

During my appearance yesterday at the Committee's Brisbane Public hearing, I was asked by Senator Canavan a 'question on notice' for the reference supporting the information quoted in my Review report regarding the rate of spread of fire ants in the USA and China.

I quoted from a review article by Wylie R. F. and Janssen-May S. (2016) Red Imported Fire Ants in Australia: What if we lose the war? *Ecological Management and Restoration* **18**, 1-12, which projected how far fire ants would have spread in Australia without the Program.

The US data of 48km per year came from Hung A. C. and Vinson S. B. (1978) Factors affecting the distribution of fire ants in Texas. *Southwestern Naturalist* **23**, 205-213, based on data collected between 1957 and 1977.

However, I have also found a paper which looked at a longer period by Kemp S. F. et al (2000) Expanding habitat of the imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*): A public health concern. *J. Allergy Clin. Immunology* **105**, 683-691 which states "The US Department of Agriculture estimates that Imported Fire Ants (IFAs) have expanded westwards at 120 miles per year." This would be 193 km per year which makes the estimated spread I quoted extremely conservative. The paper also notes "....Thus "new" infestations usually exist several years before detection, and maps illustrating the expansion of the IFA will necessarily lag behind the actual rate and degree of infestation."

Arguably surveillance to date in SE Queensland has been more intensive than in the US but it is still likely that most new RIFA infestations are not being detected for a year or more. This was why our Review panel proposed a 10km surveillance and prophylactic treatment zone outside the known boundaries of the infestation.

Following news coverage about my hearing yesterday, a former Chief Veterinary Officer of Queensland, Dr Ron Glanville, emailed me the following message.

"I did a short project last year to advise the Gold Coast Council on their role in fire ant eradication. The following three paras from my report summarise how we got to this point - a series of decisions that were too little, too late. You are right, a broader review is required. The current system that requires Ag Departments from all over the country to argue the point with their State Treasuries is not a good model for these big programs. What faces them now is a massive undertaking and I must admit I'm not too confident about their chances of success.

"As an aside, I was curious this week what BTEC would have cost us in today's dollars. I consulted an economist and the figure we came up with was around \$3 billion.

- RIFA was first identified in south-east Queensland in 2001, primarily in the southern suburbs of Brisbane. It was estimated that the infestation had been present and unreported for around 10 years, despite its reasonably wide distribution (covering an area of between 28,000 and 71,000 Ha).
- A significant, nationally cost-shared (by all States and the Commonwealth) eradication program was soon implemented which reduced the infestation to a very low density by 2003. However, program funds were then prematurely reduced, which in hindsight was a poor decision by national funding partners. This led to a subsequent rebound of RIFA infestations over subsequent years.
- Since then, there has been a succession of increasingly expensive attempts to contain and eradicate the pest over an ever-widening area, but essentially funds have always been inadequate to conduct a comprehensive eradication effort. "

Best regards

Helen

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