

8 January 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

I write to make a submission to the enquiry *Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia*, in my capacity as Adjunct Professor, Griffith University.

Fire Ants could have been nearly eradicated by now. The response by the Queensland Government in the early 2000s reflected the advice of its scientists who warned of the serious threat that this insect posed to the nation. But when a national effort was required, national coordination failed and haggling over responsibility for funding allowed the window of opportunity for eradication to nearly close.

I addressed these dynamics in the Presidential Address in the *Proceedings of The Royal Society of Queensland*, volume 123, published in 2018. (I was then President of this venerable Society, the oldest scientific institution in Queensland).

The difficulties that confronted scientists in persuading governments to adequately fund Fire Ant programs highlight three features of the contemporary formulation of national public policy:

- a lack of scientific literacy in the central agencies. National alarm bells should have rung the moment the pest was first discovered and a national disaster response put in place immediately; more or less regardless of cost;
- the opportunity cost of big ticket items like AUKUS that starve the public goods such as biosecurity on which the well-being of society (and the economy) rests;
- fragmentation of accountability, budgetary capacity and knowledge capacity, with inadequate forums to coordinate and drive remedial action.

I recommend that in its report, the Committee focus on scientific literacy, proper evaluation of opportunity cost in budget deliberations and fragmentation. I submit my 2018 paper and the above summary. I do not require confidentiality.

Yours faithfully

Geoff Edwards B.Sc.(Hons.); M.Pub.Ad.; PhD; GAICD
Adjunct Professor, Centre for Governance and Public Policy, Griffith University
(Also former President, The Royal Society of Queensland)