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Our ref: 23/820

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
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Dear Committee Secretary

Red Imported Fire Ant Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to the Senate Inquiry on the Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) Eradication Program.

RIFA pose a significant national biosecurity threat that could, if left uncontrolled, fundamentally change the way that Australian communities enjoy the outdoors. The ACT Government is pleased to be strongly engaged in the national biosecurity governance arrangements to continue the fight against this invasive species. The ACT commends the Queensland Government for their efforts to control and eradicate RIFA which continues to be logistically challenging, resource intensive, and costly.

Pursuant to the July 2023 agreement of National Agriculture Ministers to support the *Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA) Response Plan 2023-27* and the proposed cost share arrangements, the ACT now is pleased to commit \$5.098 million over four years towards red imported fire ant eradication and the support of this plan. Additionally, the ACT remains actively engaged in the national response program governance, from our membership on the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program Steering Committee, through to decisions made at the Agriculture Ministers Meetings.

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The RIFA response program's success is not only contingent on financial contributions but also on collaborative efforts and a unified response from all governments. The Steering Committee serves as a pivotal platform for coordination, where all participating jurisdictions actively contribute to the decision-making process. This cooperative approach ensures that the program is scrutinised thoroughly, and its effectiveness is consistently evaluated through independent review processes.

These review processes have consistently affirmed the program's merits and effectiveness in addressing the challenges associated with eradicating RIFA from Queensland. The shared commitment among all jurisdictions, as facilitated by the Steering Committee, has led to a cohesive and unified response that has substantially reduced the spread of RIFA.

The invasive nature of RIFA poses a severe threat to our environment, agriculture, human health, and social amenity. Recognising the potential ecological imbalances and irreversible damage the RIFA can do to delicate ecosystems, the ACT remains resolute in its determination to prevent the introduction and establishment of these ants in our territory. The ACT Government acknowledge the significance of maintaining the 'bush capital' of Canberra's social fabric and natural harmony, and we understand the potential risks posed to agricultural productivity and the economy.

The ACT Government's view is that the national biosecurity governance arrangements facilitated by the Steering Committee provide a robust framework for addressing the ongoing challenges posed by RIFA, as well as many other biosecurity threats. The ACT accepts the dynamic nature of the response and that all governments must be agile in their approaches and regularly review and update response plans.

I trust that this information is helpful to the inquiry of the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee into RIFA.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Vassarotti MLA

30/11/2023