



CANEGROWERS



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Is government failing Australians on fire ants?

CANEGROWERS is calling on the federal, state and territory governments to redouble their efforts to halt the march of Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA), following the release of a damning report on the failure of the current eradication program.

The report, which has been kept under wraps for two years, makes clear that the current strategy will not only fail to eradicate RIFA, but will be unable to stop the global super-pest from spreading beyond south-east Queensland.

'To prevent RIFA spreading beyond SEQ, building up more around Brisbane, and eventually becoming entrenched throughout Australia, a larger, more comprehensive and inevitably more expensive program will be needed,' the report states.

Failure to do so would lead to 'inevitable future costs of major public health impacts and billions worth of damage per year to Australian agriculture and the wider economy.'

If governments are not serious about eradication or containment, the report suggests the national eradication program should be wound down and transition to state-by-state management should occur.

CANEGROWERS Environment and Sustainability Senior Manager Mick Quirk said Red Imported Fire Ants are one of the worst invasive species to ever reach Australia and failure to eradicate the pest would have dire consequences for the entire community.

"The report states that the current fire ant program is not fit for purpose and is grossly under-resourced," he said.

Mr Quirk questioned why the Queensland and Federal governments sat on the report for two years.

"Why has there been no sign of any decisions or actions in the two years since the report was completed. Where is the urgency and the transparency?" he said.

"We call on all states and territories and the Federal Government to re-commit to a properly funded and coordinated national program that will eradicate fire ants once and for all.

“Failure to do so will have a devastating impact on a whole range of agricultural industries and on the Australian way of life,” Mr Quirk said.

Rocky Point cane farmer Ben Spann said growers in the district were upset and frustrated by the lack of action and transparency by the government.

“Fire ants have been a huge problem in our area for years and we’ve always suspected that the government wasn’t taking it seriously enough or committing the funds and resources necessary to properly tackle this massive environmental and societal problem,” Mr Spann said.

“But to see that in black and white, and to find out that they’ve known for two years but have sat on this report is very upsetting and frustrating.

“We’ve been let down badly by our state and federal politicians and by Biosecurity Queensland. And I don’t just mean the sugarcane industry here in Rocky Point. If not addressed, this failure will eventually impact every Australian.

“But if our local industry does end up failing because of the impact of fire ants, especially on the sugarcane mulch side of the industry, the Queensland Government will have a very large bill on its hands in the future.”

[Download a copy of the full report here](#)

Media comment: *Mick Quirk and Ben Spann are available for media comment and further information. To organise an interview, please contact CANEGROWERS Communications Manager Wayne Griffin*