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30th December 2013

**Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee
Queensland Parliamentary Committees
Parliament House**

Re: *Biosecurity Bill 2013*

Thank you for the opportunity to **recommend that the *Biosecurity Bill 2013* prescribes the precipitating conditions, management and cost-sharing arrangements for programs transitioning from the eradication of an exotic pest to the on-going management and control of that pest.**

Cost-sharing arrangements for national eradication programs of exotic pests are the responsibility of the Standing Council on Primary Industries (SCoPI). However, the Biosecurity Advisory Council has raised concerns with Council about the current cost-sharing arrangements and recommends that governments agree to arrangements for transitioning from eradication to the ongoing management of exotic incursions. The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program, managed by the Queensland Government, is a case where the current cost-sharing arrangements have had an adverse effect on the control of that pest. (see below). Therefore, I suggest that the *Biosecurity Bill 2013* makes explicit the precipitating conditions, management and cost-sharing arrangements for programs transitioning from eradication to the on-going control and containment of an exotic pest.

Deficiencies in current cost-sharing arrangements for eradication programs

The current cost-sharing arrangement for national eradication programs is for a 50% contribution from the Commonwealth Government and the other 50% from States and Territories, proportional to their populations. However, when it is decided that eradication is no longer feasible or cost effective, the total on-going costs of management and containment of an exotic pest revert to the infested States and Territories. These arrangements contain an inherent temptation for governments implementing eradication programs to over-claim progress towards eradication and fail to report serious issues impacting the program in order to keep the 'eradication' dollars coming to the State and to defer for as long as possible, the costs of a on-going management and control regime of an exotic pest.

Noting this deficiency, the Biosecurity Advisory Council in December 2011, made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 4: Governments and agricultural industries to agree on arrangement required to transition from eradication to ongoing management of exotic incursions. Transition arrangement are needed where eradication is either not feasible or cost beneficial and will often include a containment strategy. These arrangements should identify the principles and actions required, cost sharing arrangements and review periods. (www.daff.gov.au/biosecurity-advisory-council/advice)

The adverse effect of the current cost-sharing arrangements on the National Fire Ant Eradication Program

As early as 2002, the program was advised by the Scientific Review Team to consider terminating an eradication effort and to consider moving to an on-going management regime, including biological control and aggressive containment.

Science Review of RIFA Oct 2002: “At this time (Sept 2002) after one year of treatment and surveillance efforts, the Scientific Review Team is unable to determine whether success will be achieved in carrying out this eradication effort....If, however, by the end of 2004, the ants are not virtually eradicated, the SRT suggests planning now for changing the focus of the program from eradication to containment, based on IPM principles such as the implementation of biological control methods.”

The Queensland Government dismissed this recommendation because it would have been an admission that the eradication effort had failed and this would have financial consequences for the State. The recommendation was dismissed as being ‘operational’ and beyond the terms of reference of a science review. The follow-up inspection of the review team was cancelled.

The adverse effect of that decision, and the resulting mis-managed of the eradication effort, can be seen nearly thirteen years later as fire ants have now spread from 27,800 ha in 2001 to 282,00ha in 2013. Fire ants are re-infesting previously treated areas (Reported to Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council NRMMC, Nov 2008) and the program still lacks an ‘aggressive containment’ or movement control regime as required by NRMMC in April 2010. A few road signs warning against spreading fire ants and a small number of contentious businesses implementing risk management plans do not make an effective containment effort. The evidence of this paltry effort is that there has only ever been ONE prosecution for the spread of fire ants in all this time.

The cover-up of adverse results to protect the ‘eradication’ dollars continues. The Queensland government no longer publishes detailed maps of fire ant infested areas in either newspapers or on its web-site. No program data on treatment, surveillance, containment or scientific efforts or review reports of this publically funded program are made public.

Instead the Queensland government tries to distract attention from its failures with the promise of aerial surveillance as the ‘silver bullet’ of eradication. This untested method is not used anywhere else in the world because trials have shown that it is not sensitive enough to distinguish between nests and other heat sources AND is not sensitive enough to give assurance that it can detect all nests within camera range. J.T Vogt and B Wallet *The Rangeland Journal*, 2008, **30**, 291-295. “Feasibility of using ...automated detection methods for quantifying ..*solenopsis invicta*.. mounds in aerial digital imagery.”

While the rhetoric of the Queensland Government is that eradication is still possible, decisions by the Government to hand the costs of treating fire ants and moving high risk material to disposal sites back onto residents and businesses is evidence that the Government does not believe its own story. The Queensland Government is now handing the costs of on-going management and control back onto Queensland businesses and residents who have already paid for eradication with their taxes.

The Queensland Government's opportunity and responsibility.

Of the \$257 million spent on the program to date, only 10% has been contributed by the Queensland Government. Therefore, for the sake of the short-term financial gain afforded by the current cost-sharing arrangement for eradication programs, the Queensland Government has put the long-term public good of Queensland businesses and residents at risk. Fire ants have now spread because of the lack of any serious eradication program OR any on-going control and containment regime.

The *Biosecurity Bill 2013* notes the General Biosecurity Obligation of all persons, including the State, "not to do or omit to do something if the person knows or ought reasonably to know that doing or omitting to do the thing may exacerbate the adverse effects, or potential adverse effects, of the biosecurity matter, carrier or activity on a biosecurity consideration."

The Queensland Government has first hand experience that the current cost-sharing arrangements for the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program has seen the aim for short-term financial gain over the long-term, adverse consequences for Queensland agriculture, businesses and social amenities.

Therefore, I suggest that the *Biosecurity Bill 2013*, makes explicit the precipitating conditions, management and cost-sharing arrangements of programs transitioning from eradication to on-going control and containment.

Yours sincerely

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