

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References
Answers to questions on notice
Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water Portfolio

Inquiry: Inquiry into Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia
Question No: IQ24-000059
Hearing Date: 18 March 2024
Division/Agency: Biodiversity Division
Topic: Biocontrol discussions
Hansard Page: 25
Question Date: 18 March 2024
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

Senator WHISH-WILSON: ... I probably know the answer to this question. Does the environment department have any jurisdiction over investigations or evidence-based approach to the impacts of treatments or potential side-effects of treatments when dealing with something like RIFA or varroa mite? We asked some questions earlier about the use of fipronil and concerns that have been raised overseas around the use. The bee industry—they might not be threatened or endangered right now, but I'm just interested in whether there's any jurisdiction for your department there at all.

Dr Fraser: Others at the table can correct me if I'm wrong about this. Essentially for the poisons that we've been discussing or that I've heard being discussed at the hearing today, the environment department doesn't have a role. When we're talking about biocontrol, there may be a role for the environment department if that involves bringing a species of some sort into Australia which has not got permission to enter the country. That's the layperson's expression for it. That's where our department would be involved—in allowing the import of a foreign species into our country. That's assessed under the EPBC Act.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Just as a matter of interest, could you perhaps take on notice whether there have been, if not formal applications, any discussions about the use of those in Australia? I'm just trying to get an idea on how far advanced we might be in actually doing some trials on some of these things.

Dr Fraser: I'll take that on notice unless—

Senator WHISH-WILSON: If you could, yes. We certainly put it to CSIRO. If there's anything there, that'll be very useful. Thank you.

Answer:

There have been no formal applications to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, nor the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for, nor has either department been involved in any discussions about, the importation of biological controls for red imported fire ants.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References
 Answers to questions on notice
Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water Portfolio

Inquiry: Inquiry into Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia
Question No: IQ24-000060
Hearing Date: 18 March 2024
Division/Agency: Biodiversity Division
Topic: At risk species in South-East Queensland
Hansard Page: 31
Question Date: 18 March 2024
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Canavan asked:

CHAIR: Great. To the department of the environment: I noticed in your submission that there are a number of species that you have identified as being particularly at risk. Are any of those habitats in and around South-East Queensland? Dr Fraser: I'll take that on notice because there are a number of species there. It will take me a while to look through those, Senator.

Answer:

The below table lists the examples of native species vulnerable or likely to be vulnerable to Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA) (either directly or because of RIFA's impact on critical ecological functions) set out in the department's submission and whether they are found within, or in close proximity, to the south-east Queensland National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP) zone (per the *Fire Ant Response plan 2023-27*).

Example species	Range is within / near the NFAEP zone? ¹
Illidge's ant-blue butterfly (<i>Acrodipsas illidgei</i>)	Yes - may be particularly at risk due to their unusual life cycles as well as being at risk from predation. Both of these species have formed associations with native ants, in which the larvae are collected from vegetation by ants and taken to the nest where a sugary substance is excreted by the larvae and collected by the ants.
Apollo jewel butterfly (<i>Hypochrysops apollo apollo</i>)	<i>H. apollo apollo</i> is found further north in QLD from Townsville to Cairns. A close relative, <i>H. piceatus</i> , is a listed threatened species under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)</i> and ranges within the NFAEP zone.

¹ This information has been compiled using the department's publicly available Protected Matters Search Tool ([Protected Matters Search Tool: Interactive Map \(awe.gov.au\)](https://www.awe.gov.au/protected-matters-search-tool)) across an area stretching from Lake Cootharaba to Durah (QLD), to Dthinna Dthinnawan National Park and Ballina (NSW). Other reference sources included the Atlas of Living Australia, the department's website and other reputable sources.

Loggerhead turtle (<i>Caretta caretta</i>)	Yes - may kill and injure vulnerable hatchlings, and are attracted to nests by the mucous and moisture released by a laying female.
Magnificent brood frog (<i>Pseudophryne covacevichae</i>)	No Note, A number of frog species listed under the EPBC Act are found within or near the NFAEP zone - Mount Wollumbin hip-pocket frog (<i>Assa wollumbin</i>); Pouched frog (<i>A.darlingtonia</i>); Mountain frog (<i>Phyloria kundagungan</i>); Richmond Range Sphagnum frog (<i>P. richmondensis</i>); Fleay's frog (<i>Mixophyes fleayi</i>); Stuttering frog (<i>M. balbus</i>); Giant Barred frog (<i>M. teratus</i>); Wallum Sedge frog (<i>Litoria olongburensis</i>).
Northern corroboree frog (<i>Pseudophryne pengilleyi</i>)	
Southern corroboree frog (<i>Pseudophryne corroboree</i>)	
Baw baw frog (<i>Phyloria frosti</i>).	
Black-breasted button-quail (<i>Turnix melanogaster</i>)	Yes - RIFA may prey on eggs and hatchlings in nests of ground-nesting bird species or those with low arboreal nests. These bird species are also vulnerable to indirect impacts, given RIFA can reduce the number of invertebrates, a key food source for birds.
Australian brush-turkey (<i>Alectura lathamii</i>)	
Bush stone-curlew (<i>Burhinus grallarius</i>)	
Little tern (<i>Sterna albifrons</i>)	
Rainbow bee-eater (<i>Merops ornatus</i>)	
Platypus (<i>Ornithorhynchus anatinus</i>)	Yes - young platypus and short beaked echidna, given they shelter in terrestrial dens and are unable to protect themselves or flee.
Short beaked echidna (<i>Tachyglossus aculeatus</i>)	
Spotted-tail quoll (<i>Dasyurus maculatus maculatus</i>)	Yes - carnivorous marsupials, such as the spotted-tail quoll, that feed on larger invertebrates may be affected by RIFA causing declines to their food source.
Koala – (<i>Phascolarctos cinereus</i>)	Yes - arboreal animals such as koalas risk being stung and killed by ants as they travel across the ground.
Ground-dwelling native bees (many species present in Australia, including the stingless <i>Tetragonula carbonaria</i>)	Yes - invertebrate pollinators, including bees and wasps, can be particularly susceptible to RIFA. This susceptibility can alter crucial interactions between plants and animals and have flow on impacts for plant reproduction, contributing to changes to vegetation abundance and distribution in a given locale. For example, there are well documented species-specific relationships between many Australian terrestrial orchids;
Thynnid wasps (many species present in Australia)	
Orchids – giant boat-lipped (<i>Cymbidium madidum</i>); snake (<i>C. suave</i>); king greenhoods (<i>Pterostylis baptistii</i>); pixie	

caps (<i>Acianthus fornicatus</i>); and white fingers (<i>Caladenia catenata</i>)	many of these pollinating insects are ground-breeders.
---	--