



Taskforce Meeting 8 - Minutes

3 October 2024 10:00am – 12:00pm
 111 George Street, Brisbane (Face to Face) *

*A register of attendees is provided as an attachment to the minutes.

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

| Item Number | Minutes |
|-------------|---|
| 1 | <p>Meeting Open 10:05am</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chairperson, Director-General Graeme Bolton (GB) opened the meeting and gave an acknowledgment of country. GB thanked everyone for their support and leadership in eradicating fire ants. GB requested that for future meetings, partner updates be provided in writing prior to the meeting. Mick Jeffery (MJ) introduced Marni Manning (MM), Dr Rachel Chay (RC) and the FAST team. <p>Action: Taskforce partners to provide written updates of fire ant self-management activities prior to each meeting.</p> |
| 2 | <p>Previous Meeting Minutes, Actions and ToR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The minutes for the previous meeting held 3 May 2024 were endorsed and all arising actions have been completed. |
| 3 | <p>Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce Update</p> <p>Mick Jeffery (MJ) – Director, FAST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MJ re-iterated the Response Plan 2023-2027 and how the onboarding of partners is playing a crucial role in mobilising efforts in the suppression area. MJ provided an update of FAST project streams including community self, treatment (CST), government agencies self-management, responsive treatment transition (RTT), primary producers project, and the development of the FAST Work Plan 2024-25, which was circulated to the Taskforce prior to the meeting. The CST campaign launched on 1 September, encouraging residents within Ipswich, Logan, Gold Coast, and Brisbane, to sign up for the proactive treatment program. This campaign builds on previous years with the inclusion of Brisbane City Council in 2024. 8,000 registrations have been received so far with our target registration goal between 50-60k. Government self-treatment started on 1 July with 1644 reports received so far. 91% of those reports have been on roadsides or footpaths. The new community RTT model launched on 1 Oct with a great early response from the public consenting to receive bait and treat fire ants themselves. Only two councils are yet to sign collaborative agreements. MJ recognised the work the councils have been doing to build internal treatment capacity and respond to suspect ant reports. It's been a collaborative effort between FAST, councils and the program to build this capacity. |

- MJ wished to also recognise our state and federal partners, in particular Defence, Port of Brisbane, Brisbane and Archerfield Airports, Energex, and Q Rail who have all begun undertaking self-management of fire ants on their lands.
- A primary producer's project trial was launched in the upper Logan River catchment. 107 primary producers (42%) registered, representing 54% of the targeted land area. FAST is now scaling up the project over the coming months to support more primary producers in the suppression area. This is a key project for FAST as primary producers own or manage a significant amount of land in the suppression area some of which have very high densities of fire ants.
- MJ reiterated FAST support for taskforce partners with a range of tools to support self-treatment.
- FAST are currently looking at how best to harness increasing interest from community groups and individual champions to treat fire ants around their suburb and are exploring the concept of a 'volunteer army'.

Discussion and comments

- MJ confirmed the bait being sent through the pack and send company for RTT is fast-acting treatment product
- Murdoch University are in the process of developing an ant identification app
- Industry associations are a key stakeholder in the primary producers scale-up. An initial presentation has been held to raise awareness of the trial and scale up. More engagement with industry associations is planned as the project scales up.
- Assistance is available to rural residential properties through fast-acting bait provided free of charge under RTT.

Action: FAST to explore how citizen science can contribute to the eradication efforts especially around surveillance and fire ant validation.

Marni Manning (MM) – General Manager - Strategy and Delivery, National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP)

- MM reiterated the importance of suppression and shared the program have doubled eradication efforts to cover 830,000 hectares which is the world's largest eradication effort, with much international interest in our success to date.
- A very small percentage (less than 1%) of residents have refused eradication treatment, despite repeated efforts to develop a mutually beneficial treatment solution. These cases have now been escalated with the assistance of other partners as all properties must be treated.
- There has been a lot of media coverage supporting the importance of eradication around the response plan. As well as this, a continued strong narrative and media presence is essential to counter disinformation. NFAEP encourages the public to access information, consult broadly and ask questions.
- A new call centre number has been launched 132 ANT (268) with staff trained to collect vital information about fire ants.
- The Youth Symposium held in conjunction with Biosecurity Symposium 2024, was an opportunity to upskill younger people in fire ants and mobilise their interest in the environment.
- NFAEP have increased diversity of treatment application methods - drones, blowers, UTVs, fixed wing and helicopters – and are currently ahead of schedule in terms of aerial application, with a wet weather buffers built in.
- RC wished to assure the taskforce their efforts are not in vain, there is a renewed sense of optimism at a national biosecurity level and an acknowledgement of the role QLD is playing.
- MM shared some insights into the recent visit by US Entomologist Dr Robert Puckett. He commended us on the efficacy of our approach. The unregulated chemical use in the states was discussed in contrast to the highly regulated environment we operate within here in Australia. Acknowledgement that what gets missed in discussions around bait safety is environmental impact fire ants will have if not eradicated. The US has lost iconic species due to fire ants.

- Italy have recently reached out to Australia for assistance in managing and treating fire ants as we are the recognised global experts.

Discussion and comments

- Bait safety for people and pets is the most common question being received by Logan City Council.
- The perceived adverse effects on bee population and iconic species, and general anti-government sentiment are the key reasons why people are refusing eradication treatment
- Program is looking to independent research and entities to support the APVMA's bait safety standards and message, especially around iconic species.
- Resistance to eradication treatments is becoming more co-ordinated, with signs being vandalised. The safety of field officers and staff is paramount. The NFAEP program will continue to work closely with all partners to ensure the 1% don't hamper eradication efforts.
- 2021 Strategic Review was a turning point for the eradication strategy, with the NFAEP fine-tuning the message and key partners coming on-board over the past 12-18 months.
- Taskforce was thanked and congratulated for their efforts to date, with notable optimism around progress made.

Department of Defence

- Defence is responsible for 3.8 million hectares, they are the largest commonwealth land holder and have 112 sites within South-East QLD, with a high concentration of those sites within known fire ant areas.
- Oakey detection on 16 April was a catalyst to rethink their treatment approach.
- They focused on five key pillars: Education, Surveillance, Detection, Treatment and Reporting
- Education - involved the entire defence portfolio including service delivery partners. The key was national integration of fire ant management into daily activities and upskilling staff with biosecurity enforcement occurring at a management level.
- Surveillance – adaption of training to various groups as it's everyone's responsibility to look for fire ants within the context of their role.
- Detection – funding secured for national detection and treatment program, utilising service delivery partners where available. Through a service delivery partner, detection dogs were brought in and were able to detect nests that weren't visible. At one of their sites, 1 nest was found by a human, but a dog detected a further 23 nests, most of which were still underground.
- Treatment – have used direct nest injection in priority areas and have treatment requirements especially around the regular movements of material and machinery between national locations.
- Reporting – integrating defence systems into other programs is a work in progress. Keen to feed data into national fire ant systems while keeping the integrity and security of defence information protected. Have been regularly providing the Deputy Prime Minister with statistics and relevant data.

Discussion and comments

DG acknowledged Department of Defence for the significant amount of work they have undertaken in a short space of time, for their long-term focus and the protocols they have adopted to minimise risk.

DG also reiterated the risk of human assisted movement and 'for every nest you can see, there are 5 you can't'.

City of Moreton

- 1/3 of the council is in the biosecurity zone. Limited suppression zone but with lots of new developments and turf being moved
- Grateful to Gold Coast City Council for sharing their risk matrix helping to provide them with more rigour around surveillance and treatment

- Shared the benefits of utilising drones: can cover larger areas and terrain the team can't, has increased safety for staff and is cost effective.
- Drones can cover 50ha within a day over multiple sites.
- Drone usage was very effective over the South Pine Sports Complex
- GIS mapping has produced great information and is proving to be essential for communication to councillors
- FAST provided treatment product for key sites such as Bunya waste facilities, Mill Street in Petrie and Jinker Track, where nests had been detected.

Discussion and comments

The price of drones will likely come down when there is more competition in the market.

Redlands

- Consider themselves lucky as they don't currently have a high density of reported fire ants
- There have been 67 reports since 1 July, predominantly roadside
- With suppression areas handing over to council, fire ant management processes have been put into place
- Fire ant management program is focused on suppression, utilising the risk-based approach from the Gold Coast City Council
- Two staff members looking after fire ant management, so drones have become an integral tool.
- Support from council has been very supportive with resources provided outside of budget cycle
- Drone trials have taken place across key sites such as wastewater and waste transfer.
- Treatment coverage is around 15 hectares per hour, site dependent
- Key insights: calibration and mapping of sites was straight-forward, some terrains are too small for helicopters and too dangerous for ground staff. These areas are perfect for drones.
- Drones have improved officer safety, saving other equipment from being damaged due to terrain. Drones are quicker, cost-effective, and provide a uniformed treatment application rate, are helping to reduce environmental impacts caused by humans walking through fields and marine parks
- Redlands have also improved data capture and reporting, which is being presented back to councillors

Discussion and comments

MM provided an update on the detection at Minjerribah. Program is working with the land owners and taking an eradication approach. Fire ants were discovered established within sand. Next round of treatment scheduled with helicopters on mine sites and on foot in Dunwich. No detections have been found within the mangrove habitats, which is very positive as those are very sensitive habitats and difficult to treat.

Gold Coast City Council

- Fire ant self-management began in 2022
- GCCC commissioned an independent review into Council self-management of fire ants. This was completed by Ron Glanville (former Qld Chief Biosecurity Officer).
- The review was undertaken and helped inform the approach and related funding, with 14 key recommendations being made
- Large focus of the review was on the tourism impact of fire ants
- Built capacity within their team off the back of the review with recruitment ongoing
- Fire ant self-management plans have been integrated into broader council operations with a governance structure put into place to align with the biosecurity plan
- Engagement with council has been crucial with a one-pager produced to highlight key points such as treatment safety, GCCC role and that of FAST/NFAEP.
- External community and marketing have focused on socials
- GCCC is challenged by the disinformation being spread throughout the community and is actively working with partners to taken down 'anti' signage

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace health and safety is also a major focus area with field staff encountering aggression at work and in a personal capacity • Looking to be able to start to reporting on effort and overall impact <p>Discussion: Given the efforts being made by councils, discussion focused on how best to share data and communicate the great work of stakeholders. MM advised the program have been acknowledging the work of councils throughout the media</p> <p>Action: Continue to acknowledge the great work of our councils throughout the media.</p> <p>Final comments and discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks to the Department of Defence and councils for their updates and insights • We all have a role to play in raising awareness within our respective councils • Safety of field officers and staff is paramount • FAST are producing the Annual Report 2023-2024 and want to showcase the in-kind contribution of partners <p>Action: FAST will be chasing up partners over the next couple of weeks to supply estimates of in-kind support for the 2023-24 FAST annual report.</p> <p>Action: Intelligence sharing between government agencies to increase awareness of safety issues from hostile individuals or community sectors.</p> <p>Action: Share QLD Police Academy QGATE program details for field officers</p> |
| 8 | <p>Other business and next steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Taskforce members were thanked for their attendance and their work on this issue to date. • The Taskforce members were encouraged to contact the FAST team if any assistance is need. <p>Meeting closed at 12.09PM</p> |

Actions

| Action # | Action | Person Responsible | Update |
|----------|---|----------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Taskforce partners to provide written updates of fire ant self-management activities prior to each meeting. | All Taskforce members | |
| 2 | FAST to explore how citizen science can contribute to the eradication efforts especially around surveillance and fire ant validation. | FAST | |
| 3 | Continue to acknowledge the great work of our councils and stakeholders throughout the media. | MM | |
| 4 | FAST will be chasing up partners over the next couple of weeks to supply estimates of in-kind support for the 2023-24 FAST annual report. | FAST & Government Partners | |
| 5 | Intelligence sharing between government agencies to increase awareness of safety issues from hostile individuals or community sectors. | FAST/NFAEP | |
| 6 | Share QLD Police Academy QGATE program for field officers' details | MM | |

Attendance Register

| Name | Job Role | Organisation |
|----------------|---|--|
| Graeme Bolton | Director-General, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries |
| Dr Rachel Chay | Deputy Director-General and Chief Biosecurity Officer, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland) |
| Marni Manning | General Manager, Strategy and Delivery, National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland) |
| Mick Jeffery | Director, Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce, Biosecurity Queensland | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland) |
| Simon Barry | Manager, Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce, Biosecurity Queensland | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland) |
| Darren Roy | Senior Project Officer, Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce Biosecurity Queensland | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland) |
| Amanda Wendt | Engagement Officer, Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce Biosecurity Queensland | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland) |
| Sarah De Leon | Project Officer, Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce Biosecurity Queensland | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Biosecurity Queensland) |
| Andy Lyon | Biosecurity and Operations Program Leader | Logan City Council |
| Anita Haenfler | Executive Director, Natural Resource Operations | Department of Resources |
| Brett Kelly | Chief Executive Officer | Nursery & Garden Industry Association |
| Liz Friend | Red Imported Fire Ant Liaison Officer Vector, Urban Pest and Biosecurity Environment, Heritage and Resilience | City of Gold Coast Council |
| Emily Carrigan | Executive Director of Finance and Performance and Programs | Department of State Development Infrastructure Local Government and Planning |
| Emily Shafto | City Safety and Liveability Manager City Safety and Liveability Branch | Logan City Council |
| Gary Jensen | A/Manager – Water Planning and Science | Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water |
| Hadley Mills | General Manager Environment and Heritage | City of Gold Coast Council |

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| Janet Edgar | a/Manager, Safety Operations | Department of Education |
| Jessica Poole | A/ Senior Environmental Health and Projects Officer | Redland City Council |
| Justin Carpenter | Acting Executive Director Environment and Planning | Department of the Premier and Cabinet |
| Ken Cunliffe | Agforce Biosecurity Committee | Agforce |
| Leanne Weier | Manager - Client Services | Civil Contractors Federation |
| Nicole Cravigan | A/Assistant Under Treasurer | Queensland Treasury |
| Paul Hyde | Assistant Director-General, QBuild | Department of Energy and Public Works |
| Rachel Jackson | Senior environment advisor | Queensland Rail |
| Ramses Zietek | Director of Environment Culture Heritage and Sustainability | Transport and Main Roads |
| Dr John Robertson | Chair, National Biosecurity Management Consultative Committee for Fire Ants | Independent |
| Sandrine Therese | Manager, Strategic Policy, Sport and Recreation | Department of Tourism and Sport |
| Scott Smith | Chief Executive Officer | Council of Mayors (South East Queensland) |
| Tom Coultas | Fire Ant Coordinator Vector, Urban Pest and Biosecurity Environment, Heritage and Resilience | City of Gold Coast Council |
| Tony Sgroi | Manager, Infrastructure Management | Queensland Health |
| Alex K Penn | Environmental Officer Program Management and Delivery | Transport and Main Roads |
| Russell Manby | Team leader, Health Environment and Pest management | Redland City Council |
| Nicki Werynski | Environmental officer Metropolitan region | Transport and Main Roads |
| Thomas Gibney | Senior Environmental officer – North Coast region | Transport and Main Roads |
| Shane Hopgood | Proxy for Timothy Thomson | Queensland Corrective Services |
| Janine Clark | Proxy for Robyn Moffat | City of Moreton Bay Council |
| John Martinkovic | Local Government Director | Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public works |
| Lucy Hilton | Principal Policy Officer -Strategic Policy | Department of Tourism and Sport |
| David Bray | Developmental Manager for Darwalla | Darwalla |

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| Mark Stewart | Assistant Director Environment and Sustainability | Department of Defence |
| Amy McDonough | Assistant Director Environment and Sustainability – South Queensland | Department of Defence |
| Kim Reid | Senior Treasury Analyst | Treasury QLD |