

**Surveillance Program for Electric Ants under the
*Biosecurity Act 2014***

National Electric Ant Eradication Program

2025

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1 Biosecurity Program

1.1 Program name

The surveillance program (biosecurity program) for electric ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata* (Roger 1863)) will be known as the Surveillance Program for Electric Ants 2025 (the **Program**).

2 Requirement for a surveillance program

2.1 Purpose and rationale

Significant biosecurity risk

The *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the **Act**) provides for the establishment of surveillance programs. Surveillance programs are directed at any of the following—

- (a) monitoring compliance with the Act in relation to a particular matter to which the Act applies;
- (b) confirming the presence, or finding out the extent of the presence, in the State or the parts of the State to which the program applies, of the biosecurity matter to which the program relates;
- (c) confirming the absence, in the State or the parts of the State to which the program applies, of the biosecurity matter to which the program relates;
- (d) monitoring the effects of measures taken in response to a biosecurity risk;
- (e) monitoring compliance with requirements about prohibited matter or restricted matter;
- (f) monitoring levels of biosecurity matter or levels of biosecurity matter in a carrier.

The objectives of the Surveillance Program for Electric Ants 2025 are:

- monitor compliance with the Act and Biosecurity Regulation 2016 (the **Regulation**) to minimise the risk of spread of electric ants; and
- check for the presence or absence of electric ants 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.

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 ant 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).

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.

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

Electric ant is 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 Agriculture and Fisheries, 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.

The Program is the most effective and efficient option to check compliance with the Act and to monitor the presence or absence of electric ants at places 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 the amendment to the *Surveillance Program for Electric Ants*, authorised on 3 June 2016, is to:

- 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.
- 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:

- Monitoring compliance with movement controls is one of the key measures undertaken by the NEAEP to ensure the risk of human-assisted electric ant spread is minimised. Biosecurity zones will be established over the known areas of infestation (operational areas) and monitoring compliance will focus in these biosecurity zones.
- Treatment and surveillance are also key measures undertaken by the NEAEP and will be dealt with the establishment of a prevention and control program over 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.

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 surveillance 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 place 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.

Obligations

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

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.

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.

3 Authorisation of a surveillance 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 *Surveillance Program for Electric Ants 2025* (the Program) in Queensland, on the basis that:

- I am satisfied that electric ants are in Queensland and pose a significant biosecurity risk in Queensland⁵;
- I am satisfied that measures are required to check compliance with the Act and *Biosecurity Regulation 2016*, monitor for the presence or absence of electric ants, and monitor the effects of measures taken to prevent the establishment of electric ants.

On commencement of the *Surveillance Program for Electric Ants 2025*, the *Surveillance Program for Electric Ants*, authorised on 3 June 2016, 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 surveillance program relates is electric ant—*Wasmannia auropunctata* (Roger 1863).

3.2 Purpose of the Program

The purpose of the Program is to:

- monitor compliance with the Act and *Biosecurity Regulation 2016* to minimise the risk of spread of electric ants; and
- check for the presence or absence of electric ants 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.

3.3 Area affected by the Program

The Program will apply to 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.

⁵ Addresses section 235 (3)(b) of the Act

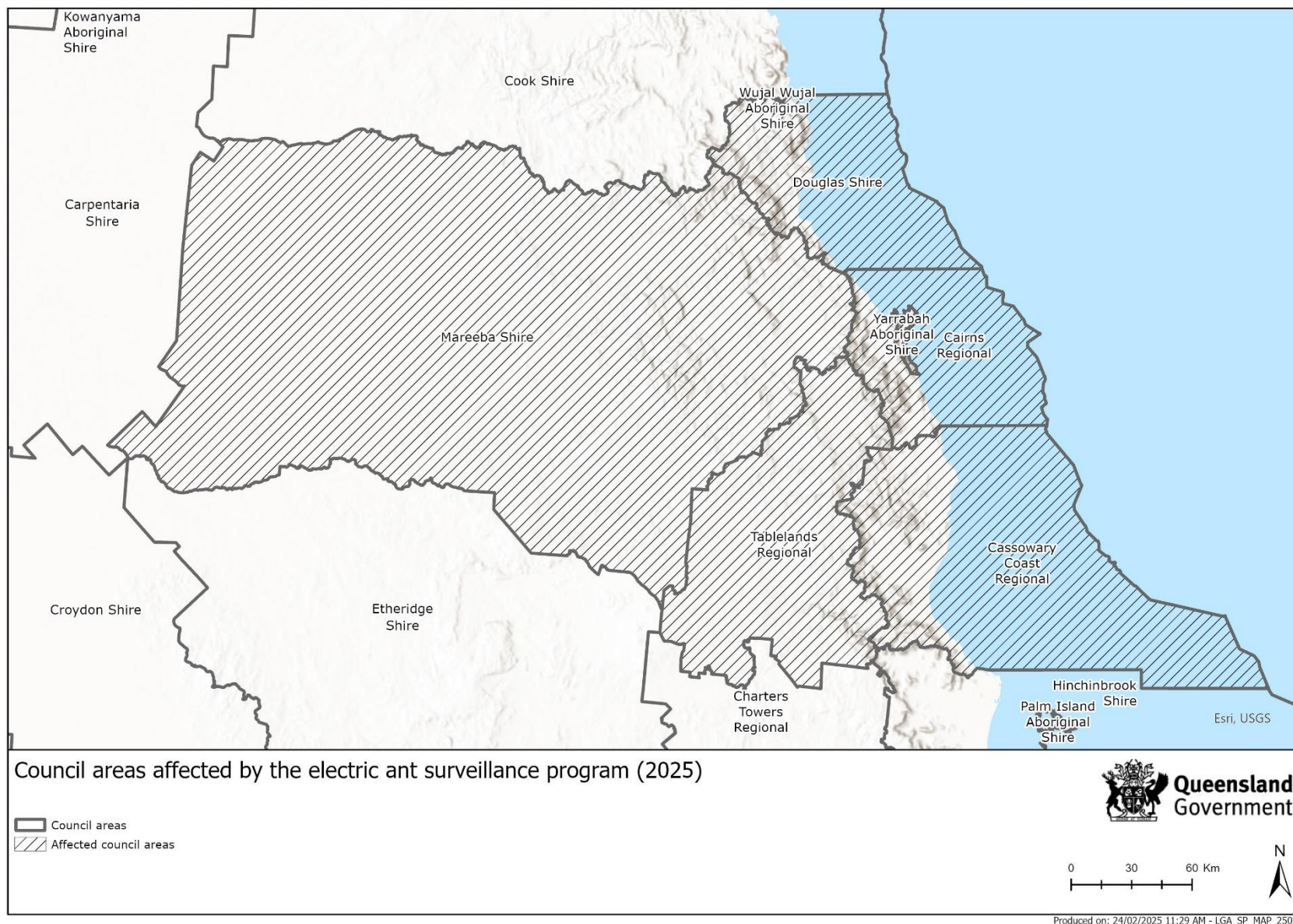


Figure 1 The Surveillance Program for Electric Ants 2025 applies to six local government areas in Far North QLD. They are Mareeba Shire Council, Douglas Shire Council, Cairns Regional Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Tablelands Regional Council and Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

3.4 Powers of authorised officers

An authorised officer of the Program appointed under the Act, may enter a place—other than a residence⁶—without a warrant and without the occupier's consent within the State of Queensland under the Program⁷. An authorised officer appointed under the Act will also have the power to enter a place under the Program⁸.

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 executive⁹. An authorised officer has general powers after entering a place to do any of the following¹⁰:

General powers in the Act	Measures an authorised officer may take under the Program
Search any part of the place	<i>To view operations and areas relevant to carriers or electric ants. Production and storage areas may include a growing area(s), receiving area(s), chemical storage area(s), office and equipment (including machinery and vehicles).</i>
Inspect, ¹¹ examine ¹² or film ¹³ 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	<i>Inspect, examine or film any production and storage areas which may include a growing area(s), receiving area(s), chemical storage area(s), office and equipment (including machinery and vehicles). Also includes records.</i>
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	<i>Take an electric ant sample. For example, taking samples for the purpose of diagnostic analysis to ascertain the presence or absence of electric ants. May take a sample of an electric ant carrier or any item that may assist with monitoring compliance.</i>
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. 	<i>Placing a flag(s) in the ground on a place to identify a location where electric ant have been found. Possibly mark an area on site that is subject to movement controls, possibly electric ant carriers that are not to leave a site. Mark an area subject to treatment.</i>
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	<i>Take documents relating to the movement of any electric ant carriers (for example, consignment notes, dockets, sales receipts, chemical records, contact lists) from a place to copy them. Once copied the document an authorised officer will return the document to the place as soon as practicable.</i>
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	

⁶ The Act defines a **residence** to mean a premises or a part of a premises that is a residence within the meaning of section 259(2) and 259(3).

⁷ See section 259 (General powers to enter places) of the Act.

⁸ See section 261 (Power to enter a place under biosecurity program) of the Act.

⁹ See section 255 (3) (Powers of particular authorised officers limited) of the Act.

¹⁰ See section 296 (General powers) of the Act.

¹¹ Section 296(5) defines **inspect**, a thing, to include open the thing and examine its contents.

¹² Section 296(5) defines **examine** to include analyse, test, account, measure, weigh, grade, gauge and identify.

¹³ 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>While conducting checks authorised officers may physically move an item that may hinder the process, asks person to log onto computer, present records or move an item.</i></p> <p><i>If unable to obtain the document from a device an authorised officer takes the device and has an expert produce the document and authorised officer returns the device.</i></p>

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 power¹⁴.

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 under this Program. 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 are being surveyed by the NEAEP to maximise efficacy of the lures¹⁵.
- 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.

3.7 Consultation with relevant parties

As required by the Act¹⁶, I have consulted, prior to the authorisation of the Program, 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.

¹⁴ See section 297 (Power to require reasonable help) of the Act.

¹⁵ The application of granular bait is more efficacious if the ground remains undisturbed for at least seven days after application to enable the ants 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.

¹⁶ See section 239 (Consultation about proposed biosecurity program) of the Act.

3.8 Notification of relevant parties of requirements

As required by the Act¹⁷, 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; and
- 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 offices¹⁸. A copy of the Program is also available to view and print at no cost on the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries 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.

¹⁷ See section 240 (Notice of proposed biosecurity program) of the Act.

¹⁸ See section 241 (Access to authorisation) of the Act.

4 References

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