

While appearing before the inquiry panel yesterday, I accused the Federal Dept of Agriculture of mis-reporting the progress of the fire ant program.

Here is my evidence related to incident one. Incident two is following.

In July 2023, I met Senator Murray Watt at a community event in Brisbane and recommended changing the national funding formula to fund states or territories to either eradicate OR contain fire ants or other invasive species. Attached is my submission to Minister Watt, and the response to it from Dr Hennecke Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer.

In response to Dr Hennecke's letter I wrote:



Pam Swepson

Mon, Jul 31, 2023,
10:46 AM

to Bertie.Hennecke

Dear Dr Hennecke

You write ' This current program has managed to slow the expansion of this highly invasive ant species over the period of its operation.' You also write. ' Since the first detection in 2001, seven separate red imported fire ant incursions in Australia.' You also write 'The system in place has the capacity to detect and respond to fire ants.'

You will note from the briefing note I sent to Minister Watt, numerous independent reviews of the program have noted the program does not have a functioning information system and has never collected reliable and consistent performance data to support any such claims.

Dr Pam Swepson
www.swepson.com.au

and

Pam Swepson

Tue, Aug 1, 2023,
1:40 PM

to Bertie.Hennecke

Dr Hennecke

A milestone set for the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program in 2001 was a functioning information system that collected reliable performance data. It never got one. Nevertheless, program oversight committees continue to recommend funding the program.

In September 2013, program auditors were critical of the oversight and guidance of the program by the National Management Group, informed by the Tramp Ant Consultative Committee, both chaired by the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water. The auditors were concerned the oversight committees were

not able to demonstrate due care in the use of public money because they accepted 'narratives' that did not report against specific and measurable performance indicators.

In 2015, the independent Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review found that Biosecurity Queensland was unable to mount credible business cases for on-going funding because it does not collect performance data (and) does not have high quality, timely, well-understood performance indicators.

In 2016, Ministerial Council commissioned a cost-benefit review of the program to determine its future: to continue with an eradication effort or revert to one of containment and management of a well-established infestation. The reviewers could not conduct a cost-benefit analysis because the program lacked reliable performance data: nevertheless they recommended continuing with an eradication effort.

In March 2017 the Queensland Audit Office found that Biosecurity Queensland cannot always demonstrate it is achieving its goals because it does not capture reliable and consistent data on the costs of the program, has no specific measurable performance indicators and no methods for evaluating the efficacy and effectiveness of the programs.

In 2018 the program's Risk Management sub-committee reported the program was at 'extreme risk' of not having a functioning information system and no timely and accurate performance data.

The 2019 audit of the program found it had no outcome focussed performance indicators, and did not have a functioning information system to provide data to assist decision making.

In 2023 the Queensland Audit Office said the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries needed to improve the accuracy and detail of its records by determining if its information system was functional and able to support decisions on managing invasive species.

There is no data to support your claims the program has eradicated infestations of the pest or contained its spread. Without reliable performance data, how can oversight committees and the department ensure due care in the use of public money?

Regards

Dr Pam Swepson

www.swepson.com.au



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry**

Ref: MC23-008562

Dr Pam Swepson

Dear Dr Swepson

Thank you for your emails to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon Murray Watt, concerning recommendation for funding future State-based Red Imported Fire Ant Programs. Minister Watt has asked me to thank you for your correspondence and to reply on his behalf.

The current Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) incursion in the south-east region of Queensland is receiving focussed attention from the Queensland government, the Commonwealth Government and supporting jurisdictions through the “The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program in south-east Queensland”. This program is delivered by Queensland, through a dedicated program team and consistent with its legislation.

This current program has managed to slow the expansion of this highly invasive ant species over the period of its operation. The system in place has the capacity to detect and respond to ant nests within the eradication zone and on its periphery to ensure sporadic outbreaks are dealt with quickly.

The Australian Government has demonstrated sustained commitment to efforts seeking to eradicate RIFA from south-east Queensland, having spent \$294.3 million under two successive response programs since 2001. A total of \$411.4 million over 10 years has been committed by the Commonwealth and states and territories to eradicate RIFA. The Commonwealth has contributed over 50 per cent of these costs, with the remainder shared between all states and territories.

The recently released review of the Queensland government’s eradication program - ‘National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program Strategic Review August 2021’ made 27 recommendations and several funding options. The National Red Imported Fire Ant Steering Committee has considered all recommendations outlined in the independent review.

A new response plan and a request for more funding has been developed by the National Fire Ant Eradication Program and endorsed by the Steering Committee and is considered by Commonwealth, and state and territory Agriculture Minister’s.

All government parties recognise the seriousness of the RIFA threat and the need to respond accordingly. The deliberation process will not hinder or interrupt the current eradication program,

which was supported by the additional funding being brought forward by the Commonwealth for 2023-24.

The jurisdictional Budget processes to allocate significant funding as outlined in the new response plan to address the RIFA incursion requires each jurisdiction to consider its own perspectives and competing responsibilities. This takes time but will not interrupt the existing eradication work.

Since the first detection in 2001, seven separate red imported fire ant incursions in Australia have been successfully eradicated, including in Queensland at Yarwun, Port of Gladstone, Brisbane Airport and 2 incursions at Port of Brisbane, and an incursion in New South Wales at Port Botany. There has also been an incursion at Fremantle Port, Western Australia.

The Commonwealth has further built and expanded RIFA detection capabilities at our international border and remains strongly supportive of the work to eradicate RIFA in south-east Queensland given it is still technically feasible to eradicate and cost beneficial to do so.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to the Government's attention.

Yours sincerely

Dr Bertie Hennecke
Australian Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer
27 / 07 / 2023

Attention Minister Murray Watt, Federal Minister for Agriculture.

Recommendations for funding future State-base Red Imported Fire Ant Programs.

From Dr Pam Swepson, ex National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program Policy Officer, whistleblower and activist.

16th July 2023

The formula for the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments to fund a State or Territory to eradicate an invasive pest, in the national interest, can create an incentive for a State or Territory to claim, without scientific evidence, that a pest can be eradicated to attract national funding.

Recommendation: A national funding formula that funds States and Territories to either eradicate an invasive pest (when there is sound scientific advice that is feasible) or a tight containment program, to contain the pest within a jurisdiction, also in the national interest.

With no scientific advice it was ever feasible to eradicate a well-entrenched infestation of red imported fire ants, the Queensland government created an eradication program to attract national funding. Contributing just 10% of the funding, and with the support of the national oversight committees, Queensland has made 100% of spending decisions. Numerous reviews of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program since 2001 state the program's treatment and surveillance methods do not work, it has done little to contain the human assisted movement of fire ants, it does not have a functioning information system and does not collect reliable performance data. Claims the program has eradicated some any areas of infestation or contained the spread of the pest are not supported by data.

The result is the waste of over \$700m of public money and the fire ant infestation has blown out from 40,000ha to 800,000ha – or more. Fire ants now in Toowoomba and on North Stradbroke Island, some have reached Victoria and they are threatening, if not breached the New South Wales border.

Recommendation for 2023. The Commonwealth fund those States and Territories now infested with fire ants to treat and contain the infestation within their borders and to fund non-infested states to protect their borders.

PLEASE DO NOT CONTINUE TO FUND A NATIONAL FIRE ANT ERADICATION PROGRAM RUN BY BIOSECURITY QUEENSLAND.

A brief history of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program

When infestations of red imported fire ants were detected around Brisbane in early 2001, national and international scientific opinion was:

- the infestations were approximately a decade old and too entrenched to eradicate.
- The major cause of their spread was the human assisted movement of fire ant carriers out of infested areas.

Scientific advice was:

- to tightly contain the infestation (approximately 40,000ha) with strict controls of the movement of fire ant carriers out of the infested areas area and
- frequent treatments of the infested areas, by air, to suppress the infestation.

The Queensland government rejected scientific advice and made the political decision, with the support of the Commonwealth oversight committee, to mount an eradication program to fund a jobs program for 400 unemployed people to address Queensland's high unemployment rate. At the beginning of the program a large team of biosecurity inspectors assisted high risk enterprises to develop risk management plans and audited those plans. The existence of this team suggested to some that the Queensland government was not confident it could eradicate the pest, and so, threaten funding. Consequently, the risk management team was disbanded and the risk management plans discontinued.

My role

I joined the Department of Primary Industries in 1987. In 2001, I was seconded to the Fire Ant Response Team as the community and industry liaison officer. I then became the program's Policy Officer, responsible for producing progress reports to the Queensland

parliament, national funders and the public. By June 2002 I was very concerned program statistics never added up because the program did not have a functioning information systems and program reports was becoming increasingly vague. I raised my concerns within the Department and lost my job as Policy Officer.

In March 2003, I had a public interest disclosure to the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission that the Parliament, the national funders and the public were being misled by program reports that over-stated the success of the program and did not report serious issues threatening the program. I listed the issues not being reported. I included a draft of the report the Queensland government submitted to the Ministerial Council in April 2003, inserting the issues not being reported.

The Crime and Misconduct Commission did not check if the issues I listed had been reported, changed the terms of my disclosure from the program mis-reporting to funders and the public to the program director mis-reporting to the Director-General, and found no substance to my claim. While the CMC took three years to come to that conclusion, the problems I listed remained unresolved.

From whistleblower to activist. Independent reports of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program from 2002 to now.

I escaped a vicious campaign of reprisal by resigning from the department. Determined to tell the public the truth, I created a website (www.swepson.com.au) where I posted blogs about the Fire Ant Program based on program reports and reviews I accessed under Right to Information processes.

Here are some of the findings of the many reviews of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication.

The 2002 science review complained about the program's lack of any sense of urgency. They made 23 recommendations and said if the ant was not virtually eradicated by the end of 2004 the program should change focus from eradication to containment. Consultative Committee reported to Ministerial Council in April 2003 that the program had addressed the review's recommendations.

The 2004 science review said despite multiple treatments, fire ants were still surviving near ‘ground-zero’ of the Richlands/Wacol infestation. They also said it was not clear what properties have been surveyed and not treated or treated and not surveyed – (because the program did not have a functioning information system)

An audit report in 2005 said the biggest drag on the program’s efficiency were staff problems. The workforce was extremely difficult and costly to manage due to recruitment failures.

The 2006 science review said fire ants were reinfesting treated areas, spreading beyond treated areas and 60 infestations had been found outside the operational area: meaning treatment was not working or the program’s movement controls were working. The Director blamed program problems in shrinking budget. The review team blamed operational decisions and said ‘Start again. Treat the entire infestation (approx. 150,000ha) by air, 6-9 round over 2-3 years.’ Consultative Committee reported to the Ministerial Council the science review ‘was positive about the chances of achieving eradication.’

The science review in 2009 was alarmed that the fire ant restricted area was at ‘an all time high’ of 93,000ha and said current surveillance methods were inadequate (and) the efficacy of current treatment method was questionable and concluded fire ants could not be eradicated from Brisbane using current techniques and recommended the program reverted to a program of suppression and containment. Consultative Committee told the Ministerial Council in 2010 that it believed it was premature to cease the pursuit of eradication – pinning hopes on the development of remote sensing technology.

Trials of the remote sensing technology 2015 found it identified millions of rocks and cow pats as nests but missed actual nests while the infestation blew out to 323,808ha.

In 2013 program auditors questioned the ability of Consultative Committee to demonstrate due care in the use of public money because the committee accepted reports from the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program that did not report against a set of specific, measurable, fit-for-purpose performance indicators of key aspects of the program.

Also in 2015, the Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review found that Biosecurity Queensland does not have the capacity to address current and future needs. Reviewers said the program is unable to mount credible business cases for on-going funding because it does not collect performance data (and) does not have high quality, timely, well-understood performance indicators.

In 2016, Ministerial Council commissioned a cost-benefit review of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program to determine the future of the program: continue with an eradication effort or revert to one of containment and management of a well-established infestation. The reviewers acknowledge they could not conduct a cost benefit analysis of the program because it lacked performance data, but recommend continuing with an eradication effort supported by new generation remote sensing technology - which never eventuated.

In March 2017 the Queensland Audit Office found that Biosecurity Queensland cannot always demonstrate it is achieving goals because it does not capture reliable and consistent data on the costs of program inputs and output, has no specific measurable performance indicators and no methods for evaluating the efficacy and effectiveness of the programs. It only reports inputs and activities.

The *Biosecurity Act 2014* imposed a General Biosecurity Obligation on everyone to be responsible for taking all reasonable precautions to ensure they don't spread fire ants. Industry representatives at a National Fire Ant Eradication Program Stakeholder Forum in 2018 said they were happy to accept their General Biosecurity Obligation if the program accepted its own by re-introducing compliance officers and the use of risk management plans and controlling the movement of fire ant materials out of biosecurity zones.

In 2018 the program's Risk Management sub-committee reported the program was at 'extreme risk' because did not have a functioning information system and so the program had no timely and accurate performance data.

In 2019, noting the fire ant infestation then covered 600,000ha the 2019 audit of the National Program's 2017-27 Program said its west to east treatment strategy was not scientifically based, but a policy decision to prioritise rural over urban areas. The program was intending to reduce the number of rounds of treatment. Poor governance by the Steering Committee meant

the program had no long terms plans, no outcome focussed performance indicators, and did not have a functioning information system to provide data to assist decision making.

A review of the scientific principle of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication program in 2020 by CSIRO said the program's scientific principles were a mish-mash of poorly referenced biological details and management actions that did not respond to a major change in the fire ant population in south-east Queensland which was a direct result of the program's actions.

In 2023 the Queensland Audit Office said the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries needed to improve the accuracy and detail of its records by determining if its information system was functional and able to support decisions on managing invasive species.

In 2003, I made a public interest disclosure to the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission that the National Red Imported Fire Ant Program was mis-reporting to national funders and the public. It continues to do so. Claims the program has eradicate areas of infestation and reduced it spread are not supported by any data.

The Queensland government cannot be trusted to continue running a National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program.

Mr Larnach - a second example to support my claim of the Federal Dept of Agriculture mis-reporting the progress of the fire ant program.

In June 2021 I posted a blog on my website to fact-check the responses officers gave to questions asked by Senator Malcolm, a member of the Rural and Regional Affairs committee.

<https://swepson.com.au/2021/06/02/fact-check-commonwealth-governments-ill-informed-and-misleading-responses-to-questions-about-the-national-red-imported-fire-ant-eradication-program-to-senate-estimates-committee-27-may-2021-time-f/>

Regards

Dr Pam Swepson

On 27th May 2021 Senator Malcolm Roberts asked the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee questions about how the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program is affecting farmers in the Brisbane Valley.

Responses came from the Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment Mr Andrew Metcalfe, Deputy Secretary Mr Andrew Tongue and senior officer of the Department and Commonwealth representative on the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program Steering Committee, Ms Jo Laduzko.

Is it science based?

Mr Tongue: It is a science-driven program...we're drawing on the best possible science we can.

Senator Roberts: when people use the word 'science' around here...it's usually opinion and not science.

Fact check:

1. The CSIRO review of the program in 2020 said its scientific principles were a mish-mash of poorly referenced biological details and management actions and said the program's measurements for mitigating the risk of human assisted spread of fire ants were a shambles because the program had failed to respond to a major change in the fire ant population in south-east Queensland.
2. The independent Effectiveness and Efficiency Audit of 2019 found no scientific basis for the program's west to east treatment strategy – it was a policy decision.
3. Every independent scientific review of the program (2002, 2004, 2006 2009), apart from the Magee review of 2016, has said the program is not eradicating fire ants.
4. There was not a scrap of scientific evidence that it was feasible to eradicate the well-entrenched fire ant infestation detected in south east Queensland in 2001. Scientific advice at the time was to contain and suppress the infestation. If we had done that, it is likely the infestation would be fraction of what it is now.

Who's responsible?

Mr Tongue: The program is run by an independent committee chaired by Wendy Craik who is a very distinguished authority in natural resource management matters.

Fact check: The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program Steering Committee was established as a separate governance body in 2017 to provide strategic oversight and clear accountability and transparency. It is responsible for providing leadership, managing risks, making expenditure decisions, monitoring the progress of the program and reporting to the Agriculture Senior Officials Committee. (Governance Plan 2017)

Fact check: The independent Efficiency and Effectiveness Audit of 2019 gave a scathing assessment of the performance of the Steering Committee, saying it was too close to the program and it needed to act like a Board of Management. It needed to manage the budget shortfall, develop outcome focussed performance indicators, improve operations on the ground by having Standard Operating Procedures and consider if program risks outweigh any chance of success. The review said the Steering Committee needed to improve its own performance by approving plans in a timely manner, meeting frequently enough, having the appropriate expertise and reporting to funders and the public in a timely manner.

What does it cost?

Senator Roberts: How much is it costing Australia in funding the fight against spread and ultimate eradication of fire ants?

Ms Laduzko: \$411.4m. Roughly speaking \$41m per annum.

Fact check:

Budget 2001-2016 approximately \$400m

Budget 2017-18: \$37.5m

Budget 2018-19: \$52.9m

Budget 2019-20 \$66.5m

Budget 2020-21 no quarterly reports published to date.

Senator Roberts: On what basis are federal monies provided to States to assist in these programs. (Is it) a money spinner? Could it be manipulated ...to prolong it?

Mr Tongue: We have a partnership agreement with the Queensland government that sets out milestones that need to be met in order for us to provide funding to a schedule. The Commonwealth is contributing 50%. All the jurisdictions involved, other than Queensland, have a huge interest in ensuring that the program is running well because they're all on the hook to fund it. So it would be very difficult for Queensland to manipulate a circumstance with the gaze of all the other jurisdictions upon it, as well as the community where...they are turning this into some sort of money spinner.

Fact check: In 2001, the Commonwealth government agreed to fund an eradication program but not a containment and suppression program as scientists advised. So long as Queensland keeps reporting, without a scrap of evidence, it is eradicating fire ants, money keep pouring into Queensland Treasury. Queensland contributes just 10% of the program funding but make 100% of the decisions on how it is spent – mostly on jobs creation programs.

They can do this because of appalling governance of the program. In 2013, Deloitte criticised the previous oversight committee managed by the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment for not approving performance indicators of key aspects of the program, having no mechanism for analysing return on investment and accepting program reports that were no more than 'narratives' that did not explain the variance between what was planned and what was delivered. Deloitte questioned the ability of the committee to demonstrate due care of the use of public money.

In 2019, the Efficiency and Effectiveness Audit was just as scathing in its assessment of the current Steering Committee, chaired by Dr Craik.

Evidence of its progress?

Senator Roberts: How successful is the management and eradication programme?

Ms Laduzko: We've been learning a lot...a very large scale eradication...we've been making progress.... trialling different ways of killing ants...some positive signs. Whether it's sufficiently funded are matters for current discussion.

Senator Roberts: So you haven't got any concrete measures other than that, you've been making progress.....because that's an awful lot of money.

Ms Laduzko: Assessing progress is an interesting question... we go through cycles of eradication and surveillance ... to see how effective those measures have been....I would prefer to source that specific information from the ... program-leading Queensland government.I think there's some stats that suggest if we'd done nothing... it would already have largely covered the entirety of Australia by now... we have managed to keep it to a defined region.

Fact check: Five independent scientific reviews, four independents audits and the Queensland Audit Office have found that the program has never collected reliable and consistent performance data. The program's Risk Management Committee said this was the program's greatest risk. The program has no quantitative data to support any claims of progress or success.

Fact check: Program figures say the infestation expanded from 40,000ha in 2002 to 500,000ha by 2016. That's a 17% increase each year. The rate of spread in Texas in the USA with a similar infestation, but without an eradication program,

is 13.4%. Is the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program making the infestation worse?

Fact check: Biosecurity Queensland sponsored research by Drs Jonathan Keith and Daniel Spring in 2013 said the opportunity for eradication has been missed ...always an infested area outside the searched and treated areas...southern and western boundaries of the invasion advanced at a steady rate...the boundary of the infestation has never been delimited.

Fact check: The independent Efficiency and Effectiveness Audit of 2019 noted the boundary of the program blew out by 78,000ha, a 21% increase, in the first year of the Ten Year Fire Ant Eradication Program 2017-27.

Senator Roberts: How effective are similar overseas eradication programs?

Ms Laduzko: Nowhere has anyone successfully eradicated red imported fire ants. Australia has the only successful eradication outcomeswere on smaller incursions that we were able to contain to port environments.

Fact check: The program has no quantitative data to support that claim and no a Proof of Freedom Protocol to support them either. In 2004 the program was told to develop a Proof of Freedom Protocol that included data on a property's history of invasions/re-invasion, treatment regime, survey history and the results on tests on surviving nests to support any claims of fire ant freedom. They never did. The program cannot prove it has eradicated ANY fire ant infestations.

Senator Roberts: So that is ominous for the (Brisbane) Valley

Ms Laduzko: It gives us pause for thought around the size of the eradication (area) and the funding commitment and what our long term strategy is.

Fact check: The \$411.4m Ten Year Fire Ant Eradication Plan 2017-27 was funded on the basis it was a long term strategy, that would, in 2027 provide Proof of Freedom that fire ants had been eradicated from ALL treatment zones.

How does it work?

Senator Roberts: So what's being done...on the ground?

Ms Laduzko: It is a complex program and very large. We have zoned certain areas that are embedded in a sentiment of moving from west (through rural land) to east (urban environment) with a rolling eradication effort....and suppressing those in other areas...(and) a lot of investment into the edge to make sure it doesn't further escape.You'd have to say we haven't allowed it to become worse.

Fact check: Significant areas of infestation are found beyond the program's operational area every year.

Fact check: 'Eradication treatment' and 'suppression treatment' are meaningless terms. 'Eradication treatment' means broadcasting bait over just parts of the infested area in the west, at less than the recommended rate of three treatments each year for three years. It is throwing good bait and good money after bad. 'Suppression treatment' means injecting insecticide directly into fire ant nests. There is no evidence the practise does anything more than cause the nests to split and spread.

What happens next? They don't know.

Senator Roberts: What else needs to be done? Are there enough resources to achieve eradication?

Ms Ludzuko: That's an open question...the scale of the response is enormous, and it often comes down to funding and commitment of participants. It's not something I'd like to comment on right now Senator. We're going through a bit of a review...to what other strategies we can adopt.... technology?...baits?...a few things like that... a question you might like to pose ...next session...when we've done...our own efficiency review.

Mr Tongue: We're trying to do something that hasn't been done anywhere else. It is a uniquely adapted little ant...challenges in urban areas...cycles of wet and dry ... can frustrate efforts.... Under constant review ...we're looking at it at the moment and government will need to make a decision.

Fact check: The nature of the ant, the climate and geography of south east Queensland, what US experts described as 'fire ant heaven' and the extent of the infestation was the reason local experts said in 2001 it was too late to eradicate them.

Mr Metcalfe: Not with a view to stopping it, but with a view of how we can do it better?

Mr Tongue. Can we do it better? If we up the cash burn rate, would we go faster? If we slowed the cash burn rate, will be do better? Some of those questions, you know. What is the right modality to get rid of it?

Ms Laduzo: It gets to a point where in all eradication (efforts) ...you have to make a concluded position about whether you think eradication remains feasible and cost effective. At the moment, we are signed up to an eradication program.

Fact check: There has never been any evidence that an eradication program was technically feasible. The enormously expensive folly to chase the last ant to eradicate it has come at the expense of a cheaper and likely more effective tight containment and suppression program.

Where are we now?

Facts:

- Fire ants are spreading out of control in south-east Queensland and have the potential to infest most of Australia.
- The Steering Committee of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program has been dumping all responsibility for managing the infestation onto the public.
 - After twenty years of telling the public not to treat fire ant nests on their properties, they are now telling them to do just that – dumping the costs and risks onto the public.
 - The program conducts no systematic surveillance to define the boundaries of the infestation. 70-80% of the detections of new nests come from ad hoc reports by the public.
 - The program abrogated its responsibility to mitigate the highest risk to the program – human-assisted spread – by imposing a legislated ‘General Biosecurity Obligation’ onto the public but fails to regulate it or check for compliance.
- The New South Wales and Victorian governments, the two biggest funders of the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program after the Commonwealth, are no longer accepting Queensland government certified potted plants into their markets on the basis of CSIRO’s scathing assessment of Queensland’s poor fire ant movement controls.

What happens next?

In 2001, fire ant experts from the USA said that if we neither eradicated the fire ant infestation, nor contained its spread, the only option left was ‘Facilitated management’ as happens in Texas in the US now. Individuals and businesses fund their own fire ant control methods with the support of government funded research and advice. In Australia it would just be ‘Self Management’ because the science behind the program, according to CSIRO, is a poor.

What should happen next? A Royal Commission

What SHOULD happen next is a Royal Commission to hold the Commonwealth oversight committee of the program from 2001 to 2016 and the current Steering Committee, chaired by Dr Wendy Craik, to account for the waste of over \$600m of public money and an out of control fire ant infestation that has spread from 40,000ha in 2002 to 650,000ha.