Quarterly report No.3
January–March, 2022–23

Report to: NFAEP National Management Group
Prepared by: Program Office

NATIONAL
Fire Ant Eradication
PROGRAM

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Background

Red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) (RIFA) impact negatively on Australia's economy, human and animal health, the environment, and social amenity. Cost–benefit analysis (CBA) suggests the likely cost of RIFA in Australia, if not eradicated, will exceed an estimated $1.25 billion per year with adverse impacts likely in most sectors of the economy as well as intangible, though not insignificant, impacts on the safety and the amenity of the community.

The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (NRIFAEP), which is based in Queensland amid Australia's only active population of RIFA, is leading efforts to eradicate and suppress RIFA and, in so doing, protect Australia from the impact of RIFA.

This quarterly report provides information about the NRIFAEP's progress in implementing the 2022–23 work plan (the work plan) during Q3.

Progress against key performance indicators

Progress against the NRIFAEP's key performance indicators (KPIs) is summarised in Table 1. Please note that the progress in implementing individual KPIs relates to the timetable for implementing the activities in question and may not necessarily be applicable to this report.

Table 1: Progress against KPIs traffic light report (31 March 2023)

Status	Key performance indicator	Target	Progress
Foster public engagement and participation in fire ant responses in all affected areas			
Waiting for data	An increase in the percentage of households within the eradication and containment areas that disclose they look for fire ants in targeted surveys.	A 10% increase on FY2021–22 survey results.	• The baseline for this KPI was measured in April 2022 with 64% of people in eradication and containment areas indicating they had checked their yards for fire ants. • The 2022–23 KPI target is 74%, there was no research conducted by the NRIFAEP during this reporting period. This KPI will be measured in the next round of market research, which is scheduled for May 2023. Results will be available in June/July 2023.
Prevent the spread of fire ants beyond their current extent in Australia			
Monitoring	Total number of unique ha surveyed for fire ants in eradication and containment areas by remote sensing surveillance (RSS) or ground surveillance.	Minimum of 45,000 ha of land is surveyed.	• 25,564 unique ha of land was surveyed via remote sensing from 1 July–31 March 2023. • 11,018 unique ha was surveyed by ground surveillance (field and odour detection dog teams) during the same period. (Please note: If 5,000 properties with a total area of 45,000 ha are targeted for

Status	Key performance indicator	Target	Progress
			surveillance, the progress measures how much of the 45,000 (unique) area has been surveyed once. If we visit a property twice, we must not count the ha for the second visit).
Monitoring	Evidence of a reproductively viable fire ant queen detected beyond the outer limits of the containment area.	Zero detections.	• This target was not met. There were 2 fire ant detections beyond the outer limits of the Containment area during Q3. • When fire ants were first discovered on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) in January 2023 it was considered beyond the operational area that was in place at the time. • In relation to an interstate detection, though a fire ant queen was found in Thomastown, Victoria, the ant was dead therefore not reproductively viable, and likely transported to Victoria via human–assisted movement. There was a very low risk of the pest having spread. The Victoria detection was managed and is explained in the serious outbreaks section below. • Technically neither detection meets the KPI criteria but both detections are referred to in the Serious outbreaks section below.
On track	Response time to treat fire ants detected within the containment area.	All suitable habitat within 500 m of a fire ant outbreak within the containment area and outside the current treatment area is treated within 31 days of a confirmed fire ant detection.	• Two fire ant nests were detected outside of planned treatment areas within the containment area during Q3. • Both nests were destroyed immediately upon detection and a treatment consisting of an insect growth regulator was applied on all suitable habitat out to 500 m from the nests within 31 days.
Waiting for data	Awareness of fire ant biosecurity zones that restrict the movement of fire ant carriers.	At least 80% of industry is fully aware of fire ant biosecurity zones that restrict the movement of fire ant carriers.	• The baseline for this KPI was measured in April 2022 with 71% fully aware of fire ant biosecurity zones. • The 2022–23 KPI target is 80%. This KPI will be measured in the next round of market research, which is scheduled for May 2023.

Status	Key performance indicator	Target	Progress
			Results will be available in June/July 2023.
Suppress fire ants in all infested areas			
Monitoring	Total number of unique ha of land receiving at least one round of treatment in the eradication area (379,000 ha).	One round of planned treatment completed across 150,000 unique ha of land.	• The treatment season began on 1 September 2022 and 141,509 ha has received one round since treatment season began. • The NRIFAEP is on track for the treatment target of 150,000 ha, however these will not be unique ha. Planned eradication treatment is 300,000–315,000 ha as the total of all the rounds of the eradication treatment areas on 31 December 2022 was 315,000 ha. This ranges from 95% to 100% completion.
Monitoring	Total number of unique ha of land receiving at least one round of treatment in the containment area (205,000 ha).	One round of planned treatment completed across at least 36,000 unique ha of land.	• 27,746 ha in the containment area have received one round. This is on track for delivery of treatment targets under the work plan.
Achieve and prove absence of fire ants from targeted areas through eradication treatment and clearance surveillance			
Off track	Total number of unique ha of land receiving 3 rounds of treatment in the eradication area.	3 rounds of planned treatment across at least 150,000 ha.	• No sites have received 3 rounds of treatment in Q3 as Round 3 is not due to start until April 2023. It is also unlikely 3 rounds over 150,000 ha will be completed given cuts to the treatment budget and aerial delays due to contract negotiations.
Waiting for data	% of suitable habitat that was planned for, but not treated (i.e., treatment gaps).	Less than 2% gaps in suitable habitat that was planned to be treated.	• Treatment gaps can occur due to cropping cycles as well as entry refusals, which can lead to the NRIFAEP applying enforced entry provisions. • At the completion of the first round of treatment 1.8% of suitable habitat remained untreated. • Entry refusals accounted for the biggest portion of the gaps, followed by cropping. • The NRIFAEP is working with landowners to address their concerns and will treat cropping land when paddocks are fallow.

Note: Please refer to Table 6 for mitigation measures relating to the KPI strategic goal means by 2027.

Summary of treatment

The treatment season commenced on 5 September 2022 and is planned to finish in June 2023. See Appendix 1 – Treatment round 1 (1 January−31 March 2023) and Appendix 2 – Treatment round 2 (1 January−31 March 2023). Figure 1 displays planned and achieved treatment progress for the 2022–23 season, not responsive treatment. The graph displays completed treatment to date and shows that the NRIFAEP has not achieved planned treatment targets for the year to date. This was primarily due to procurement processes causing aerial operations to cease during November 2022 and not recommencing until February 2023. It was also due to the continuation of the wet weather.

Figure 1: Planned treatment progress against achieved (ha)

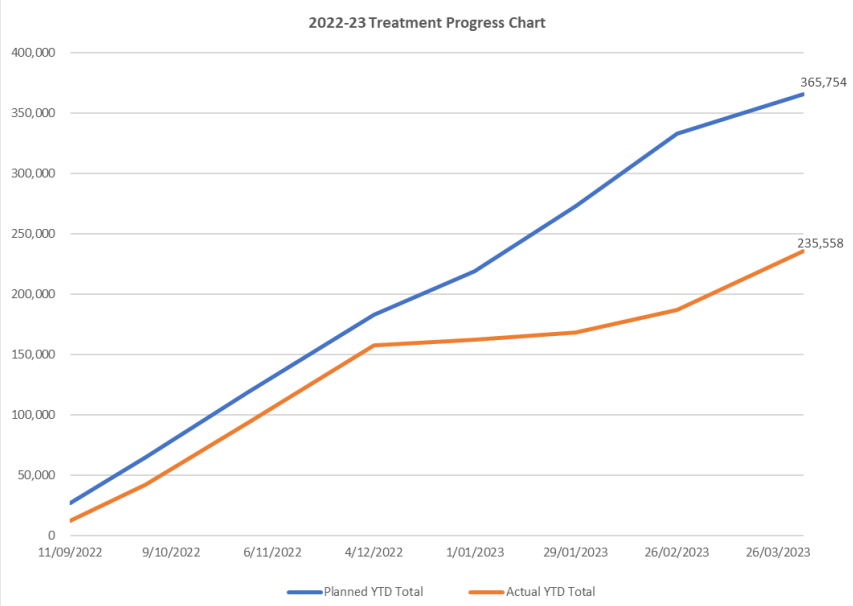


Table 2 outlines the numerical values of planned and actual treatment progress broken into treatment area for the reporting period. Containment areas 1 and 3, eradication area 1, outbreak areas 1 and 2, and polygyne/bait trials experienced reductions to the treatment plan dure to budget constraints. Approval was granted in November 2022 and March 2023 for the treatment plan.

Table 2: Planned and responsive treatment progress on 31 March 2023

Treatment area*	Planned ha	Actual ha	% Completed
Containment area 1	**44,500	0	0%
Containment area 2	51,450	38,737	75%
Containment area 3	**10,550	7,763	74%
Eradication area 1	**230,200	145,533	63%

Treatment area*	Planned ha	Actual ha	% Completed
Eradication area 2	34,750	24,423	70%
Eradication area 3	4,200	4,205	100%
Outbreak area 1	**13,800	9,030	65%
Outbreak area 2	**10,400	3,035	29%
Outbreak area 3	4,750	0	0%
Polygyne/bait trials	**8,500	2,832	33%
Responsive	5,000	*6,465	129%
Total	**418,100**	**242,023**	**58%**

Detections of importance

During Q3, detections of Importance (DOI) continued to be a major concern for the NRIFAEP's eradication efforts, resulting in the development of an alternative treatment approach under the proposed eradication strategy. DOI pose a heighted risk and are prioritised for a more extensive response, which includes the immediate application of insect growth regulator and/or toxicant bait as well as direct nest injection (DNI) treatment out to 500 m of the detection as detailed in Table 3. See Appendix 4 – Detections of importance (1 January – 31 March 2023).

The attributes of DOI may include location relative to the operational boundary, areas undergoing clearance, density of infestation, the detection of a polygyne infestation and outlier detection. The response to DOI includes scheduled treatment in selected areas as summarised detections receiving planned treatment. Data arising from this activity is used for the planning of future treatment and surveillance. A 5 x 5 km area (2,500 ha) used for clearance and freedom activities, and based on fire ant biology, spread risk and probability of independent infestation. The 2022–23 significant scale–up includes the amendment of risks in the Eradication area.

Table 3: Fire ant detections of importance

Type*	No.	No. detections receiving planned treatment
Detection beyond the operational boundary of containment area	2	0
Containment area	49	47
Eradication area	220	140
Total	271	187

Serious outbreaks

The NRIFAEP confirmed 2 serious outbreaks during Q3 (included in the detections beyond the operational boundary of the containment area) on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) and in the outer Melbourne suburb of Thomastown, Victoria.

In relation to the detection at Minjerribah, 21 nests across 3 properties were confirmed during this outbreak for the quarter. The NRIFAEP worked collaboratively with the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) to launch an immediate response to eradicate the nests, determine the extent and source of the infestation, and assess the risk of spread to non-infested areas. The response is now in its second phase, which is to eradicate the nests detected in April as well as to gather evidence to support the 'clearance' of the island and surrounds. This response is being complemented by drone trials.

Also, during Q3 the NRIFAEP assisted Agriculture Victoria with a fire ant incident. A single fire ant queen was detected in a consignment of potted plants at a nursery in the outer Melbourne suburb of Thomastown on 23 February 2023. The consignment was traced back to a nursery in Wongawallan in the Gold Coast Local Government Area. An incident response team was established to undertake investigations, which included the movement tracing of potted plants from the nursery at Wongawallan. No further detections of fire ants were made, and the incident response team was stood down in late March 2023. The NRIFAEP is continuing to work with the nursery industry representatives and providing communication and educational material as required.

For the NRIFAEP, outbreak control occurs for areas outside of the planned treatment area. It consists of eradicating such infestations and in the case of high-risk infestations, the creation of new treatment areas.

Summary of surveillance

Planned ground surveillance was slightly ahead of the target at the end of March 2023. The NRIFAEP has prioritised resources to ensure targets are achieved by the end of the financial year and will continue tasking field teams with surveillance activities when ground conditions are not suitable for treatment activities. Surveillance information is depicted below in Figure 2, Table 4 and Appendix 3 – Planned and responsive surveillance activity (1 January−31 March 2023).

Figure 2: Planned surveillance progress by field teams against schedule on 31 March 2023

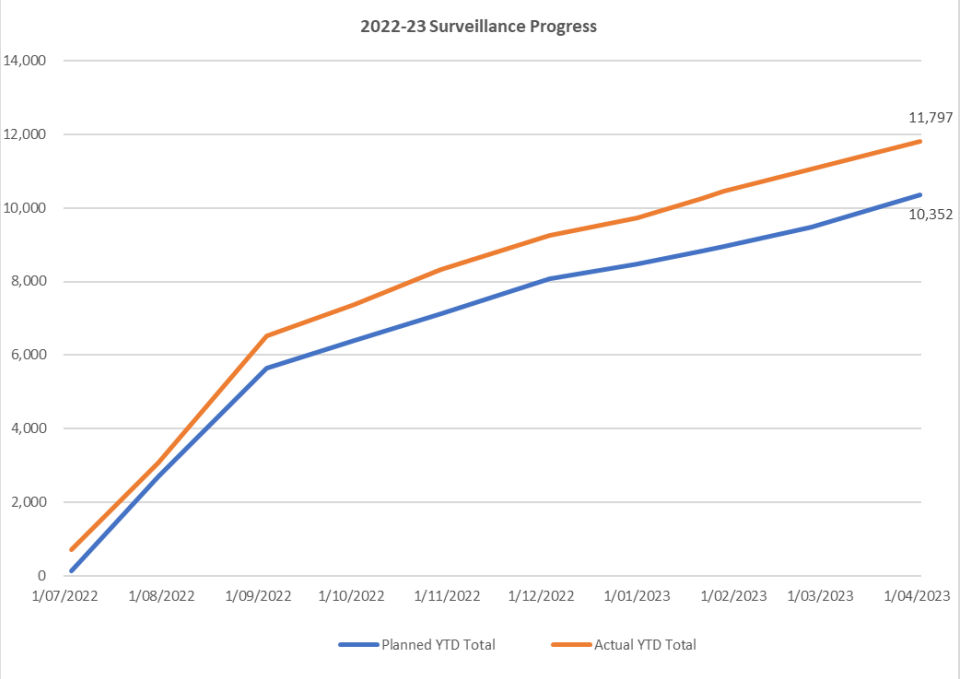


Table 4 outlines the numerical values of planned and actual treatment progress broken into treatment area (ha) for the reporting period. The targeted surveillance area includes planned surveillance for outbreak control of previous season's DOI (500 m from detection), targeted sites out to 2 km for new detections during 2022–23, targeted surveillance of locations flooded during 2022, and targeting of monitoring sites within the pre-eradication area. The responsive surveillance area includes an allocation for delineation surveillance of new outbreak control detections.

The targeted surveillance area includes planned surveillance for outbreak control of previous season's DOI (500 m from detection), targeted sites out to 2 km for new detections during 2022–23, targeted surveillance of locations flooded during 2022, and targeting of monitoring sites within the pre-eradication area.

The responsive surveillance area includes an allocation for delineation surveillance of new outbreak control detections.

Odour detection dogs are not included in the chart for Table 4.

Table 4: Planned surveillance progress

Surveillance area*	Planned ha	Progress actual ha	Progress % completed
Clearance	3,350	2,922	87%
Targeted	7,050	4,092	58%
Responsive	5,000	4,783	96%

Surveillance area*	Planned ha	Progress actual ha	Progress % completed
Odour dog detection surveillance	500	130	26%
Total	**15,900**	**11,927**	**75%**

Stakeholder mobilisation

Raising stakeholder awareness

In Q3, the NRIFAEP continued working to empower communities to look for and report fire ants and raise awareness of the importance of letting authorised field officers' access targeted properties. Activities included localised communication and engagement in treatment areas and broadscale advertising in sections of South East Queensland.

Primary communication channels

A summary of the primary functions used to deliver key information to stakeholders, including trends across quarters, are as follows.

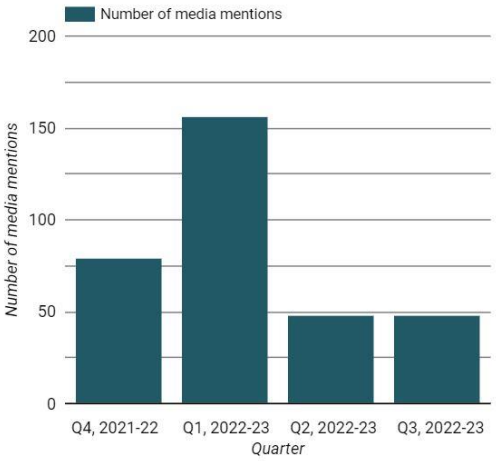
Media stories

The following media stories mentioned the NRIFAEP:

- A total of 48 news media stories mentioned the NRIFAEP, fire ants or fire ant eradication this quarter. This was the same result as Q2.
- Most of the media stories published had a neutral sentiment (98%), with just one story deemed negative. The stories included discussion about the safety of fire ant treatment, the risks the pest poses to the environment and the detection at Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island).

Figure 3 provides a graphical depiction of the media stories mentioning the NRIFAEP.

Figure 3: Media stories



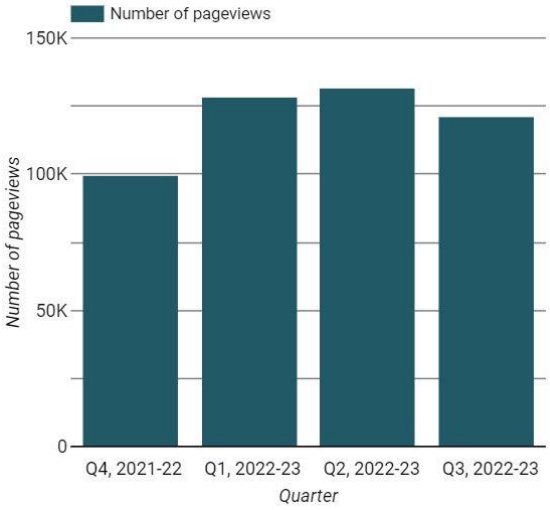
Website views

The following website page views (fireants.org.au) have been recorded during the reporting period:

- Traffic on the NRIFAEP's website fireants.org.au dipped slightly (8%) this quarter, with 121,406 pageviews recorded. This is a result of a reduction in campaign spending and delivery at the start of the year.
- More than 7% more people accessed the website using a mobile phone this quarter, up from 64%. Users also spent an average of 1.40 minutes on the website (in each session), up 132%.
- Social media advertising continues to drive most of the traffic to the fireants.org.au website (45%) – up 7% on last quarter. The number of people navigating to the website from search engines also continues to grow – organic search (17%) and paid search (7%).

Figure 4 provides a graphical depiction of the website page view of the NRIFAEP.

Figure 4: Website page views – fireants.org.au



Social media

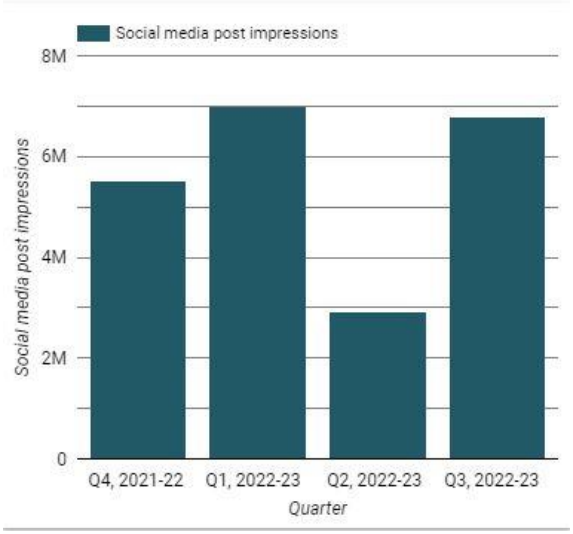
The following social media reaches have occurred during the reporting period:

- Social media reach increased by 3,886,288 this quarter with more than 6,800,000 post impressions. A post impression is recorded when a social media post is displayed in a personal social media feed. An individual may see multiple posts, or a post multiple times.
- Social media advertising cost $38,477 this quarter and resulted in almost 38,657 people clicking links in the posts seeking additional information. This was 4.4% down on the previous quarter.
- The decrease is related to lower social media advertising in this period.

- Social media reach is expected to increase again next quarter with new social media advertising planned for the Look for and report fire ants and Don't spread fire ants campaigns.

Figure 5 provides a graphical depiction of the social media reaches for the NRIFAEP.

Figure 5: Social media reach



Additional communication material to raise awareness

The following additional communication materials have been used to raise awareness:

- More than 283,000 direct mail pieces were delivered across South East Queensland in Quarter 3 – up 3,000 items on the previous quarter.
- Communication comprised campaign material encouraging residents to look for and report fire ants and let field teams access their properties.
- A small mail delivery was also designed to target residents living or working on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island).
- Fourteen electronic communications were sent to external stakeholders in the form of our monthly newsletter, general community and industry notifications, and text message in Quarter 3. Overall, 39,233 people received the communication with 16,612 (42.34%) opening or reading the message.

Building support and empowering stakeholders

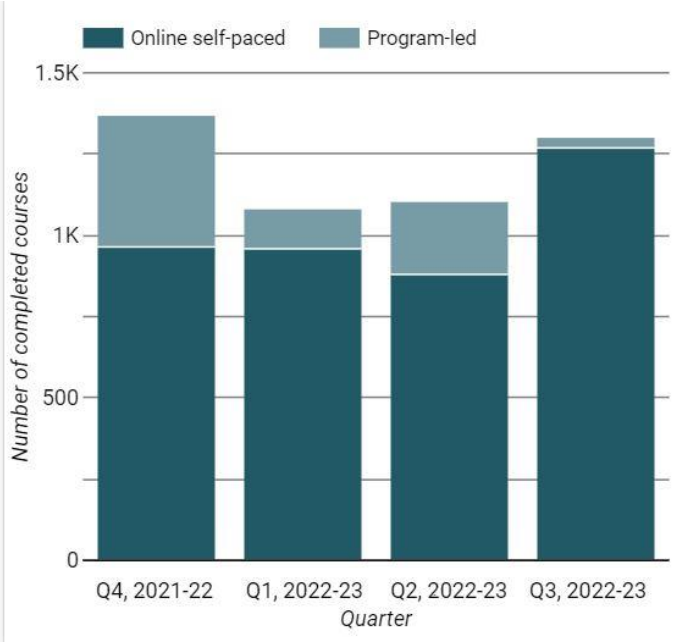
Stakeholder training status

Figure 6 Stakeholder fire ant awareness training, indicates that:

- A total of 1,300 people undertook one of the modules offered in online self-paced training this quarter, with 882 people completing the workplaces training module and 331 people completing the course for residents. The recently launched pest manager training module was completed by 57 people.

- The overall satisfaction rating of the online courses rated at 4.56 out of 5 in Q3. This is slightly higher than previous quarters.
- The feedback was also positive with participants noting the training was clear, concise, informative, easy to understand and a good refresher.
- The NRIFAEP also delivered one face-to-face training session for 30 students at the University of Queensland's Gatton campus.

Figure 6: Stakeholder fire ant awareness training

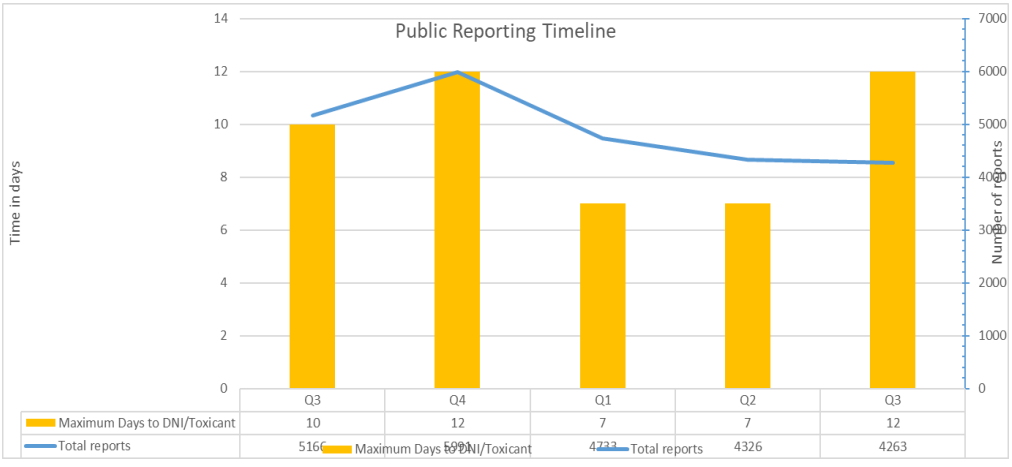


Community reports of fire ants

Figure 7 illustrates to maximum number of days from public reports to DNI. The graph illustrates that:

- There were 4,263 public reports of suspected fire ants in Q3.
- The maximum days to respond to public reports was 12 business days.

Figure 7: Public reports and maximum days to DNI



Compliance enforcement

Compliance enforcement activity is focused on the movement of high-risk carrier products, especially hay and carrier material associated with the construction sector as shown in Table 5. The compliance enforcement team undertakes this work with the aid of business data, field inspections, compliance inspections, and audits. During Q3, recruitment processes occurred for the purpose of increasing compliance officer numbers.

Two significant detections directed the compliance enforcement team to focus resources on businesses at risk of providing potential fire ant carriers to locations outside of the fire ant biosecurity zones. As a result, an increase in non-compliance was identified.

In total, 242 audits were undertaken by a team consisting of 5 compliance officers and 3 compliance inspectors (see Appendix 5 – Compliance activity (1 January – 31 March 2023)).

Table 5: High risk industry audits – compliant audits and non-compliant audits

High risk industry	Compliant audits	Non-compliant audits	Outcome
Quarry	8	4	While some were minor non-compliances where an Advisory Notice was issued, others received a Biosecurity Order, closing the business until the risk of fire ant spread was reduced.
Landscape supplier	32	14	As a result of the Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) response, landscape suppliers within the fire ant biosecurity zones and locals to the island, were audited. Biosecurity Orders were issued to businesses possessing a high risk of moving fire ants in their product. Cases where the risk of non-compliance was not as significant were resolved with an Advisory Notice and additional compliance advice.
Nursery	30	8	During an extensive tracing exercise after a fire ant was detected amongst potted plants in Victoria, 38 compliance checks were conducted. It should be noted, that due to the non-compliance that had been identified, several nurseries were audited multiple times to identify and rectify non-compliance. To date, only one nursery audited in Quarter 3 holds a non-compliance status. A Biosecurity Order remained in place at this nursery, while evidence and witness statements were being collated.
Transport	4	1	The only transport company found to be non-compliant was transporting soil from a non-compliant business. The transport company was also found to have fire ants on their property. As a result, no movement of fire ant carriers was permitted until the business and its supplier became compliant.

High risk industry	Compliant audits	Non-compliant audits	Outcome
Waste management	5	1	The business found non-compliant re-processes waste material for re-sale. While they were mostly compliant, fire ants were found within a product marked for sale. A Biosecurity Order was implemented, until the fire ants were appropriately treated, and the product was reprocessed.
Turf	9	1	Only one, minor non-compliance was identified within the turf industry. This turf producer is a smaller business and while they were applying a bifenthrin chemical spray, the mix rate was not as per the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority requirements. This non-compliance was quickly resolved.
Earthmoving	50	5	While non-compliance was identified, no high-risk movements are believed to have occurred. The primary issue was a failure to keep records or documentation required under a Biosecurity Instrument Permit.
Building /construction	52	0	This quarter, no non–compliance was identified within the building/construction industry. During previous quarters, significant efforts have been made to increase the compliance awareness across industry. It is also often the case that these sites do not export fire ant carriers, so they have less requirements to fulfill to be compliant.
Landscaping	13	0	All landscapers identified this quarter were sourcing fire ant carriers from compliant businesses.
Hay producer	3	0	Hay producers were found to be meeting the storage requirements for producing hay for use on their properties.
Poultry	1	0	This compliance check was conducted after the business reported fire ant nests on their property. The investigating officer found no risk of fire ant spread in poultry manure.
Produce agent	1	0	This agent is based in Dunwich and sells bagged soils and mulches. The business which supplies these bags was also audited and found to be compliant.
Total	**208**	**39**	**18.75% of audits returned a non-compliant result. Of these non-compliances, only one has not been rectified. The business remains under a Biosecurity Order while the allocated officer continues investigations.**

Clearance and proof of freedom strategy

The Proof of freedom strategy was independently reviewed by the Centre for International Economics. The review found the strategy was sound, rigorous, and that principles of the strategy are, by design, extensible to any application for verifying absence of fire ants, including post–eradication monitoring and sentinel/boundary surveillance.

There is currently no expectation of declaring any area free or clear from fire ants within the next 2 years, according to the strategy.

Research and innovation

Remote piloted aircraft trial

An externally conducted feasibility study found that using remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) to complement the NRIFAEP's current treatment and surveillance methods is both feasible and viable. This led to the development of a proof-of-concept demonstration for both treatment and surveillance to test several platforms and gain hard data on the efficiency and capabilities of RPA performing NRIFAEP-specific tasks to achieve the most beneficial outcome. The study reviewed the activities conducted by the NRIFAEP and presented drone technology types that could be used within the NRIFAEP. The study also provided guidance on meeting Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) regulations and possible deployment pathways to complement existing responses. An assessment of the drone's performance in complementing existing methods is occurring at Minjerribah.

Risk management

Risks to the NRIFAEP and its activities are identified and monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure they adequately reflect the NRIFAEP's current operating environment. Risks will be periodically reviewed and brought to the attention of the Senior Leadership Board (SLB), the National Steering Committee (NSC) and Risk Management Sub-Committee (RMSC) if required. A review of the risks under the work plan has been undertaken. Table 6 shows the risks identified as being actively managed and mitigated.

Table 6: Risk and mitigation

Risk	Description	Mitigation plan	Contingency plan	Management and mitigation
Quantum of funding is insufficient to implement plan	The NRIFAEP budget is insufficient due to issues such as: • errors or increases in input costs • inflation rates beyond that planned • detections of fire ants beyond the scope of the plan.	• Invest in management and research that increases efficiency of operations. • Plan for sufficient contingency budget each year. • Execute plan on time.	• Prioritise containment over eradication. • Raise issues with NSC for resolution.	• Cost savings of $7.5 million to meet budget requirements were implemented in Q1. • Some treatment areas planned to receive 3 rounds during 2022–23 were reduced to 1 or 2 rounds in areas with

Risk	Description	Mitigation plan	Contingency plan	Management and mitigation
				low density detections from the past 12 months, especially if those areas did not receive repeat treatments during 2021–22.
Loss of community and political support for continuing fire ant eradication efforts	A lack of community support may lead to: • community resistance to treatment and surveillance on land they control • lack of political support for implementing legislation like movement control compliance and right of entry to treat • reluctance to communicate risks of fire ants to the community • loss of political support and funding for fire ant control.	• Dedicate resources to raising fire ant awareness and support for eradiation strategies. • Conduct targeted engagement of stakeholders who are most important to fire ant eradication success. • Conduct regular surveys of the community to measure community sentiment towards fire ant eradication.	• Review effectiveness of current communicati on and engagement strategies. • Raise issue with NSC for resolution.	• There have been some small pockets of community resistance against the NRIFAEP (e.g. Boonah). • Increased engagement with the local community and community leaders is currently underway.
Fire ant treatment not possible in 100% of fire ant suitable habitat	Some land types may be suitable for fire ant habitation but not	• Systematic identification of treatment gaps and reasons for	Prioritise containment over eradication.	• The NRIFAEP is working to identify and treat gaps.

Risk	Description	Mitigation plan	Contingency plan	Management and mitigation
	accessible for treatment due to: • growth of organic produce • workplace health and safety (WH&S) issues (e.g. railways, highways) • chemical sensitivity of residents • chemical sensitivity of produce (crayfish farms etc.) • community opposition.	their existence. • Dedicated team to manage gaps. • Research into alternative treatment methods where required.	Raise issues with NSC for resolution.	• The NRIFAEP has a dedicated staff member and working group to identify and work through issues to resolve treatment gaps. • NRIFAEP compliance officers can (and do) use the Queensland Police Service to help with treatment refusals as a last resort.
Fire ant surveillance and monitoring is ineffective	Surveillance is ineffective at detecting fire ants.	• Invest in management and research that increases effectiveness of surveillance. • Conduct quality assurance and quality control on surveillance activities.	Raise issues with NSC for resolution.	• RSS currently under review, traditional ground surveillance is still effective at locating fire ant nests.

Workplace health and safety

The workplace health and safety (WHS) team is committed to creating workplaces where staff can thrive and perform at their best. This is being achieved through good work design, safe work environments, and providing resources and tools for staff to do their jobs safety. The NRIFAEP demonstrates its commitment to the health safety and wellbeing of our workers and empowering everyone to Think, Act and Be Safe at all times, thus contributing to a proactive and preventative safety culture.

During this quarter, this was demonstrated through maintaining a robust and responsive WHS management system, integrating effective risk management processes into our operations and work practices, ensuring hazards are thoroughly identified, incidents are promptly reported and investigated, and deficiencies are addressed in a timely manner. In addition, the NRIFAEP continues to communicate, consult, and engage to secure active participation in decisions that may impact on health and safety. This is achieved though consultative arrangements within the workplace with our Health and Safety Committee and working collaboratively with stakeholders within the NRIFAEP, Biosecurity Queensland and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) to ensure best practice WH&S and adherence to legislation. This has included reviewing procedures and protocols, collaborating with the training, and developing area and reviewing risk and controls within the NRIFAEP.

The NRIFAEP remains vigilant in its priorities of reducing risk and harm to ensure the safety of field officers and continues to investigate the best ways possible to further decrease the number of incidents.

The NRIFAEP continues to align with the DAF workforce strategy and action plan for 2021–25, which is for people to be empowered and engaged to innovate and collaborate, demonstrating strong leadership, adaptability, agility, and foresight. In Q3, this has been achieved by supporting the NRIFAEP with the recruitment of temporary and permanent employees while maintaining employee FTE caps and budgetary restrictions as well as adherence to the *Public Sector Act 2022* that was released on 1 March 2023.

Finance

The 2022–23 budget is comprised of the estimated cost of delivering the work plan and target treatments agreed by the NSC. The budget to expenses trend is shown in Figure 8.

The NRIFAEP was underspent by $10.7 million at 31 March 2023. The underspend mainly related to $9.1 million in supplies and services and $1.6 million in employee expenses. Substantial variance occurred in supplies and services expenses mostly associated with an underspend in bait costs of $6.1 million and aircraft hire of $2.2 million. This was due to aerial treatment not occurring between 22 November 2022 and 13 February 2023, resulting in 13.5% completion of planned treatment. Flights recommenced on 13 February 2023. The employee expense underspend of $1.6 million resulted from delays in filling vacant positions, which have now been filled by contractors or remain vacant.

The budget to expenses trend is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Budget to expenses trend

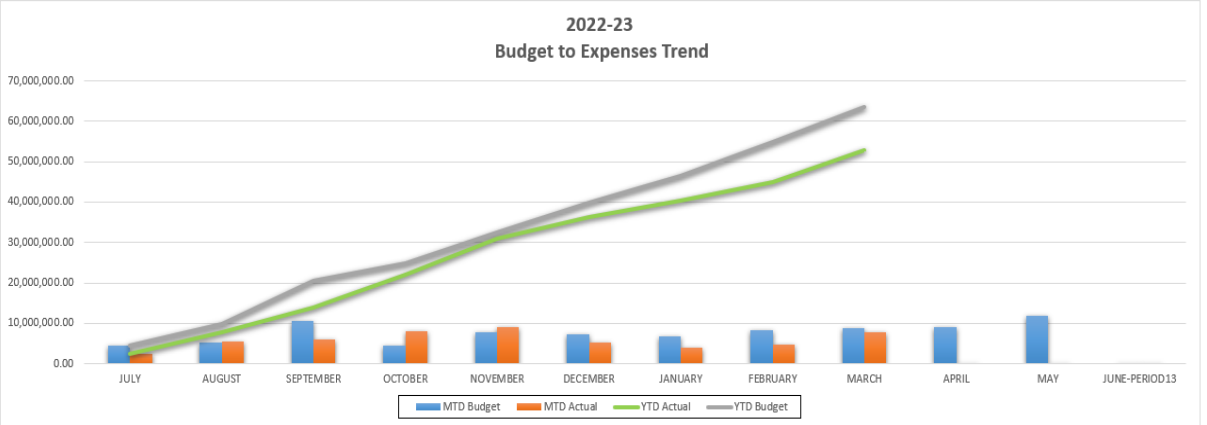


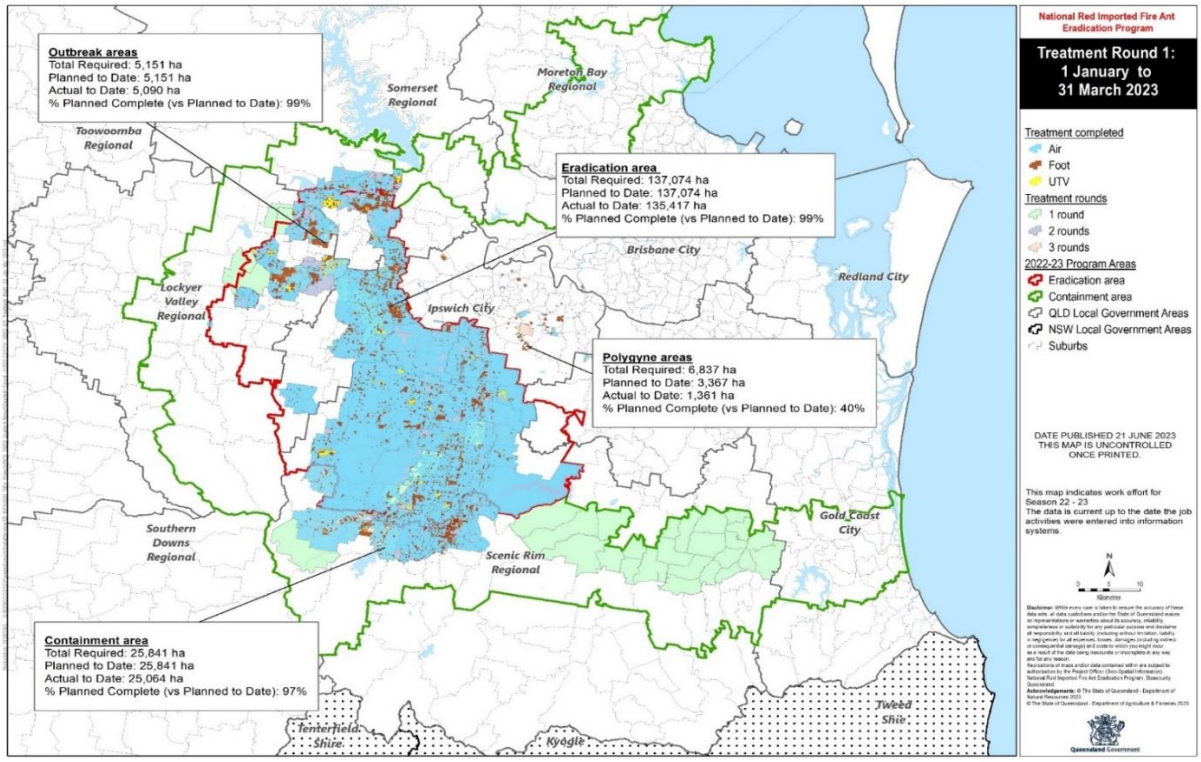
Table 7 details the quarterly financials for the NRIFAEP.

Table 7: Quarterly financials

	Revised Budget $'000	YTD Budget $'000	YTD Actual $'000	Variance to YTD Budget $'000
Revenues				
User Charges	36,358	25,045	21,067	(3,978)
Grants from the Commonwealth	54,414	38,496	31,805	(6,691)
Total Revenue	**90,772**	**63,541**	**52,872**	**(10,669)**
Expenses				
Employee Expenses	17,739	12,280	10,681	1,599
Supplies and Services	72,383	50,922	41,865	9,056
Depreciation	278	209	210	(0)
Other Expenses	372	130	117	14
Total Expenses	**90,772**	**63,541**	**52,873**	**10,669**

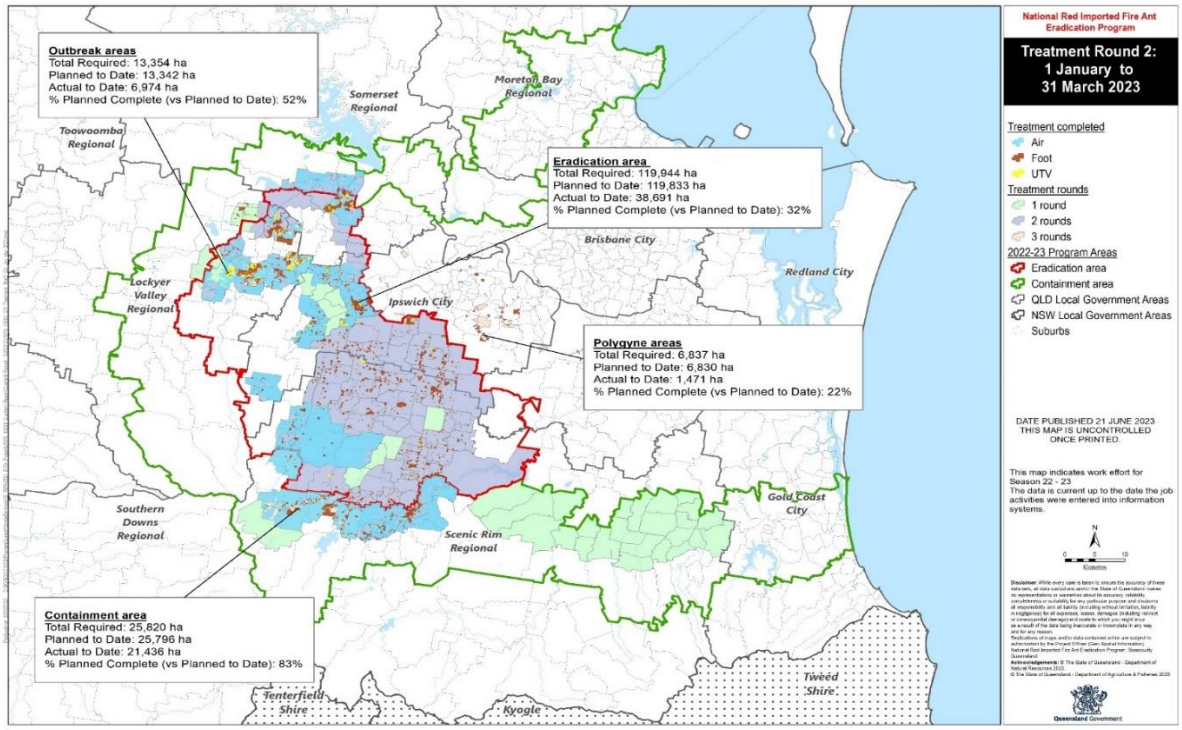
Appendix 1 – Treatment round 1 (1 January−31 March 2023)

The map provided below outlines the round 1 treatment progress conducted during the reporting period. Details within the map indicate air (blue), foot (brown) and utility terrain vehicles (UTV – yellow) treatments were carried out within the eradication area (red). Planned treatment rounds are indicated in 3 pastel colours (green – round 1, purple round 2, and cream round 3) identifying the treatment round within the containment (bright green) and eradication areas.



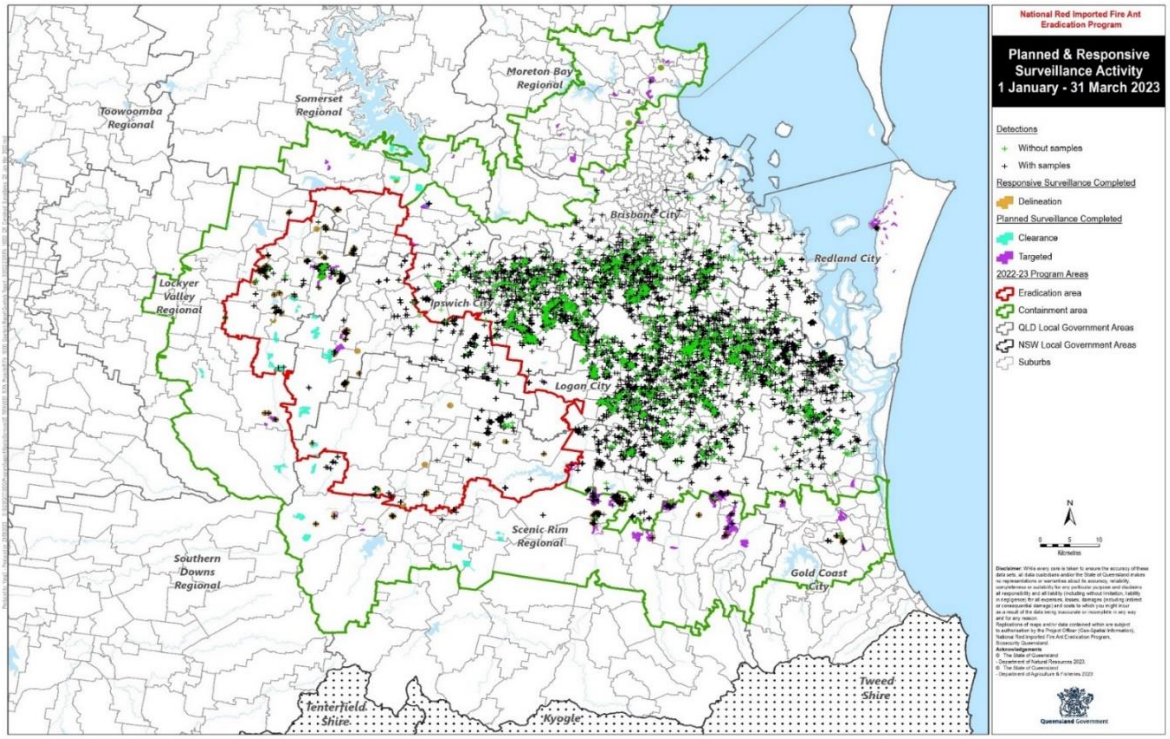
Appendix 2 – Treatment round 2 (1 January−31 March 2023)

The map provided below outlines the round 2 treatment progress conducted during the reporting period. Details within the map indicate air (blue), foot (brown) and UTV (yellow) treatments were carried out within the eradication area (red). Planned treatment rounds are indicated in 3 pastel colours (green – round 1, purple round 2, and cream round 3) identifying the treatment round within the containment (bright green) and eradication areas.



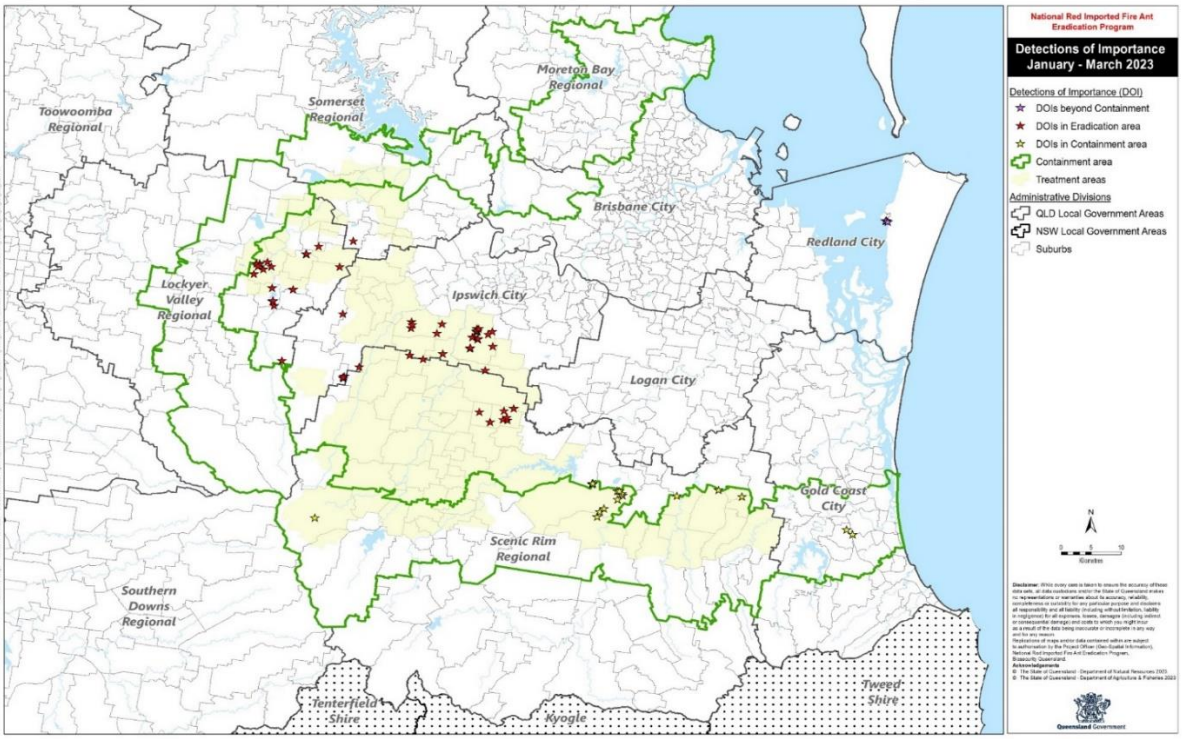
Appendix 3 – Planned and responsive surveillance activity (1 January−31 March 2023)

The map below outlines the planned and responsive surveillance activity carried out during the reporting. Indications of the map state that surveillance was completed through responsive (delineation – orange) and planned surveillance (clearance – cyan, and targeted – magenta), and RSS. RSS flight cells both completed (yellow) and validated (pink) surveillance. Fire ant detections were both sampled in the laboratory and identified on site in the field.



Appendix 4 – Detections of importance (1 January – 31 March 2023)

The map below outlines the DOI within containment (green) and treatment (yellow) areas. Geographical locations are bound in local government (NSW – grey dots, and Queensland – grey) and suburbs (light grey).



Appendix 5 – Compliance activity (1 January – 31 March 2023)

The map below indicates the compliance check activities within the fire ant biosecurity zones. Compliance is indicated by a green triangle, non-compliance a red triangle. There are 2 fire ant biosecurity zones indicated in yellow and grey.