

Far North Regional Organisation of Councils

# Regional Tramp Ant Response Plan

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Contact author: Travis Sydes

Regional Natural Asset Management and Sustainability Coordinator, FNQROC

[t.sydes@fnqroc.qld.gov.au](mailto:t.sydes@fnqroc.qld.gov.au)

**Key concepts of the response plan** - Although we have a world-class quarantine and inspection system in place in Australia, incursions of biosecurity risks past our borders do occur. Northern shipping ports and airports and remote communities are particularly vulnerable due their proximity to Asia and the Pacific, a tropical climate and diverse traffic from aircraft, touring yachts, commercial and military transport docking on our shores. Of the six significant tramp ant species listed in the Commonwealth Threat Abatement Plan, three have entered and established in our region to date. It is likely they or others may be back in the future.

This *regional tramp ant response plan* outlines a three part response plan for local governments in collaboration with state biosecurity capability to;

1. Assist the transition of the national cost-shared electric ant (EA) eradication program in the process of monitoring sites through to confirmed eradication.
2. Assist the ongoing delivery of the Yellow Crazy Ant (YCA) eradication program through relevant advocacy, strategic operational and logistical contributions.
3. Establish and maintain a region-wide surveillance and precautionary baiting program at green waste transfer facilities.

## Contents

Key concepts of the response plan .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Considerations for councils .....	4
What are 'biosecurity risks' and 'biosecurity events'? .....	4
Why adopt a regional approach; what are the positives and risks? .....	5
The response plan.....	6
Regional tramp ant response plan – annual action plan.....	7
Reference and resources .....	8
Contact details for reporting invasive tramp ants .....	8

## Introduction

The Far North is currently impacted by two legislated pest ants' species, broadly termed invasive tramp ants; **electric ant (EA)** and **yellow crazy ant (YCA)**.

Both are or have been the subject of eradication programs led by state or national agencies. The *National Electric Ant Eradication Program* is drawing to a close and is on track to deliver the goal of national eradication.

The yellow crazy ant was deemed ineradicable from Queensland in 2012 and hence the state withdrew its program. After a short management hiatus, the management of the issue was taken up by Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) who successfully secured funding for a five year program. Although no formal announcement has been made it seems likely the program will secure ongoing funding to continue the work from both State and Federal coffers for another term of approximately 3 years. If it is to be realised, the goal of eradication from the Wet Tropics is likely to take in the order of 10 years. Current and historical distribution of tramp ants in the Far North includes YCA (Bentley Park and Edmonton-CRC, Russet Park/Kuranda – MSC) and Electric Ant (Port Douglas- DSC, Kuranda, Speewah and Koah MSC, Kewarra Beach, Smithfield-CRC).

Tramp ants by nature are most readily translocated by human activity, hitching rides in anything from garden materials and building waste to pot plants and green waste. The electric ant program has maintained a range of measures across green waste facilities as a key mode of detection for both ant species. Several successful detections supported by routine baiting at select green waste facilities have eliminated spread to new locations.

As the National Electric Ant Program draws to conclusion several elements of the operation which have provided support to local outcomes will also cease and councils will need to work with partner agencies to maintain the level of response required. This includes the follow up monitoring of treated sites to ensure long term eradication; ant identification services; call centre; and green waste site monitoring and treatment. Not all of these are within the skill set or jurisdiction of local government however; so this response plan maps out the areas where councils are required to operate to execute their *General Biosecurity Obligation* as well as where they are well positioned to maintain cost-effective and proactive levels of preparedness.

[Current distribution of yellow crazy ants in the Wet Tropics](#)

[Current distribution of electric ants in the Wet Tropics](#)



## Considerations for councils

### Statutory requirements:

Both EA and YCA are currently legislated under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*; electric ants are the highest level of classification as a Category 1 biosecurity matter whereas yellow crazy ants are a Category 3. The main difference being the higher category requires compulsory reporting of the matter and all reasonable steps must be taken to minimise and not exacerbate the risk. In terms of lead roles in responding to the different categories Category 1 will be led by the State and Category 3 will be led by Local Government.

### The **general biosecurity obligation (GBO)**:

Under the Act, local governments, like other persons, are obliged to take all reasonable and practical steps to minimise biosecurity risks posed by their activities. This is known as a [general biosecurity obligation](#) (GBO).

To meet their own obligations, local governments may wish to consider formal planning processes for biosecurity risk management to demonstrate due diligence. Local government will only be able to enforce the GBO if the risk is related to invasive biosecurity matter.

### What are 'biosecurity risks' and 'biosecurity events'?

To properly understand your responsibilities under the GBO, councils need to understand what is meant by 'biosecurity risks' and 'biosecurity events'.

A biosecurity risk is the risk that exists when you deal with:

- any pest, disease or contaminant
- something that could carry a pest, disease or contaminant (e.g. animals, plants, soil, equipment—known as 'carriers')

In the case of executing councils GBO regarding invasive tramp ants consideration needs to be made to both the management of infestations on lands under councils control e.g. – controlling or eradicating the 'pest' from parks and gardens under council management; as well the risk posed by the management actions and procedures councils are engaged in e.g. – reducing or eliminating the risk of the 'carrier' in products or processes during the management of waste transfer facilities.

A biosecurity event is an event that:

- has, or may have, a significant harmful effect on human health, social amenity, the economy, or the environment *and*
- is caused by a pest, disease or contaminant.

In the case of councils and the management of invasive tramp ants an event may be the outbreak or introduction of EA or YCA to waste transfer facility; or the transport of an active nest in plant or materials between depots.

The GBO shares the responsibility for managing biosecurity risks more broadly so that we can reduce the likelihood of having a biosecurity event.

## **Why adopt a regional approach; what are the positives and risks?**

### **Positives for local government:**

1. A pro-active surveillance program will assist in the early detection of known tramp ants (YCA and EA) and potential new species into the region. This will enable a much more timely response prior to wider establishment. The potential economic impacts of this group of pests are significant as are the required resources and expertise to fund eradication programs.
2. Demonstrating a strategic and cross regional commitment via a surveillance and precautionary baiting program will assist to lever state and commonwealth resources to current (and future) management if the need arises.
3. Under the provisions of the Biosecurity Act (implemented July 1, 2016), local government is the agency responsible for the management of YCA. The response plan will build the region's capacity to intervene or respond to new incursions or delivery of active programs as required.
4. Increase in awareness and skills in key operational staff in the early detection and response to tramp ants (or other invasive ants).
5. The response plan is a cost effective approach with low overheads, the effectiveness rests more in coordination action and alignment of priority and use of existing resources rather than major expenditure.
6. The response to invasive tramp ants requires a focus behaviour change regarding illegal dumping and green waste management in the community. Managing the risk to the community and councils through these two lenses provides an opportunity to expand on current community engagement and enforcement actions underway.

### **Risks for local government:**

1. If the Yellow Crazy Ant Program fails to deliver regional eradication then local governments may be left as the sole respondent to the issue. The legislation clearly demarcates the responsibility for YCA in the future to LG.
2. Detection of new tramp ant species or outbreaks of known species in new locations may require response which is beyond the resource scope of councils.
3. The successful eradication of electric ants requires a monitoring period following final treatment and clearances of sites for a period of 2 years. If subsequent detections are made as a result of LG/BQ surveillance activities a response would have to be initiated.
4. Public perception of the periodic use of pesticide at green waste facilities may have to be justified to residents.
5. Capacity to participate may vary between councils requiring additional support to implement.
6. Unless a region-wide strategy is adopted to respond to tramp ant incursions into the future, individual councils may bear the expense of responding to the benefit of other non-contributing parties

## **The response plan**

The key objectives of the Regional Tramp Ant Response Plan are to;

- a) Assist the transition of the national cost-shared electric ant (EA) eradication program in the process of monitoring sites through to the confirmed eradication; and maintain that status.
- b) Assist and support the ongoing delivery of the Yellow Crazy Ant (YCA) eradication program.
- c) Establish a region-wide green waste sentinel site and awareness program to conduct recurrent (quarterly) monitoring and precautionary baiting. This would include a rapid-response protocol and education component for council staff.

Like any strategy for managing risk it is important to councils that the implementation of the response plan is both efficient and cost-effective and that it is commensurate to the risk posed to councils and community. Wherever possible the delivery of key objectives will be supported by actions in a day to day approach by incorporating the required activities, processes and procedures into business-as-usual. Where there are identified capacity, resource or knowledge gaps the plan will assist councils to work with partner agencies and communities to either fill the gap; or to provide the basis for effective advocacy to State and Federal Governments for the required resource or support.

### **Technical oversight**

Technical oversight for the implementation of the response plan will be delivered by the Natural Asset Management Advisory Committee (NAMAC). The NAMAC will also engage directly with the local advisory committees/groups within each local government. Annual review of work and action plan will be undertaken by the committee as part of core business. FNQROC and directly impacted councils will also contribute to, and liaise with regional stakeholders in the YCA Reference Group.

### **Executive oversight**

Regional oversight of the response plan will be provided by the FNQROC Board who will receive essential updates, progress reports and approve or make recommendations relating to regional investments and actions. Local oversight will be provided through individual councils. Where advocacy is required both local and regional approaches, supported by the technical input of the NAMAC and relevant management program advisory groups.

### **Annual taskforce operations**

Since 2014 local governments, state departments, ranger groups and NGO's have assisted FNQROC and WTMA in the delivery of the annual NAMAC - Yellow Crazy Ant Taskforce. The taskforce has grown to be a crucial component of the funded program by training numerous field staff in the detection and control of invasive tramps ants. The operations have enabled the delivery of field operations which support the greater program to take place through completing delimitation of surveys and ground-baiting many kilometres of waterways.

### **Action plan**

The response plan is guided by an annual action/works plan which sets targets for each of the three objectives; identifies the required resources and key contributors.

## Regional tramp ant response plan – annual action plan

Component	Key actions	Resource overview	Contributors	Frequency/ duration
a) EA program transition	Assist in final clearance surveys of EA sites & assist BQ in ongoing monitoring to eradication	One-off site inspections initially and then annual monitoring for X years (site specific staffing)	LG pest management staff, BQ and EA officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single induction of management sites and then periodic monitoring for 3-5 years</li> </ul>
b) YCA program support	Provide strategic and operational support to annual YCA Taskforce	Multiple staff per operation	WTMA, BQ, QPWS, LG's, FNQROC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 days annually</li> <li>• (additional days contributed by FNQROC in planning and logistics)</li> </ul>
	Provide logistical support to program	Site and facility specific arrangements between CRC/MSD and WTMA	CRC, MSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing for duration of program</li> </ul>
	Provide support to YCA reference group	2 LG reps., 1 FNQROC rep.	FNQROC, MSD, CRC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 meetings annually</li> <li>• Ongoing for duration of program</li> </ul>
c) Sentinel site program	Conduct quarterly/or six monthly monitoring of green waste sites	1 pest management staff, 1 green waste staff, 1 BQ staff	LG pest management staff, green waste staff (BQ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 (2) monitoring runs annually</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
	Conduct precautionary baiting at high risk transfer sites	1 pest management staff, 1 green waste staff Pesticide	LG pest management staff, green waste staff (BQ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (2) baiting runs annually</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
d) Plan implementation and coordination	Oversight and reporting to individual councils and FNQROC Board	Regional NAM coordinator, 3-5 days annually	NAMAC, FNQROC NAM coordinator, BQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial intensive works to establish</li> <li>• Ongoing</li> </ul>
	Develop and adopt a regional rapid response protocol and education package for operational staff	Regional NAM coordinator, 3 days to develop 1 day annually to review	NAMAC, FNQROC NAM coordinator, BQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One off initial protocol development</li> <li>• Annual review through NAMAC</li> </ul>

## Reference and resources

[Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program](#) – Wet Tropics Management Authority

[Electric Ants in Queensland](#) - Biosecurity Queensland

[Commonwealth of Australia. 2006. Threat abatement plan to reduce the impacts of tramp ants on biodiversity in Australia and its territories, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra](#)

[State of Queensland. 2016. Invasive animal risk assessment. Yellow crazy ant, \*Anoplolepis gracilipes\*. Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Biosecurity Queensland.](#)

## Contact details for reporting invasive tramp ants

Electric ants – Biosecurity Queensland – 13 25 23

Yellow crazy ants - Yellow Crazy Ants Eradication Program - 07 4241 0525,  
[yca@wtma.qld.gov.au](mailto:yca@wtma.qld.gov.au)

