



Consideration of Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*

Report No. 16, 57th Parliament
Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee
September 2024

Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee

Chair	Mr Aaron Harper MP, Member for Thuringowa
Deputy Chair	Mr Robert (Rob) Molhoek MP, Member for Southport
Members	Mr Stephen (Steve) Andrew MP, Member for Mirani
	Hon Craig Crawford MP, Member for Barron River
	Mr James Martin MP, Member for Stretton
	Mr Samuel (Sam) O'Connor MP, Member for Bonney

Committee Secretariat

Telephone	+61 7 3553 6626
Email	heac@parliament.qld.gov.au
Technical Scrutiny Secretariat	+61 7 3553 6601
Committee webpage	www.parliament.qld.gov.au/heac

Acknowledgements

The committee acknowledges the assistance provided by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

All web address references are current at the time of publishing.

Contents

Chair’s foreword	ii
Recommendations	iii
Executive Summary	iv
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Role of the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee	1
1.2 Role of the Auditor-General	1
1.3 Committee examination of Auditor-General reports	2
2 Managing invasive species	2
2.1 Background	2
2.2 Summary of Queensland Audit Office findings	2
2.3 Queensland Audit Office recommendations	3
2.4 Implementation of Queensland Audit Office recommendations	4
2.4.1 Strengthening biosecurity system leadership and coordination	4
2.4.2 Designing an effective strategy	5
2.4.3 Using data to inform decision making	5
Committee comment	6
2.4.4 Assessing and mitigating the risk of invasive species	6
2.4.5 Regulating the risk of invasive species	7
3 Eradicating fire ants case study	7
3.1 Background	7
3.1.1 National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program	7
3.2 Summary of Queensland Audit Office findings	8
3.3 Queensland Audit Office recommendations	9
3.4 Implementation of Queensland Audit Office recommendations	9
3.4.1 Assessing progress and outcomes for National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program	10
3.4.2 Outcome-based reporting of fire ant eradication progress	10
Appendix A – Department of Agriculture and Fisheries progression update for recommendations in Auditor-General’s Report 1: 2023-24 – <i>Managing invasive species</i>	11

Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the Health Environment and Agriculture Committee's consideration of the Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing Invasive Species*.

The committee appreciates the assistance provided by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and our Parliamentary Service staff to the committee's consideration of the Auditor-General's report.

I commend this report to the House.



Aaron Harper MP
Chair

Recommendations

Recommendation 1	2
The committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly notes the content of this report.	2

Executive Summary

This report presents a summary of the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee's (committee) consideration of the Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing Invasive Species* (the report).

The report examined the institutional framework for how invasive species are managed in Queensland, how risks are prioritised, and the effectiveness of programs. The report also included a case study on the management of red imported fire ants. The report made 8 recommendations to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (department), focused on:

- strengthening biosecurity system leadership and coordination
- designing an effective strategy
- using data to inform decision making
- assessing and mitigating the risk of invasive species
- regulating the risk of invasive species
- responding to fire ants.

As part of its consideration of the report, the committee requested and received from the department an acquittal against the timeline for implementation of the QAO's 8 recommendations. The committee also sought additional information from the department about the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program.

The committee notes that Auditor-General reports have repeatedly highlighted the need for the department to develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based (SMART) indicators across biosecurity activities. The committee considers the department should consider including SMART indicators for invasive species management as part of its review of the *Invasive plants and animals strategy 2019-24*.

The committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly notes the content of this report.

1 Introduction

1.1 Role of the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee

The Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee (committee) was established by the Queensland Legislative Assembly on 13 February 2024 through an amendment to Schedule 6 of the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly.¹

The committee has responsibility for the following portfolio areas:

- Health, Mental Health, Ambulance Services and Women
- Environment, Great Barrier Reef, Science and Innovation
- Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, and Rural Communities.

In relation to its areas of responsibility, the committee:

- examines bills and subordinate legislation to consider the policy to be enacted and the application of the fundamental legislative principles set out in section 4 of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992* and compatibility with the *Human Rights Act 2019*
- examines the estimates of each department
- investigates any issue referred to it by the Legislative Assembly or under an Act, whether or not the issue is within the committee's areas of responsibility
- assesses public accounts in its portfolio area in regard to integrity, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of financial management
- assesses public works in its portfolio area in regard to the suitability of the works for the purpose.

1.2 Role of the Auditor-General

The Auditor-General leads the Queensland Audit Office (QAO), which is the independent auditor of the public sector. The Auditor-General reports to parliament on the results of QAO's audit work, providing insights and advice, and recommendations for improvement.

The QAO:

- provides professional audit services, which include audit opinions on the accuracy and reliability of the financial statements of public sector entities
- provides public sector entities with insights on their financial performance, risk, and internal controls, and on the efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of public service delivery
- supports QAO reports with graphics, tables, and other visualisations, which connect insights to regions and communities
- conducts investigations into claims of financial waste and mismanagement raised by elected Members, state and local government employees, and the public
- shares wider learnings and best practice from work with state and local government entities, the QAO's professional networks, industry, and peers.²

¹ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88 and Legislative Assembly of Queensland, Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly, standing order 194.

² Queensland Audit Office, *Our Role*, <https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/about-us/our-role>.

1.3 Committee examination of Auditor-General reports

The committee's role includes consideration of reports of the Auditor-General that fall within its portfolio.³

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly notes the content of this report.

2 Managing invasive species

2.1 Background

The Committee of the Legislative Assembly referred Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species* to the former State Development and Regional Industries Committee (SDRIC) on 24 August 2023. The report examined the institutional framework for how invasive species are managed in Queensland, how risks are prioritised, and the effectiveness of programs. The report also included a case study on the management of red imported fire ants. The report made 8 recommendations.

In the report, the QAO reviewed the progress of Biosecurity Queensland, a business group of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (department), to prevent and recover from pests and diseases threatening our agriculture, the environment, social amenity and human health in Queensland.⁴ The SDRIC held a private hearing with the department on 25 August 2023.

On 13 February 2024, the Legislative Assembly retired the SDRIC and transferred portfolio responsibility for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries to the newly established Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee, and transferred Report 1 accordingly.

On 17 April 2024, the committee wrote to the department requesting an acquittal against the timeline for implementation of the 8 recommendations, which the department provided in June 2023. On 12 June 2024, the committee wrote to the department seeking additional information about the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program.

In addition to the committee's targeted inquiries, on 25 July 2024, during the Estimates public hearing, some committee members and other Members of the Legislative Assembly sought further information relating to issues pertaining to invasive species, including fire ants.⁵ Separately, issues related to biosecurity, invasive species and red ants were addressed in responses to pre-Estimates hearing questions on notice to the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities (Minister).⁶

2.2 Summary of Queensland Audit Office findings

The QAO found that Biosecurity Queensland, along with state and local government entities are doing a lot to manage invasive species, such as using technology for greater detection and eradication.

³ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 94(1).

⁴ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 1.

⁵ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 25 July 2024, pp 59-60, 63-65, 65-66.

⁶ Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, Responses to 2024 Estimates Pre-Hearing Questions on Notice, <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/HEAC-7F95/CONSIDERAT-E409/Minister%20for%20Agricultural%20Industry%20Development%20and%20Fisheries%20and%20Minister%20for%20Rural%20Communities%20-%20-%20-%20responses%20to%20pre-hearing%20Questions%20on%20Notice%20from%20the%20committee.pdf>.

However, Biosecurity Queensland needs to take greater leadership in its oversight and coordination role to reduce the impact of some species.⁷

The report found that reducing the impact of invasive species would require:

- stronger leadership and effective strategy by the department to address key challenges, such as the lack of capacity of some remote local councils to manage invasive species
- addressing existing gaps in assessing and prioritising invasive species risk, including more effectively identifying and targeting funding
- a coordinated state-wide response to managing established invasive species, which is left largely to local councils without adequate support or coordination.

Regarding the eradication of red imported fire ants, the QAO reported that fire ants have spread to 700,000 hectares across south-east Queensland since first detection in 2001.⁸ The QAO found:

- initial delays in gaining funding approval across Commonwealth and state governments, and in commencing treatment, likely contributed to the spread of fire ants
- Biosecurity Queensland has worked hard to slow the spread and, while slowing the spread to less than that experienced in other countries with infestation, Biosecurity Queensland will need to provide greater transparency about the rationale for its decisions and its progress (including outcome not output-focussed performance metrics) as it seeks to mobilise governments and councils, the community, industries, and local businesses in the eradication effort.

2.3 Queensland Audit Office recommendations

The report made 8 recommendations aimed towards the department:

- strengthening biosecurity system leadership and coordination
- designing an effective strategy
- using data to inform decision making
- assessing and mitigating the risk of invasive species
- regulating the risk of invasive species
- responding to fire ants.

The QAO recommended that the department should:

1. strengthen its leadership and coordination role by setting strategic priorities, prioritising funding and coordinating and overseeing activities across Queensland
2. review the *Biosecurity Act 2014* to ensure the department has the necessary clarity, authority, and responsibility to lead, coordinate, and enforce Queensland's biosecurity system
3. review, update and implement the Queensland invasive plants and animals strategy 2019-2024⁹ to:
 - a. identify current and future challenges and priorities for Queensland's biosecurity system and provide practical solutions
 - b. clearly define Biosecurity Queensland's leadership role including coordinating and working with councils and stakeholders responsible for established invasive species
 - c. include performance measurement indicators across the biosecurity system

⁷ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 1.

⁸ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 1.

⁹ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland invasive plants and animals strategy 2019-2024, https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1441637/qld-invasive-plants-animals-strategy.pdf.

- d. better align with the Department of Environment and Science’s Biodiversity Conservation Strategy
- 4. improve tracking of invasive species and how it manages them by:
 - a. determining if Biosecurity Online Resources and Information System (BORIS) has the required functionality
 - b. auditing and reporting on the quality of data held on BORIS
 - c. developing processes to analyse data for trends and using this in decision making
- 5. develop and implement a framework for assessing and mitigating the risk of new and established invasive species
- 6. provide greater education to local councils on their powers under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, including when to issue orders and best practices regulating invasive species
- 7. strengthen its approach to assessing the National Fire Ant Eradication Program
- 8. report regularly on the outcomes of its activities and the extent of eradication of fire ants.

2.4 Implementation of Queensland Audit Office recommendations

The department agreed with all 8 QAO recommendations and supplied a timeframe for implementation for each recommendation.¹⁰ On 17 April 2024 the committee requested the department provide an acquittal against its June 2023 timeline for implementation of the 8 recommendations. The department advised it was continuing to undertake management actions to meet the agreed implementation timelines and supplied the committee with a summary of key implementation activities undertaken. The implementation status of these recommendations, as provided, is in Appendix A.

On 31 May 2024, the department advised that it had implemented Recommendations 4, 7 and 8 in full, and was on track to achieve the remainder within its originally nominated timeframes, with ongoing actions in respect of the remaining recommendations as discussed below.

2.4.1 Strengthening biosecurity system leadership and coordination

The QAO recommended that the department should:
1. strengthen its leadership and coordination role for the biosecurity system by setting strategic priorities, prioritising funding, and coordinating and overseeing activities across Queensland
2. review the Biosecurity Act 2014 in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure it has the necessary clarity, authority, and responsibility to effectively and efficiently lead, coordinate, and enforce Queensland’s biosecurity system

The department noted that Recommendation 1:

...is a reversal from a central tenet of the National Biosecurity System that "biosecurity is a shared responsibility". The department has put considerable effort into bringing together its various key stakeholders, including Local Government, to work collaboratively across sectional interests which vary significantly across the State. This central shared responsibility will continue during the revision of the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy which is currently underway.¹¹

The department further noted that the report espoused a leadership model ‘which is inconsistent with the modern biosecurity system approach that looks for the creation of an authorising environment and collaborative partnerships’.¹² The Auditor-General responded:

¹⁰ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, pp 33-37.

¹¹ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 39.

¹² Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 31.

[The] comment that my report 'espouses a hierarchical or leader-follower model of leadership' is not accurate. My report acknowledges that all Queenslanders, land owners and levels of government have both specific and general responsibilities for biosecurity. However, given the limited information, expertise and resources available, statewide leadership is needed to coordinate and prioritise effort in the state and national interest.¹³

Implementation actions for these recommendations includes revision of Queensland's Biosecurity Strategy and the department's leadership, consultation and partnership arrangements. Ongoing actions in respect of the recommendations include:

- reviewing Queensland's Biosecurity Strategy (Recommendation 1)
- consulting on outstanding recommendations from the 2019 review of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* (Recommendation 2).

2.4.2 Designing an effective strategy

The QAO recommended that the department should:

3. review, update and implement the Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Strategy 2019–2024.

The strategy should:

- a) identify the current and future challenges and priorities facing Queensland's biosecurity system and provide practical solutions to address these challenges
- b) clearly define Biosecurity Queensland's role in relation to leading the biosecurity system, including coordinating and working with councils and stakeholders responsible for managing established invasive species
- c) include indicators of success to measure performance across the biosecurity system – these measures should be cascaded to all key stakeholders including councils
- d) better align to the Department of Environment and Science's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.

The department advised that a review of the Invasive plants and animals strategy 2019-24 cannot commence until the review of Queensland's Biosecurity Strategy is complete, but committed to including key performance indicators for invasive species management consistent with performance measures for biodiversity conservation, and exploring whether other arrangements to give effect to a cascade of those performance measures to other stakeholders and local councils is necessary.¹⁴

2.4.3 Using data to inform decision making

The QAO recommended that the department should:

4. improve the accuracy and level of detail it records about invasive species, their risk, and the activities it does to manage them. This should include:

- a) determining if the Biosecurity Online Resources and Information System has the required functionality
- b) regularly auditing and reporting on the quality, completeness, and accuracy of data in the Biosecurity Online Resources and Information System
- c) developing processes and measures for analysing its data for trends
- d) using its data in making decisions about how best to manage invasive species

Recommendation 4 aligns to a finding in the report that Biosecurity Queensland cannot accurately measure and report its performance due to data inaccuracies in BORIS.¹⁵ This finding aligns with a

¹³ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 43.

¹⁴ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, correspondence, 31 May 2024, attachment, pp 1-7.

¹⁵ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 10.

finding in Auditor General Report 4: 2021-22 – *2021 status of Auditor-General's recommendations*¹⁶ that while the department is developing key performance measures, it does not have specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based (SMART) indicators across biosecurity activities. This is despite the department saying it had fully implemented a recommendation to have SMART indicators developed which was contained in Auditor-General Report 12: 2016-17 – *Biosecurity Queensland's management of agricultural pests and diseases*.¹⁷

The department responded that BORIS is not designed as a specific species management or data analysis tool and is only one of a number of information systems it uses to support evidence-based decision making.¹⁸ As at 31 May 2024 any identified enhancements required to BORIS had been implemented, and future enhancements will continue as part of a rolling program based on funding decisions.

Committee comment

We note there are now multiple Auditor-General reports which speak to the need for the department to develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based (SMART) indicators across biosecurity activities. We also note from its response to the 2021 review of status of the Auditor-General's recommendations, that the department appears to hold a view that it has this type of indicator already in place. Given the department's response pending implementation of Recommendation 3, the department should consider including SMART indicators for invasive species management when it reviews its Invasive plants and animals strategy 2019-24.

2.4.4 Assessing and mitigating the risk of invasive species

The QAO recommended that the department should:

- 5. develop and implement a framework for assessing and mitigating the risk of new and established invasive species. The framework should include:**
 - a) an approach for regularly assessing, prioritising, and mitigating the risk of invasive species**
 - b) protocols for communicating the risk of invasive species and any changes in approach to managing those risks to relevant stakeholders.**

The report found that, except for fire ants, it is unclear which invasive species are a priority in Queensland and how their risk is assessed.¹⁹ This is accompanied by a lack of clarity about how much money is spent by the state and local governments on managing invasive species because Biosecurity Queensland does not capture this data.

The department's response to Recommendation 5 includes scoping and implementing a framework for assessing and mitigating the risk of new and established invasive species and publishing relevant documentation and tools. It notes that there are more than 1,000 invasive plants and animals in Queensland which will take time to affect a full review of all required risk profiles.²⁰

¹⁶ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 4: 2021-22 – *2021 status of Auditor-General's recommendations*, <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tableoffice/tabledpapers/2021/5721T1943.pdf>.

¹⁷ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 12: 2016-17 – *Biosecurity Queensland's management of agricultural pests and diseases*, <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2017/5517T522.pdf>.

¹⁸ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, correspondence, 31 May 2024, attachment, p 4.

¹⁹ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 11.

²⁰ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, correspondence, 31 May 2024, attachment, p 5.

2.4.5 Regulating the risk of invasive species

The QAO recommended that the department should:

6. **provide greater education and awareness to local councils about how they can use the powers of the Biosecurity Act 2014 to regulate the risk of invasive species. This should include:**
 - a) **educating local councils on when and why they should issue biosecurity orders**
 - b) **sharing better practice learnings about how local councils are regulating the risk of invasive species and the outcomes.**

The report found that a common view among Biosecurity Queensland staff was that it is only responsible for new invasive species and that councils are responsible for managing established species.²¹ The report identified some local councils are not currently complying with their responsibilities under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* because they do not have a biosecurity plan or are reluctant to issue biosecurity orders.²²

The QAO noted that Biosecurity Queensland as systems leader had a critical role in managing established invasive species including setting strategic and funding priorities and assessing their risk, and research, coordination and oversight functions.²³

The department responded that it intended to continue partnering with local government staff, office holders and the Local Government Association of Queensland, on better compliance training towards the general biosecurity obligation and local council powers, roles and responsibilities.

3 Eradicating fire ants case study

3.1 Background

The QAO report utilised a case study of red imported fire ants as one of the worst invasive species in the world:²⁴

Biosecurity Queensland is leading a national effort to eradicate fire ants from Queensland. Despite significant effort and funding, fire ants have now spread to over 700,000 hectares across South East Queensland. Initial delays in gaining funding approval across Commonwealth and state governments, and in commencing treatment, likely contributed to the spread. Expert views on whether eradication is still feasible vary, but the benefits of eradicating fire ants are apparent. Continuing to try to eradicate fire ants will take considerably more commitment and funding from the Commonwealth and state governments beyond what has already been provided. The significant commitment and funding necessitate that Biosecurity Queensland provides greater transparency about its progress as it seeks to mobilise governments and councils, the community, industries, and local businesses to do more in the fight against fire ants.²⁵

Biosecurity Queensland is leading the national response to fire ant eradication through the 10-year National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (NRIPAEP) which commenced in 2017. Australian state and federal governments share the cost of the NRIPAEP. Biosecurity Queensland reports to a National Steering Committee for oversight and guidance.

3.1.1 National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program

The department advised the NRIPAEP:

²¹ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 14.

²² Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 16.

²³ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 15.

²⁴ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 18.

²⁵ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 1.

...is unlike any other program attempted in the history of biosecurity in Australia. Accordingly, it has been reviewed a number of times in its 20+ year history. In 2021, the RIFA Steering Committee commissioned an independent strategic review of the Program with the aim of examining the Program's effectiveness, the feasibility of achieving fire ant eradication and alternative strategies for achieving the eradication objectives. On 3 September 2021, the Independent Review Panel delivered its report, the 'National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program Strategic Review August 2021'. The review was undertaken by an independent panel comprising of Dr Helen Scott-Orr, Dr Monica Gruber and Mr Will Zacharin. Dr Scott-Orr, the Chair of the review panel, was formerly the Australian Inspector-General of Biosecurity.

The review found that eradication remains technically feasible if changes in the program's scope, strategy, budget and governance are initiated. A new response plan and a request for ongoing funding has been developed and endorsed by the Steering Committee and is progressing to Agriculture Ministers for their consideration.²⁶

Since 2001, Biosecurity Queensland has spent \$644 million on fire ant eradication and was expected to exhaust all funding by June 2023.²⁷ Biosecurity Queensland estimated that it would require a further \$593 million over 4 years to 2027 to implement its strategy to manage and eradicate fire ants.²⁸ In July 2023, a decision about approving the additional funding was yet to be made.²⁹

3.2 Summary of Queensland Audit Office findings

The report found:

The infestation and spread of these ants are recognised as a significant state and national economic, health, and social threat. Efforts to initially eradicate and later manage these ants in China and the United States have been largely unsuccessful and resulted in significant cost and impacts. Biosecurity Queensland has worked hard to slow the spread and eradicate fire ants. To date, the eradication efforts have had isolated and limited success. Its efforts to slow the spread of the ants in Queensland has contributed to the rate of spread being significantly less than experienced in China and the USA, but still the infestation has continued to grow. Inadequate containment boundaries, as well as uncertainty and delays in funding, slowed treatment to control the spread and eradicate these ants.³⁰

The QAO made findings that:

- expert views vary on whether eradication can be achieved with the number of detection sites increasing from 116 in 2007 to 12,388 in 2022³¹
- it is difficult to determine how Queensland is progressing with eradicating fire ants based on publicly available information. Biosecurity Queensland has many performance metrics and reports regularly and publicly on its activities. However, it does not clearly highlight the outcomes of the program and focuses on outputs³²
- the community, industries, local businesses, and councils need to better understand the current size of the infestation, the impact of fire ants and the risk of them spreading further, and what they can do to manage them.³³

The department disputed the QAO finding that expert views vary on whether fire ant eradication is achievable, and in response the Auditor-General stated:

²⁶ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 39.

²⁷ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 20.

²⁸ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 2.

²⁹ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 25.

³⁰ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 2.

³¹ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 20.

³² Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, pp 23-24.

³³ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 24.

[The department's] view that eradication remains technically feasible overstates what the report and the subject matter experts actually said. Page 47 of the report states that 'technical feasibility of eradication is unclear at this time' and further states that eradication 'may eventually be feasible' (not remains feasible) with major changes in the program. The full extract from page 47 of the report is reproduced below:

"Based on previous successes, the containment of polygyne infestations and the elimination of RIFA from significant portions of SEQ, it is still considered biologically feasible to eradicate the ants. However, due to the scale of the infestation at this point, and outstanding uncertainty regarding the effectiveness and strategic use of RSS in routine operations, the technical feasibility of eradication is unclear at this time.

In view of Program outcomes to date and current risks of spread, a major change of strategy is needed for any possibility of long term eradication and even for continued mitigation of a build-up of infestation with consequent serious problems. Gains made to date must be preserved if possible, while a new strategy is put in place. In the longer term eradication may eventually be feasible but only with major changes in program scope strategy budget and governance and possibly with new technologies." (Underlining added).³⁴

3.3 Queensland Audit Office recommendations

The QAO recommended that the department should:

- 7. strengthen its approach for assessing the progress and outcomes of the NRIPAEP. Decisions about what to do next should be guided by independent assessments grounded by scientific data and modelling. This should include periodically assessing whether it is technically feasible to eradicate fire ants from Queensland**
- 8. report its progress in eradicating fire ants from Queensland and the outcomes of its activities. This should include developing and reporting regularly on performance measures that show how well the program is achieving its outcomes, such as the size of the fire ant infestation over time**

3.4 Implementation of Queensland Audit Office recommendations

In June 2023, the department agreed with these recommendations but indicated that any implementation action was subject to the acceptance of a revised national response plan. On 31 May 2024 the department provided an update, again noting that any forward management actions in respect of fire ants were subject to the acceptance of a revised national response plan.

On 12 June 2024, the committee wrote to the department seeking additional information about the NRIPAEP.

Regarding acceptance of the revised national fire ant response plan, on 25 July 2024 the Minister advised during the Estimates hearing:

In July last year, all agriculture ministers across Australia supported continuing the eradication program by endorsing the new 2023-2027 response plan. It was my pleasure also to take the ministers last week to Berrinba to see the major centre of the Fire Ant Eradication Program. They were very pleased with the progress we are making. The response plan is supported by \$593 million in funding by all national cost-share partners. This funding enables the program to scale up operations. This includes doubling the size of the treatment and surveillance area and increasing compliance enforcement capability to address human assisted movement. The response plan structures program efforts by eradicating ants from the outer eradication zone and pushing them inwards. This reduces the reinfestation risk from the ants given their capacity for flight. The program is complemented by the Myles government's \$37.1 million Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce.³⁵

³⁴ Queensland Audit Office, Auditor-General Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*, p 42.

³⁵ Public hearing transcript, Brisbane, 25 July 2024, p 59.

3.4.1 Assessing progress and outcomes for National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program

In response to the committee's question about how regularly eradication feasibility reviews will be conducted under the revised national response plan, the department stated:

Planned and responsive eradication feasibility reviews are built into the Program's governance approach. The Program has scheduled eradication feasibility reviews to occur at the completion of each operational response plan period (planned reviews). The most recent review occurred in 2021 as part of the Independent Strategic Review. This review confirmed that fire ant eradication remains technically feasible in Australia and informed the development of the Fire Ant Response Plan 2023-27 (the Response Plan).

The National Fire Ant Eradication Program National Management Group (NFAEP NMG) will conduct an efficiency and effectiveness review in 2025 to assess the Program's progress against the agreed Response Plan. The outcomes of this review may prompt a technical eradication feasibility review. Pending any decisions following the 2025 efficiency and effectiveness review, a planned eradication feasibility review will next occur in 2027 at completion of the agreed Response Plan. This review will inform Program activities beyond 2027. Outcomes from both the efficiency and effectiveness review and the 2027 eradication feasibility review will be publicly available following internal approval processes attached to the Program's governance structure.

In addition to planned eradication activities, the Program responds to fire ant detections located beyond its current containment boundary. These detections are referred to as outlier detections. The Program develops an outlier response plan following an incident investigation for each outlier detection. These nuanced response plans are informed by comprehensive scientific data and modelling and assessed by the National Fire Ant Eradication Program Consultative Committee (NFAEP CC). The NFAEP CC also determines if the outlier detection is sufficiently significant to warrant an eradication feasibility review of the Program as a whole (responsive review).³⁶

3.4.2 Outcome-based reporting of fire ant eradication progress

The department replied to the committee's query about how the new reporting framework will operate including frequency and format of reporting:

Following endorsement of the Response Plan, the Program adopted a Managing Successful Programs (MSP) key delivery framework, supported by the ADKAR (Awareness; Desire; Knowledge; Ability; Reinforcement) for managing change. Adoption of this best practice framework is being led by a newly established Program Management Office, which is leading the Program's commitment to enhanced transparency and efficiency under MSP, including more frequent and comprehensive weekly and monthly internal reports.

Adoption of MSP has also resulted in enhancements to the external reporting framework. The Program will continue publishing quarterly and annual reports online, detailing progress against annual work plan objectives and agreed and published performance measures. Additionally, to enhance transparency for external stakeholders, the Program now hosts quarterly industry and council collaboration network meetings to report on progress.³⁷

The department also advised that the relevant performance measures for the new framework:

...represent a shift from the Program's previous approach, highlighting an emphasis on strengthening compliance to reduce the potential for human assisted movement system and mapping activities and progress against eradication objectives. Additionally, the new objectives and performance measures capture the Program's commitment to leveraging innovative approaches and technology to improve operations.

The department remains dedicated to enhancing the transparency of the Program's performance in achieving the critical goal of eradicating fire ants from Australia by 2032.³⁸

³⁶ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, correspondence, 31 May 2024, attachment, pp 1-2.

³⁷ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, correspondence, 31 May 2024, attachment, p 2.

³⁸ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, correspondence, 31 May 2024, attachment, p 3.

Appendix A – Department of Agriculture and Fisheries progression update for recommendations in Auditor-General’s Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species*

Auditor-General's Report 1: 2023-24 – *Managing invasive species* – DAF progression update for the Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee

Recommendation	DAF stated management action	Action and timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Key activities undertaken - DAF progression update	Progress - % complete
Strengthening biosecurity system leadership and coordination We recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF): 1. strengthen its leadership and coordination role for the biosecurity system by setting strategic priorities, prioritising funding, and coordinating and overseeing activities across Queensland (Chapter 4).	DAF is currently working with key stakeholders to revise the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy. A major tenet of the Australian and Queensland biosecurity system is "biosecurity is a shared responsibility". A stakeholder writing team is currently drafting and will develop action plans in coming months. DAF will review its leadership, consultation and partnership arrangements and structures including the Terms of Reference (ToR) and DAF's role in stakeholder committees within the Biosecurity System. These committees and arrangements include the State Land Pest Management Committee (SLPMC), State Oversight Group (SOG), Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Committee (QIPAC) and the Queensland Dog Offensive Group (QDOG).	Q2 2023/24 (Revision of Queensland Biosecurity Strategy for Premier's consideration)	DAF has released the revised Queensland Biosecurity Strategy which was announced by the Minister on 14 May 2024.	100%
		Q3 2023/24 (Review of DAF's leadership, consultation, and partnership arrangements)	ToRs including roles and responsibilities have been reviewed for the Research Review Committee, QIPAC, QDOG, SLPMC, and the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative Oversight Group. The SOG ToR is still in progress with a co-investment model project due to begin in October 2024 that will determine Local Government (LG)/DAF roles and responsibilities to underpin this ToR.	95%

Recommendation	DAF stated management action	Action and timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Key activities undertaken - DAF progression update	Progress - % complete
<p>Strengthening biosecurity system leadership and coordination</p> <p>We recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries:</p> <p>2. reviews the <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure it has the necessary clarity, authority and responsibility to effectively and efficiently lead, coordinate and enforce Queensland's biosecurity system (Chapter 4).</p>	<p>The <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> was comprehensively reviewed with key industry stakeholders including Local Government and the Local Government Association of Queensland in 2019. That review was undertaken within three years of its commencement of the Act, as required by S501 of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i>.</p>	<p>Q3 2024/25 (Progression of outstanding recommendations from the 2019 Act Review that require further consideration and/or public consultation)</p>	<p>Agriculture, Fisheries, and other Legislation Amendment Bill (AFOLA) passed parliament and the Governor provided assent on 26 April 2024. Implementation of the regulatory amendments is expected to occur with the amendment of the Biosecurity Regulation 2016 within 12 months of assent of AFOLA. Delegations for the amendments to the Act are being developed for consideration by the Chief Executive. Criteria for assessment of prohibited and restricted matter has been developed and amendments to Section 48 affecting Local Governments has taken effect from the date of assent.</p>	100%
	<p>The 2019 <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> review and recommendations are published at: https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/biosecurity/policy-legislation-regulation/review-of-the-biosecurity-act-2014. Some necessary recommendations were actioned in the <i>Agriculture and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020</i>.</p> <p>Certain other recommendations, not requiring a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) are currently progressing through the normal legislative amendment processes.</p> <p>The outstanding recommendations from the 2019 <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> review require further consideration and/or public consultation prior to a final decision being made by Government on whether they will be progressed.</p> <p>DAF will progress this recommendation in conjunction with the next review cycle for the Biosecurity Regulation 2016 currently scheduled for 2026.</p>	<p>Q1 2025/26 Further review of <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i></p>	<p>Not yet commenced. See stated management action comments.</p>	0%

Recommendation	DAF stated management action	Action and timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Key activities undertaken - DAF progression update	Progress - % complete
Designing an effective strategy We recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: <p>3. review, update and implement the <i>Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Strategy 2019-24</i> (Chapter 4). The strategy should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify the current and future challenges and priorities facing Queensland's biosecurity system and provide practical solutions to address these challenges clearly define Biosecurity Queensland's role in relation to leading the biosecurity system, including co-ordinating and working with councils and stakeholders responsible for managing established invasive species include indicators of success to measure performance across the biosecurity system – these measures should be cascaded to all key stakeholders including councils better align to the Department of Environment and Science's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. 	<p>The Queensland Biosecurity Strategy is currently under revision with expected release in Q3 2023/24.</p> <p>A review of the Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Strategy 2019-24 will commence once the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy is finalised.</p> <p>DAF will renew the Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Strategy for release during 2025 to include key performance indicators (KPI) in line with the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy and the "Conserving Nature – A Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for Queensland 2022".</p> <p>DAF will work with DES to develop KPIs for invasive species management consistent with the performance measures for biodiversity conservation.</p>	<p>Q2 2023/24 (Sep – Dec 2023 review of current IPAS)</p>	<p>All survey responses and feedback from targeted surveys have been received, collated, and assessed. Redrafting of the strategy has commenced and is expected to be available for further planned consultation in Q4 2023/24. This recommendation remains on track.</p>	100%
	<p>DAF will investigate whether certain other arrangements are necessary to give effect to a cascade of performance measures to other stakeholders and local governments such as amendments to the <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish a mandatory requirement for local government biosecurity plans to contain KPI for each local strategy to manage invasive plants and invasive animals and/or establish a mandatory annual reporting relationship from Local Governments to DAF for State or Local Government determined performance measures or KPIs. <p>DAF will implement the identified priority activities in the updated Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Strategy subject to normal budgetary constraints.</p>	<p>Q4 2023/24 (Mar – June 2024 public consultation of revised QIPAS)</p>	<p>Public consultation completed on 31 May 2024.</p>	100%
		<p>Q2 2023/24 (July – Sep 2024 adoption of revised QIPAS strategy)</p>	<p>Not yet commenced</p>	0%

Recommendation	DAF stated management action	Action and timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Key activities undertaken - DAF progression update	Progress - % complete
<p>Using data to inform decision making</p> <p>We recommend that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries:</p> <p>4. improve the accuracy and level of detail it records about invasive species, their risk, and the activities it does to manage them (Chapter 4). This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> determining if the Biosecurity Online Resources and Information System has the required functionality regularly auditing and reporting on the quality, completeness, and accuracy of data in the Biosecurity Online Resources and Information System developing processes and measures for analysing its data for trends using its data in making decisions about how best to manage invasive species. 	<p>The Biosecurity Online Resources and Information System (BORIS) is an internal system to aid Biosecurity Queensland administer aspects of its regulatory functions under its legislation portfolio, it is not a specific invasive species management tool or data repository or data analysis tool and is used across all biosecurity Queensland programs.</p> <p>Biosecurity Queensland has a rolling program to make functionality enhancements to BORIS and its various modules. Changes to functionality can be scoped and delivered at the request of any Biosecurity Queensland program area which identifies a need for an enhancement.</p> <p>BORIS is just one of the information systems and analytical tools used to support evidence-based decision-making. Biosecurity Queensland also uses nationally agreed applications such as CLIMATCH as part of risk profiling and decision-making using data held in national and global data invasive species data repositories.</p> <p>The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) are the national and global repositories for invasive species distribution data.</p> <p>DAF, other government agencies and citizen scientists provide invasive species locational data to those data repositories. DAF does not seek to duplicate those data repositories within BORIS.</p> <p>DAF curates a number of spatial data sets associated with pest species distribution and abundance. These data sets are made available through whole-of-Government Open Data policies and the department has also created dashboards for external parties to support pest prioritisation and evaluation of management effort.</p>	<p>Q1 2023/24 (Rolling program of enhancements to BORIS as need identified)</p>	<p>On 10 August 2023, a comprehensive list of systems enhancements for the BORIS platform were provided to Biosecurity Queensland Information Technology work group and workshopped to discuss approaches to address several options for delivery of improvements for the system. BORIS specifically supports the species prioritisation and compliance processes that improve Local Government coordination of established pest management throughout regional and remote Queensland. The enhancements will continue to be prioritised as part of rolling program of enhancements while awaiting the outcome of the funding decisions.</p>	<p>100%</p>

<p>Assessing and mitigating the risk of invasive species</p> <p>We recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries:</p> <p>5. develop and implement a framework for assessing and mitigating the risk of new and established invasive species (Chapter 4). The framework should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an approach for regularly assessing, prioritising, and mitigating the risk of invasive species • protocols for communicating the risk of invasive species and any changes in approach to managing those risks, to relevant stakeholders. 	<p>DAF will refine the risk assessment and prioritisation processes and tools developed by DAF and previously made available to Queensland Local Governments in partnership with the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ). These documents and tools will be published on the DAF website once reedited to meet current web access publishing guidelines.</p> <p>DAF will use the same risk assessment and prioritisation tools, as provided to Local Government, to provide regular revisions of the risk profiles of the invasive biosecurity matter which are a Local Government responsibility.</p> <p>DAF will develop protocols for communicating changes in risk profiles to all relevant stakeholders including local governments.</p> <p>DAF notes that there are more than 1000 invasive plants and invasive animals, and about the same number of species of noxious fish or invasive ornamental fish. DAF has not yet scoped the resources and timelines required. However, it may take some considerable time and extra resources to affect a full review of all required risk profiles.</p> <p>DAF will also undertake a review of all invasive plants and invasive animals (including noxious fish) currently listed as restricted matter or prohibited matter in the <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> to determine whether the risk profiles and mitigation measures continue to require a legislative listing.</p> <p>The Queensland Government is partnering with other stakeholders in the development of Biosecurity Commons, a platform that host a suite of tools that will deliver a cloud-based decision-support platform for modelling and analysing biosecurity risk and response of invasive plants and animals.</p>	<p>Q4 2023/24 (scoping of developing and implementing of framework)</p> <p>Q4 2024/25 (Publishing documentation and tools)</p>	<p>Funding for the procurement of a professional contractor to progress this recommendation has been secured. Procurement process is now underway to redevelop the tools previously developed and extended to Local Governments for Risk Assessment and Prioritisation of pest and weeds species across Queensland.</p> <p>Procurement activity has commenced.</p>	<p>30%</p> <p>10%</p>

Recommendation	DAF stated management action	Action and timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Key activities undertaken - DAF progression update	Progress - % complete
Regulating the risk of invasive species We recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> provide greater education and awareness to local councils about how they can use the powers of the <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> to regulate the risk of invasive species (Chapter 4). This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educating local councils on when and why they should issue biosecurity orders sharing better practice learnings about how local councils are regulating the risk of invasive species and the outcomes. 	DAF intends to continue to partner with LGAQ on how to best provide training packages for Biosecurity Best Practice Regulation to local government elected members, senior management and staff. DAF has commenced “master classes” for Local Government “authorised persons” to support Local Government compliance with the general biosecurity obligation (GBO) when managing invasive grasses. The learning process for Local Government authorised persons is ongoing. DAF will continue to provide training to Local Government authorised persons during 2023/24 and beyond.	Q4 2023/24 Develop and deliver a dedicated education and awareness package for elected councillors.	Panels are being approved for finalisation of recruitment for these project positions. Implementations for this recommendation was originally reported for Q4 2023/24, however, this timeframe is unlikely to be met and the current plan for implementation will extend across a three-year implementation period. The additional staff and resources for implementation and the detailed project plan are expected to be available by 30 June 2024.	10%
		Q4 2023/24 Develop and deliver dedicated training package focusing on Local Government Chief Executive Officer powers, roles, and responsibilities.		10%
		Q1 2023/24 Continue to deliver training to Local Government appointed “authorised persons” on powers, roles and responsibilities.	All scheduled capacity building training has been completed. In addition to masterclasses on invasive grass management and cactus identification and control, local government officers have participated in <i>Biosecurity Act 2014</i> , biosecurity planning and compliance training across the four regions. In addition, biosecurity officers have provided specialist mapping and spatial data management training to local government, Indigenous Rangers and NRM officers at the annual Gamba Grass taskforce activity initiated by Cook Shire Council and Cape York NRM.	100%

Recommendation	DAF stated management action	Action and timeframe for implementation (Quarter and financial year)	Key activities undertaken - DAF progression update	Progress - % complete
Responding to fire ants We recommend the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries:				
7. strengthen its approach for assessing the progress and outcomes of the National Fire Ant Eradication program (Chapter 5). Decisions about what to do next should be guided by independent assessments grounded by scientific data and modelling. This should include periodically assessing whether it is technically feasible to eradicate fire ants from Queensland.	Agree. Subject to acceptance of revised national response plan	Q1 2023/24 (subject to acceptance of revised national response plan)	Governance Structure has been finalised. The first NMG meeting occurred 22 February 2024. The new governance arrangements were endorsed at this meeting.	100%
8. report its progress in eradicating fire ants from Queensland (Chapter 5) and the outcomes of its activities. This should include developing and reporting regularly on performance measures that show how well the program is achieving its outcomes, such as the size of the fire ant infestation over time.	Agree. Subject to acceptance of revised national response plan	Q1 2023/24 (subject to acceptance of revised national response plan)	The Program has addressed the recommendations of the QAO report by establishing a new reporting and performance framework and incorporating regular eradication feasibility reviews into the governance structure.	100%