

Report on a page

Invasive plants and animals (invasive species) affect the lives of all Queenslanders and are estimated to cost the Australian economy between \$5 and \$7 billion each year. Biosecurity Queensland is a business group of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. It leads Queensland's response to prevent and recover from pests and diseases threatening our agriculture, the environment, social amenity, and human health. It works with state and local government entities to manage invasive species. We found that although these entities are doing a lot to manage invasive species, Biosecurity Queensland needs to take greater leadership in its oversight and coordination role to reduce the impact of some species.

Reducing the impact of invasive species

Stronger leadership and effective strategy are needed to address key challenges

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' role, through Biosecurity Queensland, is to lead the biosecurity system. However, it has not clearly articulated how it will deliver on its crucial leadership role.

The *Queensland invasive plants and animals strategy 2019–2024* does not address some of the key challenges facing the biosecurity system, like increasing biosecurity risk and the limited capacity of some entities. It aspires to reduce the impact of all invasive species, without clearly defining which ones are a priority for entities with a role in managing invasive species.

Gaps in assessing and prioritising risk

There is significant variation in how state entities and local councils assess the risk of invasive species and prioritise their activities. Some have mature systems and processes and others do not have any. Despite its role as system leader, Biosecurity Queensland does not have a documented framework for assessing and prioritising the risk of invasive species. It does prioritise its effort, but it is difficult to determine whether its focus is always on the right species.

Responding to established invasive species

Biosecurity Queensland is taking a proactive approach to keep new invasive species out of Queensland and detect quickly those that do arrive. This aligns to the state strategy and is consistent with what industry experts recognise as the most cost-effective way to reduce their impact. However, it is not actively coordinating a state-wide approach across entities to manage established invasive species. For example, neither it nor the Department of Environment and Science have a state-wide plan to manage feral cats, despite their significant impact on our native wildlife. Biosecurity Queensland could better assist councils to more effectively use the powers of the *Biosecurity Act 2013* to regulate biosecurity risk.

Eradicating fire ants

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.

We made 8 recommendations to improve how entities assess, prioritise, and mitigate the risk of invasive species, design their strategies, use data to inform their decisions, and report their progress.

