

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 209
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Director of National Parks (DNP)
Topic: Biological control agent for the Yellow Crazy Ant
Hansard Page:
Question Date:
Question Type: Written

Senator Urquhart asked:

1. Was the application to the Department of Agriculture to import a biological control agent for the Yellow Crazy Ant (a wasp) that was submitted on 28 November 2014 approved?
2. The current phase of funding for the crazy ant control program will finish at the end of this financial year, is that correct? What is the budget for the next phase, and will you receive that funding?
3. Where are you to in the implementation process of the Yellow Crazy Ants biocontrol programme? How much has it cost so far? What is the final cost expected to be? What are your expectations of success for the program? Why?
4. Will it be possible for the biocontrol programme to be used in the Queensland Wet Tropics, where there is a burgeoning Yellow Crazy Ant problem?

Answer:

1. The application to the Department of Agriculture is still being assessed. It is anticipated that the assessment will be finalised in the next few months.
2. The current funding ceased on June 30 2015. The anticipated budget for the next phase of biological control is approximately \$ 800,000 from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2018. These funds will be sourced through Parks Australia's annual operational budgets.
3. Parks Australia has submitted: a biological control agent import approval application to the Department of Agriculture, and a referral under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* to the Department of the Environment to import, raise and release biological control agents.

The biological control programme has cost \$1.4M to date. It is estimated another \$800,000 will be required to implement the programme on the ground.

Advice from the expert researchers suggests that biological control, using stingless micro-wasps, will be an effective means of controlling yellow crazy ants on Christmas Island and will not have any off-target impacts. This is because the main food supply for the crazy ants is honey dew produced by the yellow lac scale insect. The micro-wasp preys on the scale insect, killing it by laying eggs inside it. This means less food for crazy ants, potentially stopping the ants from building super-colonies, which have a significant impact on the island's biodiversity including the iconic red crabs.

4. There would need to be a specific scientific assessment to determine if the biological control of yellow crazy ants could be worth exploring for the Queensland Wet Tropics. If considered potentially feasible, an extensive research project would be needed to determine the feasibility of biological control and to ensure there were no off-target impacts.