliance with the movement of RIFA carriers. Additionally, the NFAEP has developed and will introduce a risk-based compliance model across LGAs in SEQ. The model enables planning and intelligence-based targeting of high-risk industries and activities.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>Over the past 12 months, the NFAEP compliance team has expanded its capability, completing the first recruitment phase (increasing of personnel from 10–27) for new officers. The onboarding of new officers is currently underway, with the second recruitment phase (14 personnel) just beginning. The compliance team are projected to reach capacity (41 personnel) by 30 June 2024, to fulfil the compliance activities committed to in the response plan.</p> <p>The NFAEP is reviewing its risk-based compliance monitoring system to ensure efficient and effective deployment of resources across the operational area. The NFAEP assesses the risks of non-compliance associated with various factors, including carrier type, movement frequency, and purpose. This assessment integrates information on industry characteristics, volume and scope of carrier movement, and historical program compliance enforcement activity. The resulting risk mapping helps evaluate non-compliance risks within specific industries and by specific entities.</p> <p>In December 2023, the Minister approved the drafting of amendments to the regulation, acknowledging the need for a second tranche of regulatory amendments, which will include ongoing work to harmonise fire ant movement controls nationally. The program anticipates the first tranche of amendments to be implemented by 30 June 2024.</p> <p>The NFAEP has drafted an industry guideline on meeting the GBO under Section 107 of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> (Qld). Industry feedback is currently being incorporated, with finalisation expected in March 2024. The guideline outlines how entities engaged in commercial activities involving the movement of fire ant carriers can fulfil their GBO by implementing reasonable and practical measures to prevent or minimise risks and mitigate resulting impacts.</p>				



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17	Adopted	In progress	NFAEP communication strategy, risk-based compliance model, and industry education and communication	Director, FAST Director, Legislation and Compliance Director, Customer Experience and Engagement
Strategic review recommendation				
The Program work with land developer and waste facility peak organisations and the Government agencies that regulate them to define appropriate routine RIFA suppression programs that must be implemented throughout and beyond the Biosecurity Zone.				
Previous program response (December 2022)				
FAST will lead many of these types of engagements, supported by the program where appropriate. Currently, there is no baseline data suggesting that one industry or activity poses a higher risk than another. By introducing a risk-based compliance model across LGAs in SEQ, the program will be able to identify high-risk industries and activities for greater (or lower) targeted compliance activity. Additionally, industries found to have low compliance rankings may benefit from targeted communication, education, and awareness initiatives prior to regulation implementation.				
Updated program response (February 2024)				
FAST has met with the state government department responsible for planning and development to investigate the use of the State planning policy to empower local governments to condition new developments to treat for RIFA. However, we have been advised that the preference is to regulate through the <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> (Qld). FAST is working with all local governments in the suppression area to initiate routine IGR treatment of their waste facilities. Treatment and equipment have been provided to several councils to facilitate this outcome.				



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18	As per 13 and 17	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Program embark on an industry-by-industry engagement program to develop and embed appropriate RIFA carrier risk mitigation and suppressive treatment processes into QA programs, moving over time to more industry self-regulation, with relevant State or Local Government agencies as the compliance auditors of last resort.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
N/A				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
N/A				



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19	Adopted	In progress	FAST Plan 2022–26	Director, FAST
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
Queensland state government agencies work with the Program to develop and implement a framework for councils and communities to manage RIFA in their areas, assisted by State and National bodies, as well as responding to reports of suspect RIFA and linking to national Program reporting systems.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
FAST has established a taskforce, including Queensland Government agencies and LGAs within the operational area.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
See recommendations 20–23 for further detail. FAST presents regular updates to the Steering Committee and Risk Management Sub-committee. Stakeholder self-management data is collected by FAST and progressively integrated into the existing program data and mapping systems.				



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20	Adopted	In progress	FAST: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>community suppression program</li><li>self-management agreements</li></ul>	Director, FAST
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Program work with councils to develop and extend area-wide RIFA suppression and eradication programs as soon as possible, starting in suburbs with significant RIFA infestations and moving to all LGA's with any land in or adjacent to the extended Biosecurity Zone.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
FAST is <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>establishing community suppression programs in heavily infested residential areas to empower the community to share responsibility for fire ant management and treat their own properties</li><li>establishing collaborative self-management agreements with key large landholders, including all levels of government and private entities. These collaborative agreements aim to reflect the shared values of fire ant self-management, including surveillance, suppression, human safety, and ultimately eradication</li></ul>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
A community RIFA suppression program is currently underway in Logan, Ipswich, and Gold Coast LGAs, with 41,000 residents registering to receive IGR treatment and treat their properties twice per year. This NFAEP will be expanded to Brisbane LGA in September 2024. FAST has met with all 9 councils in the suppression area and 7 councils are actively participating in self-management with support of bait, equipment, and training from FAST. Some councils have invested in additional staff resources specifically for RIFA management, while others are incorporating it into their existing work programs and resources. In December 2023, the D-G sent letters to the 9 council chief executive officers to reinforce the need for them to undertake RIFA self-management to meet their GBO. It was also communicated that the program's responsive teams will cease servicing their land after June 2024.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
21	Partially adopted	In progress	Responsive transition	Director, FAST
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
Responsibility for responsive visits after reports of RIFA nests be devolved from the Program to local governments, with training of Council staff and linkages to the national recording system provided by the program.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA) is the agreed national approach for cost-sharing biosecurity incursions. While this program does not fall under NEBRA, the intent is to align with the key principles of that agreement. Recommendations from the strategic review suggest that the Queensland Government invests more annually (100–250 metres) than other states, which is not consistent with the NEBRA approach. In addition, large landholders are expected to assist in eradicating RIFA.</p> <p>Self-management from the wider Queensland community and industry could potentially contribute over \$100 million, representing a significant in-kind contribution. This will be borne by the wider Queensland economy and community, and additional costs on the public and industry beyond this will be politically challenging to support.</p> <p>While Queensland leads the NFAEP, the benefits are for all of Australia, and maintaining responsive treatment in high-risk situations appears appropriate. The way responsive operations are conducted will be fundamentally different going forward because of the work of FAST and self-management models, increased compliance activities, and the shrinking area requiring responsive treatment over time.</p> <p>Previous concerns about distraction or dilution of eradication treatment will be less apparent and managed to a degree that will not slow or impact eradication progression. In fact, it will contribute to the reduced risk of human-assisted movement to the program through more timely, effective, and risk-based deployment.</p> <p>In a sense, responsive treatment is partially being transitioned to self-management for lower-risk occurrences under FAST collaborative models. However, transitioning responsive treatment to FAST in its entirety would take too long to execute and fail without diverting resourcing from the program.</p> <p>Relegating responsive treatment to FAST may also create competition between NFAEP and FAST for critical resources, such as treatments, helicopters, and staff, all of which are essential for the NFAEP treatment strategy. Resources have already been identified as a moderate risk to the success of the eradication strategy.</p> <p>At this stage of the eradication effort, collaboration and a consolidated effort between NFAEP and FAST are needed, not segregation and competition for resources.</p>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				



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Responsive treatment by the NFAEP will transition to a new model delivered by FAST starting from 1 July 2024. A responsive transition project plan has been developed, and implementation is underway. NFAEP responsive teams currently active in the suppression area will be redirected to the response plan's eradication activities from July 2024.





Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
22	Adopted	In progress	RIFA suppression programs	Director, FAST
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
All Queensland Government agencies work with the Program to develop and implement RIFA-suppressive programs on land for which they are responsible.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
FAST is working with all Queensland Government agencies to establish RIFA suppression programs.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>All Queensland Government agencies that own land are Taskforce members and attend the quarterly meetings. In December 2023, the D-G sent a letter to all relevant D-Gs, reinforcing the need for them to undertake RIFA self-management to meet their GBOs, emphasising that NFAEP responsive teams will cease servicing their land after June 2024.</p> <p>Ten of the 15 relevant departments have made contact or have previously been engaged. The Department of Education treated 45 schools with IGR in 2023, and negotiations are underway to supply fast-acting toxicant to 400 schools so school maintenance staff can self-manage. Treatment has been provided to some individual schools and correctional facilities for self-treatment. Lengthy negotiations have been ongoing with the Department of Transport and Main Roads and Queensland Rail since mid-2022. Additionally, several meetings have occurred with the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation and Seqwater.</p>				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
23	Adopted	In progress	Commonwealth and Defence RIFA suppression programs	Director, FAST
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Program work through QDAF and DAFF with Department of Defence and port-of-entry operators to develop RIFA-suppressive programs for Commonwealth land that Defence and airport and port operators will implement and report on to the Program.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
Not provided				
<b>Updated Program response (February 2024)</b>				
FAST is working with Defence, port operators, and airports to establish fire ant self-management protocols. Treatment has been provided to Archerfield Airport. Defence is in the process of incorporating RIFA management into their existing maintenance contracts. The Port of Brisbane is working with FAST to develop a self-management plan and communicate GBO requirements to all port tenants, who will be responsible for their own RIFA management. Additionally, FAST has supplied treatment and equipment to the Australian Rail Track Corporation, which has completed the current round of treating on their rail tracks.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
24	Adopted	Project Initiation	Information technology (IT) projects	Director, Science, Strategy, and Innovation
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
<p>The Program regularly review and improve its IT systems to optimise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance, integration, data searchability, cost and adaptability</li> <li>• ability to interface with other systems and apps used by the public and councils</li> <li>• more effective and timely reporting to support decision making by all parties</li> <li>• efficiency in streamlining information capture to support reporting analysis and operational management work at the local, state, and national levels</li> </ul>				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>Several significant projects will be undertaken to accommodate the changing needs of the program as it moves into the future, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• finalising the migration of paper-based recording to the NFAEP's mobility application</li> <li>• implementing systems to allow community members to participate in self-treatment activities</li> <li>• implementing systems to allow for efficient data exchange with local councils and other organisations undertaking suppression activities</li> <li>• integrating remote sensing activities into NFAEP systems</li> <li>• integrating drone surveillance and treatment into NFAEP systems</li> <li>• developing enhanced reporting capabilities.</li> </ul>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>The NFAEP is currently in the process of establishing an enhanced intelligence capability that will access existing and alternate data sources to develop operationally actionable intelligence. This intelligence will assist in operational planning and inform decision-making by complimenting risk management. The enhanced intelligence capability will build on existing systems and offer areas for optimisation with the intent of increasing effectiveness and efficiency through enhanced decision-making.</p>				



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It is intended that the intelligence capability will also enable greater understanding of progress through monitoring and reporting. The optimisation of current systems, along with building a future-state strategy for systems is planned for Quarter 4 in 2024.



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
25	Adopted	In progress	Innovation framework	Director, Science, Strategy, and Innovation
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
The Steering Committee explore development of a broader strategic research program for RIFA and other tramp ants, looking at longer-term applications of new 'blue-sky' technologies to the challenges of their eradication and surveillance.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
Innovation will contribute to the success of the NFAEP. No single technology is considered a 'silver bullet'; instead, a range of technologies will provide various options to achieve the desired confidence outcomes. The NFAEP will implement a project board to assess potential blue-sky options based on an efficiency and effectiveness innovation process (Ideation, Gate1, Discovery, Gate2, Pilot, Gate3, Production and Go live).				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
The NFAEP is continuing to mobilise its resources to establish the innovation framework. As mentioned earlier, this will be a continuous focus of the NFAEP to ensure that appropriate innovation capability is embedded into the operational delivery practices available to the NFAEP. Currently, the NFAEP is establishing the framework, recruiting innovation leads, developing the methodology, and empowering the process through engagement and collaboration.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
26	Noted but not adopted	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
Staff funded by the national Program be exempt from the Queensland Public Sector FTE cap.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
While there are challenges in managing within an FTE cap, it is an important part of managing the ongoing commitment of the public service and costs of the workforce. The NFAEP will work collaboratively with central agencies; however, at the same time, it will be seeking to leverage other mechanisms such as innovative service agreements with the broader market to meet the output demands of the NFAEP.				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
On 1 February 2024, the Queensland Minister for DAF announced that an additional 150 FTE positions would be allocated to the program to aid in the attraction and retention of skilled workers.				



Recommendation ID	Program response	Status (February 2024)	Deliverable	Owner
27	Adopted	In progress	Streamlined procurement	Director, Business Services
<b>Strategic review recommendation</b>				
QDAF review its processes for approving Program expenditure and major contract procurement, with greater delegations for operational expenditure and procurement being given to the Program General Manager and more flexible oversight to assist program effectiveness.				
<b>Previous program response (December 2022)</b>				
<p>NFAEP has developed a new internal governance structure, with an increased workforce with the required skills, to allow business functions to be better managed. This new structure will ensure reporting and accountability (see structure under Recommendation 1) with a new program executive and directors.</p> <p>A key focus for increasing the program's efficiency includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• fast tracked procurement and diversification of treatment options, drones, RSS, and AI platforms with the aim of improving cost-effectiveness in the immediate future</li><li>• investigating common user infrastructure and cohabitation models with other government agencies to increase supply chain efficiencies, while also exploring optimised logistics technologies and decision support tools that ensure flexibility as the NFAEP evolves.</li></ul>				
<b>Updated program response (February 2024)</b>				
<p>The NFAEP has undergone a significant shift in the procurement and contract management space, aligning with the department and whole of government procurement and contracting framework. The program has reviewed its procurement program to increase efficiency by streamlining the approval processes required for executing contracts.</p> <p>The department has recently completed a review of and subsequently implemented new Financial Delegations effective Monday 12 February 2024. This provides more flexible oversight to assist with the execution of the program's deliverables. The department has also updated the procurement limits, moving to threshold-based decision-making, completed in December 2022.</p>				