

**Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ants
under the *Biosecurity Act 2014***

National Electric Ant Eradication Program

2025

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Contents

1	Biosecurity Program	1
1.1	Program name	1
2	Requirement for a prevention and control program.....	1
2.1	Purpose and rationale	1
	Significant biosecurity risk	1
2.2	Measures that are required to achieve the purpose	2
2.3	Powers of authorised officers	3
	Entry of place	3
	Giving a direction under a prevention and control program	3
	Failure to comply with a direction	3
	Power to carry out aerial controls measures.....	3
	Obligations.....	4
	General powers of authorised officers	4
2.4	Consultation.....	4
3	Authorisation of a prevention and control program in the State of Queensland	5
3.1	Biosecurity matter.....	5
3.2	Purpose of the Program	5
3.3	Area affected by the Program	5
3.4	Powers of authorised officers	7
3.5	Obligations imposed on a person under the Program	8
3.6	Commencement and duration of the Program	8
3.7	Consultation with relevant parties	9
3.8	Notification of relevant parties of requirements.....	9

1 Biosecurity Program

1.1 Program name

The prevention and control program (biosecurity program) for electric ants, *Wasmannia auropunctata* (Roger 1863) will be known as the Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ants 2025 (the Program).

2 Requirement for a prevention and control program

2.1 Purpose and rationale

Significant biosecurity risk

The *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the **Act**) provides for the establishment of prevention and control programs. Prevention and control programs are directed at any of the following—

- a) preventing the entry, establishment or spread of biosecurity matter in an area that poses a significant biosecurity risk;
- b) managing, reducing or eradicating any biosecurity matter in an area that could pose a significant biosecurity risk.

The objectives of the Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ants 2025 are:

- prevent the establishment or spread of electric ants in Queensland that pose a significant biosecurity risk; and
- manage, reduce or eradicate any electric ants in Queensland that could pose a significant biosecurity risk.

Electric ant was first detected in Smithfield, a northern suburb of Cairns in Far North Queensland, on 11 May 2006 in close proximity to World Heritage listed rainforest. This was the first record of an established incursion of this species in Australia.

The National Electric Ant Eradication Program (NEAEP) has been established with the aim of eradicating electric ants within Queensland and therefore preventing the spread and establishment of electric ants in other states and territories. The NEAEP is run by the Queensland Government on behalf of national cost-share partners (including the Federal Government, and Australian States and Territories) and operates under a nationally agreed response plan. The response plan was developed using the criteria set out in the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement¹ (the NEBRA) prior to the introduction of NEBRA, and is therefore referred to as NEBRA-like. The response plan establishes a framework to delimit, contain and eradicate electric ants in Queensland.

The NEAEP has been assessed against the criteria contained in the NEBRA at reviews conducted in 2008, 2010, 2014, 2016 and 2024. Each review determined that eradication of electric ant remains technically feasible, cost beneficial, and of national significance.

Eradication activities delivered by the NEAEP have so far prevented the full impact of electric ants being realised on the environment of Far North Queensland, including in areas of World Heritage listed rainforest. As a signatory to the World Heritage Convention, under article 5 of the convention, Australia has an obligation to ensure the protection, conservation, presentation, rehabilitation, and transmission to future generations of the natural heritage of the area (UNESCO 1972).

Overseas experience has shown that the impact of electric ant on the environment can be devastating. Electric ants can cause a decline in diversity and abundance of invertebrates, vertebrates, and some plants due to predation by electric ants, and their impact on ecosystem function in affected areas can be severe.

¹ The National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (NEBRA) is the first deliverable of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity, and sets out emergency response arrangements, including cost-sharing arrangements, for responding to biosecurity incidents that primarily impact the environment and/or social amenity and where the response is for the public good.

Electric ants are considered by the IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group to be one of the world's worst invasive species (Global Invasive Species Database 2009).

The Wet Tropics is recognised as an area of 'outstanding universal values'. It contains Australia's greatest diversity of animals and plants, and a large number of endangered species including seven amphibians, three reptiles, seven mammals, six birds. It also contains 33 vertebrate species and one invertebrate species that are declared as vulnerable (WTMA 2012a). For example, the southern cassowary (*Casuarius casuarius johnsonii*) is an iconic Australian bird and a nationally listed endangered species that is already under considerable threat of extinction. It is possible that its ground nesting habits could make its young susceptible to electric ant infestation, placing the species under further stress. There are three specific areas in the Wet Tropics where cassowaries are known to frequent: the Daintree area, Mission Beach, and the Kuranda and Atherton Tablelands area. The infestation at Smithfield has intruded on the Kuranda and Atherton Tableland Wet Tropics area, whilst infestation at Kimberley intrudes on the Daintree Wet Tropics area, and if left unchecked, infestation in Bingil Bay would encroach on the Mission Beach Wet Tropics area.

The cost of not eradicating an electric ant infestation was valued by Queensland's Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (Antony 2006), now the Department of Primary Industries, in the early stages of the NEAEP. It is estimated that after 30 years of infestation, 350 000 houses will be infested and the annual cost to residents of treating their properties would amount to almost \$14 million. This figure assumes that there would be some residents that would not treat their properties. In this case, these residents would be likely to avoid outside areas, and would most probably see the infestation move into their house.

Eradication activities are focused on areas within Far North Queensland in areas of known infestation. Under the Program, the NEAEP has been able to treat and survey these areas quickly and effectively to prevent the establishment of the pest.

Monitoring compliance with movement controls is also an important aspect of the response to ensure the risk of human-assisted electric ant spread is minimised. This will be dealt with by the establishment of a surveillance program in Far North Queensland Local Government areas including Cairns Regional Council, Mareeba Shire Council, Tablelands Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Douglas Shire Council and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

The purpose of amending the Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ant, authorised on 21 May 2021, is to:

- a) Incorporate changes made to the Biosecurity Act 2014 that were enacted with the passing of the Agriculture and Fisheries and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 on 26 April 2024. Specifically, authorised officers must attempt to locate and notify an occupier of their intent to enter a place under sections 261 and 262.
- b) Include Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council as a Local Government area to which the Program applies (section 239(1)).

2.2 Measures that are required to achieve the purpose

The key activities undertaken by the Program include but are not limited to:

- Treatment to eradicate existing infestation and proactive/preventative treatment to prevent the establishment of the pest in high-risk areas. Bait is predominantly distributed by foot and in some instances, aerially.
- Surveillance to check for the presence or absence of electric ants and to monitor the effectiveness of the treatment regime—either by luring or trapping undertaken by field teams or odour detection dogs.

2.3 Powers of authorised officers

Entry of place

The Act provides that authorised officers appointed under the Act may, at reasonable times, enter a place situated in an area to which a biosecurity program applies, to take any action authorised by the biosecurity program². These activities must be done in a timely and efficient manner to ensure that the measures are as effective as possible. The Program will authorise entry into places to allow these measures to be undertaken.

In accordance with the Act, a reasonable attempt will be made to locate an occupier³ and advise the occupier of an intention by an authorised officer to enter the place to undertake activities under the Program, prior to the entry taking place. Nevertheless, an authorised officer may enter the place if⁴ -

- a) The authorised officer is unable to locate an occupier after making a reasonable attempt to do so; or
- b) the occupier refuses to consent to the entry.

If after entering a place an authorised officer finds an occupier present or the occupier refuses to consent to the entry—an authorised officer will make reasonable attempts to produce an identity card for inspection and inform the occupier of the reason for entering and the authorisation under the Act to enter without the permission of the occupier. An authorised officer under the Program must make a reasonable attempt to inform the occupier of any steps taken, or to be taken, and if steps have been taken or are to be taken, and that it is an offence to do anything that interferes with a step taken or to be taken.

If the authorised officer does not find an occupier present at the place, the authorised officer must leave a notice in a conspicuous position and in a reasonably secure way. This notice must state the date and time of entry and information addressing the reason for entry, authorisation to enter a place, and the steps undertaken by the authorised officer after entry, and that it is an offence to do anything that interferes with a step taken or to be taken.

Giving a direction under a prevention and control program

Section 237 of the Act provides that an authorised officer may, at a reasonable time and at a place within an area to which a prevention and control program applies:

- Direct an occupier to take reasonable steps, within a stated and reasonable timeframe, to remove or eradicate electric ants. These steps must be limited to what is reasonably necessary to achieve the purposes of this prevention and control program.
- Destroy electric ants or a carrier of electric ants, if the authorised officer believes on reasonable grounds that they pose a significant biosecurity risk.

Failure to comply with a direction

Under section 238 of the Act, occupiers of a place are obligated to comply with an authorised officer's direction issued under section 237 of the Act, as outlined above.

Power to carry out aerial controls measures

The power to carry out aerial control measures is authorised by a biosecurity program under the Act⁵. This means that an authorised officer may carry out, or direct another person to carry out, the aerial

² See section 261 (Power to enter a place under biosecurity program) of the Act.

³ The Act defines an **occupier**, of a place, generally to include the person who apparently occupies the place (or, if more than 1 person apparently occupies the place, any of the persons); any person at the place who is apparently acting with the authority of a person who apparently occupies the place; or if no-one apparently occupies the place, any person who is an owner of the place.

⁴ See section 270 (Entry of place under sections 261 and 262) of the Act.

⁵ See section 294 (Power to carry out aerial control measures under biosecurity program) of the Act. Section 294(6) of the Act defines **aerial control measure**, for biosecurity matter, to mean an activity, done from the air by an airborne machine or a person in an aircraft, to achieve a purpose of a biosecurity program and includes the following—

- surveying and monitoring the biosecurity matter;

control measure for electric ant in relation to a place to which the Program relates. The aerial control measures may be undertaken by manned helicopter or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV).

Obligations

A person who is an occupier of a place may be obligated to take action as specified in the Authorisation in 3.6 below.

In addition to Program specific obligations in the Authorisation, under section 238 of the Act, occupiers of a place are obligated to comply with an authorised officer's direction issued under section 237 of the Act.

General powers of authorised officers

Nothing in the Program or its associated authorisation limits the powers of authorised officers under Chapter 10 of the Act.

2.4 Consultation

The Local Governments within the area to which the program relates have been consulted.

• distributing an agricultural chemical to control the biosecurity matter.

3 Authorisation of a prevention and control program in the State of Queensland

I, Graeme Bolton, the Director-General of the Department of Primary Industries (the Department) acting pursuant to section 235 of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the Act), authorise the *Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ant 2025* (the Program) in Queensland, on the basis that:

- I am satisfied that electric ant are in Queensland and pose a significant biosecurity risk in Queensland⁶;
- I am satisfied that measures are required to prevent the establishment or spread in Queensland of electric ant (biosecurity matter) that pose a significant biosecurity risk in Queensland.

On commencement of the *Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ant 2025*, the *Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ant 2020*, authorised on 21 May 2021, is repealed under section 235 of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and section 24AA of the *Acts Interpretation Act 1954*.



Graeme Bolton

Director-General, Department of Primary Industries

Dated at Brisbane this 14 day of March 2025.

3.1 Biosecurity matter

The biosecurity matter to which the prevention and control program relates is electric ant—*Wasmannia auropunctata* (Roger 1863).

3.2 Purpose of the Program

The purpose of the Program is to:

- prevent the establishment or spread of electric ants in Queensland that pose a significant biosecurity risk; and
- manage, reduce or eradicate any electric ants in Queensland that could pose a significant biosecurity risk.

3.3 Area affected by the Program

The Program will apply to the following Local Government areas in Far North Queensland: Cairns Regional Council, Mareeba Shire Council, Tablelands Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Douglas Shire Council, and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

Figure 1 provides a detailed map of the area affected by the Program.

⁶ Addresses section 235 (3)(b) of the Act

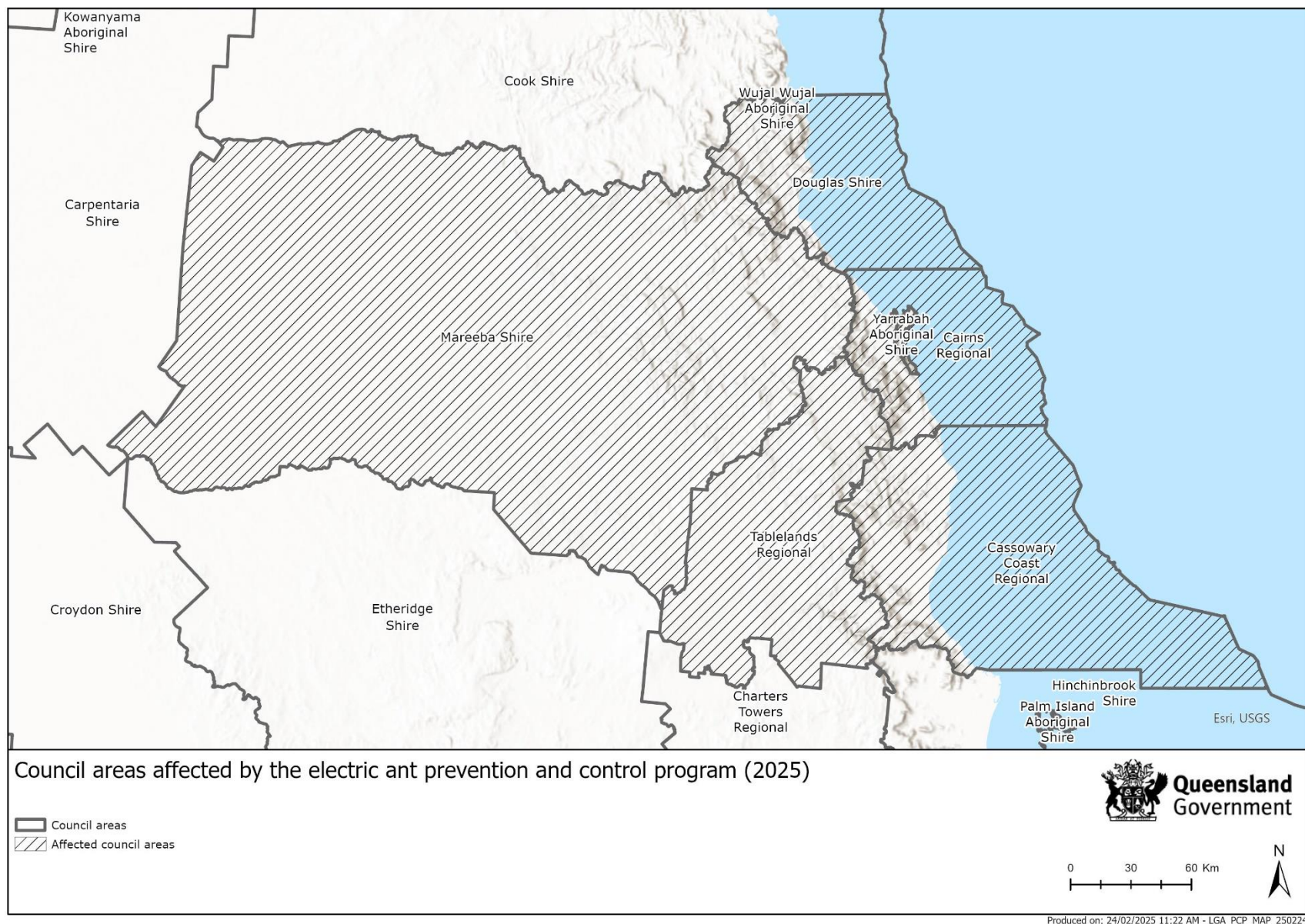


Figure 1 The Prevention and Control Program for Electric Ant 2025 applies to six local government areas in Far North QLD. They are Mareeba Shire Council, Douglas Shire Council, Cairns Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Tablelands Regional Council and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

3.4 Powers of authorised officers

An authorised officer of the Program appointed under the Act, may enter a place—other than a residence⁷—without a warrant and without the occupier’s consent within the State of Queensland under the Program⁸. An authorised officer appointed under the Act will also have the power to enter a place under the Program⁹.

An authorised officer can exercise the powers of an authorised officer under the Act in relation to the Program, if the authorised officer is appointed by the Chief Executive¹⁰. An authorised officer has general powers after entering a place to do any of the following¹¹:

General powers in the Act	Measures an authorised officer may take under the Program
Search any part of the place	<p><i>Undertaking preventative treatment and/or treatment¹² on places to destroy electric ants on the land or in electric ant carriers; or requiring an owner to destroy electric ant. Treatment is distributed by field teams on foot with fertiliser spreaders, aurally by helicopter or un-manned aerial vehicles (UAV), backpack blowers, blower trucks, all-terrain vehicles.</i></p> <p><i>Destroying an electric ant carrier undertaken by an authorised officer or an owner if the authorised officer believes it poses a significant biosecurity risk.</i></p> <p><i>Searching a place to check for the presence or absence of electric ant, undertaken by odour detection dogs and/or authorised officers.</i></p> <p><i>Inspections, examinations and filming may be undertaken to assist with tracing of electric ant carriers to and from a place.</i></p> <p><i>Taking a sample of ants for analysis to determine whether the ants are electric ants.</i></p> <p><i>Placing a flag(s) in the ground on a place to identify an electric ant location.</i></p>
Inspect, ¹³ examine ¹⁴ or film ¹⁵ any part of the place or anything at the place	
Take for examination a thing, or a sample of or from a thing, at the place	
Place an identifying mark in or on anything at the place	
Place a sign or notice at the place	
Produce an image or writing at the place from an electronic document or, to the extent it is not practicable, take a thing containing an electronic document to another place to produce an image or writing	
Take to, into or onto the place and use any person, detection animal, equipment and materials the authorised officer reasonably requires for exercising the authorised officer’s powers under this division	
Destroy biosecurity matter or a carrier if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authorised officer believes on reasonable grounds the biosecurity matter or carrier poses a significant biosecurity risk The owner of the biosecurity matter or carrier consents to its destruction. 	
Remain at the place for the time necessary to achieve the purpose of the entry	
The authorised officer may take a necessary step to allow the exercise of a general power	
If the authorised officer takes a document from the place to copy it, the authorised officer must copy and return the document to the place as soon as practicable	

⁷ The Act defines a **residence** to mean a premises or part of premises that is a residence with the meaning of section 259(2) and 259(3).

⁸ See section 259 (General powers to enter places) of the Act.

⁹ See Section 261 (Power to enter a place under biosecurity program) of the Act.

¹⁰ See section 255(3) (Powers of particular authorised officers limited) of the Act.

¹¹ See section 296 (General powers) of the Act.

¹² The Program applies treatment for two reasons—destruction of colonies of electric ants (infestation) and as a preventative measure using a broadcast bait. The broadcast bait treatments applied by the Program consist of a crushed corn grit impregnated with soybean oil, and either a metabolic inhibitor, hydramethylnon, or an insect growth regulator, S-methoprene, as authorised for use under Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) permit, or other baits allowed for under APVMA permit.

¹³ Section 296(5) defines **inspect**, a thing, to include open the thing and examine its contents.

¹⁴ Section 296(5) defines **examine** to include analyse, test, account, measure, weigh, grade, gauge and identify.

¹⁵ Section 296(5) defines **film** to include photograph, videotape and record an image in another way.

General powers in the Act	Measures an authorised officer may take under the Program
If the authorised officer takes from the place an article or device reasonably capable of producing a document from an electronic document to produce the document, the authorised officer must produce the document and return the article or device to the place as soon as practicable.	<p><i>Taking an image of a location of electric ants and the general vicinity.</i></p> <p><i>Taking GPS coordinates to ensure accuracy of location details of electric ants.</i></p>

Pursuant to section 237 of the Act an authorised officer may also give a direction to an occupier of a place located in an area to which the Program applies to take reasonable steps to:

- remove or eradicate electric ants as reasonably necessary to achieve the purposes of the Program, or
- destroy electric ant or a carrier of electric ant, if that authorised officer believes on reasonable grounds that they pose a significant biosecurity risk.

A penalty applies for failing to comply with a direction issued under this section.

An authorised officer may make a requirement (a **help requirement**) of an occupier of the place or a person at the place to give the authorised officer reasonable help to exercise a general power¹⁶.

An authorised officer may also carry out, or direct another person to carry out, aerial control measures for electric ants in relation to a place to which the Program applies. Under the Program, these measures may be undertaken by manned helicopter or un-manned aerial vehicle (UAV) to apply preventative bait treatment on un-infested properties and bait treatment on electric ant infested properties.

3.5 Obligations imposed on a person under the Program

The following obligations may be imposed on a person who is an occupier of a place to which the Program relates:

- remove any thing on a place that would obstruct an authorised officer undertaking the activities as required to eradicate electric ant. This may include restraining animals such as dogs and livestock; and/or mowing/slashing an area of long grass.
- refrain from disturbing or irrigating areas that have been treated by the NEAEP to maximise efficacy of the bait¹⁷.
- help the authorised officer in the execution of their powers.

3.6 Commencement and duration of the Program

The Program will begin on 21 April 2025 and will continue to operate until the nationally agreed response plan for the eradication of electric ant expires or there are no National Electric Ant Eradication Programs operating in Queensland.

The duration of the Program is considered to be reasonably necessary to achieve the Program's purpose.

¹⁶ See section 297 (Power to require reasonable help) of the Act.

¹⁷ The application of granular bait is more efficacious if the ground remains undisturbed for at least seven days after application to enable the ant to store and circulate the bait to the rest of the colony. An area that is being treated should not be irrigated 24 hours before or after the bait treatment being applied as it breaks down the bait, rendering it ineffective.

3.7 Consultation with relevant parties

As required by the Act,¹⁸ I have consulted, prior to the authorisation of the Program, with the following Local Governments, which are the Local Governments for the areas to which the Program applies: Cairns Regional Council, Mareeba Shire Council, Tablelands Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Douglas Shire Council and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

3.8 Notification of relevant parties of requirements

As required by the Act¹⁹, I will give public notice of the Program 14 days before the Program starts by:

- giving the notice, by way of letter, to each government department or government owned corporation responsible for land in the area to which the Program relates;
- publishing the notice on the Department's website.

A copy of the Program (including its Authorisation) is available for inspection at the Department of Primary Industries head office at 275 George Street Brisbane and regional offices²⁰. A copy of the Program is also available to view and print at no cost on the Department of Primary Industries website at www.daf.qld.gov.au. A copy of the Program Authorisation will be provided on request by contacting the Department of Primary Industries Customer Service Centre on 13 25 23.

¹⁸ See section 239 (Consultation about proposed biosecurity program) of the Act.

¹⁹ See section 240 (Notice of proposed biosecurity program) of the Act.

²⁰ See section 241 (Access to authorisation) of the Act.

Appendix 1 – References

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