



## Red Imported Fire Ants

(*Solenopsis invicta*)



Red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*)

### PURPOSE

This bulletin highlights the significant biosecurity risk posed by fire ants in Australia and outlines the training, reporting, material procurement, storage and movement protocols for ARTC personnel and contractors working in Queensland and New South Wales.

These protocols are designed to ensure ARTC meets its compliance obligations and minimise the risk of fire ants being transported through ARTC activities.

### BRIEF OVERVIEW

Red imported fire ants (fire ants) are invasive introduced ants that cause serious social, economic, and environmental harm. They can destroy crops, damage machinery, kill native flora and fauna and render public places unusable. They are aggressive and have a severe, burning sting. Fire ants are not known to occur in New South Wales, but currently infest a large area of South-East Queensland with nests found very close to the NSW border. This proximity makes fire ants one of the highest emerging biosecurity risks to NSW as well as posing an existing biosecurity risk in QLD.

In **Queensland**, Fire ants are a category 1 restricted matter under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. Under this Act, everyone – including ARTC – has a general biosecurity obligation (GBO) to take all reasonable steps to prevent the spread of fire ants. This includes a legal requirement to report suspected sightings of fire ants within 24 hours.

Fire ant biosecurity zones are in place to manage the movement of materials that are known to spread fire ants in QLD. The ARTC rail corridor is located within QLD biosecurity zone 2. The biosecurity zone currently starts at Rathdowney (896.500km) and extends through to Acacia Ridge (971.580km); however, the zones are

regularly updated to reflect new incursions and/or successful eradication from an area.

In **New South Wales**, fire ants are a prohibited matter under the *NSW Biosecurity Act 2015*. Their possible movement is regulated under the *NSW Biosecurity (Invasive Ant Carriers) Control Order 2023* and the *Biosecurity (Fire Ant) Emergency Order 2023* (the Emergency Order) issued on 16 August 2023. The Emergency Order makes the entire State of NSW an Emergency Zone and places restrictions on the movement of 'fire ant carrier' materials into NSW from a 'known infested area'. The Emergency Order defines 'fire ant infested areas' as an area in Queensland which is shown in yellow on the map published on the following NSW Department of Primary Industries website at the time this order commences. See the current known infested areas map [here](#). Fire ant sightings in NSW must be notified to the Department of Primary Industries immediately.

### ACTIONS REQUIRED

The below actions apply to all ARTC personnel, contractors and sub-contractors who undertake work on behalf of ARTC within known fire ant infested areas in QLD (**including both on and off formation works**) and/or move fire ant carriers between these areas and NSW. All other ARTC personnel should have a general awareness of fire ants.

#### General

- All personnel who work or plan works within the fire ant infested areas must undertake training prior to works commencing. This includes, completing the online DAF training module found [here](#) and attending a local toolbox presentation on fire ants presented by the Environmental Advisor. Certificates of completion for the online training must be kept on file.
- Any suspected sightings of fire ants must be reported to the ARTC Environment Advisor ASAP and reported to the relevant authorities within the appropriate reporting timeframes.
- All workers are to familiarise themselves with the good vehicle hygiene practices and implement them as required. Further information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- All works contracts between ARTC and contractors undertaking work on behalf of ARTC must outline the specific requirements in relation to fire ants.
- Appropriate awareness and educational information should be included within inductions, pre work briefs, Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS) and ensure this alert is communicated to all workers.
- Relevant WHS Committees are to be made aware of the human health risks associated and first aid officers are to

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become familiar with the first aid treatment requirements for fire ant stings.

### Works within QLD

- Moving items considered fire ant carriers between QLD biosecurity zones or to areas outside of these zones should only be undertaken with the appropriate controls implemented and requirements met. Speak to the ARTC Environment Advisor prior to any movement of fire ant carriers in QLD.
- Pre and post works inspections are to be undertaken at all worksites within biosecurity zones in QLD. Other works in QLD outside of these zones should also consider pre and post works inspections as best practice.
- When storing fire ant carriers (such as quarry materials including rock and ballast) in the rail corridor in biosecurity zones for greater than 24 hours, ensure the following measures are implemented.
  - Store the material off-ground and covered with an effective physical barrier that prevents alates (flying fire ant queens) from settling in the materials; or
  - Store the material on-ground, covered with an effective barrier and store on top of a fire ant resistant surface with an chemical product treatment around the perimeter.
  - For long-term storage of material, a Biosecurity Instrument Permit may be required.
  - Physical barriers could include plastic sheeting at least 200microns thick or appropriate chemical barriers in conjunction with compacted ground.
  - The steps undertaken above need to be documented and records retained for a minimum 2 years.

Further information can be found [here](#).

### Movement between QLD and NSW

- All movement of fire ant carriers including plant and equipment between known infested areas in QLD and NSW must be in accordance with the [Biosecurity \(Fire Ant\) Emergency Order 2023](#). To relocate earth moving plant and equipment between the known fire infested areas in QLD and NSW, you will be required to clean down equipment, and have a QLD Biosecurity Officer inspect and certify (Plant Health Certificate) the equipment as clean before crossing the NSW border. There is a cost associated with this certification.

## FIRE ANT IDENTIFICATION

- 2–6 mm long, found in a variety of sizes within one nest
- dark reddish-brown in colour; darker brown-black abdomen
- aggressive behaviour - hundreds of ants will come out of a nest if disturbed, trying to sting over and over.
- new queens can fly up to 5km from a nest.

Fire ant nests have no obvious entry or exit holes. Nests often appear as dome-shaped mounds or can appear as flat patches of disturbed soil. They are usually found in areas of direct sunlight and warmth. For example, next to structures or on the rail formation. However, they can also appear in open areas within the corridor.



## FIRE ANT CARRIERS

The following materials which are used in the during rail maintenance activities are considered 'fire ant carriers' in QLD and NSW:

- Soil and anything with soil on it (*rail components, sleepers etc*)
- Mining and quarrying materials (*ballast, rock, road bases etc*)
- Material that is a product or by-product of the processing of a plant, or something that comes from a plant (*mulch, green waste etc*).

The following materials are also considered 'fire ant carriers' in NSW:

- Agriculture or earth moving machinery (*including various types of plant and equipment used for rail maintenance such as excavators*)



These types of materials and equipment are considered ideal habitat for fire ants and are considered high-risk as they are likely to carry fire ants (i.e., fire ant carriers). There are restrictions on the storage and movement of these materials within fire ant biosecurity zones and across state borders which are listed above.

**For further information in regard to fire ant requirements and management, contact the local Environmental Advisor.**

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