

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Urgent government action needed to eradicate red imported fire ants**

Greenlife Industry Australia (GIA) welcomes the government's recently announced commitment to addressing the red imported fire ant (RIFA) crisis and is encouraged by the scope of this inquiry. However, the commitment of \$600 million over four years falls short of the estimated \$300 – \$500 million per year needed to eradicate the invasive species. GIA recently provided a submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on their inquiry into RIFA, detailing the crisis that will occur if RIFA is not eradicated.

GIA CEO, Joanna Cave, said "RIFA poses a serious threat to the Australian way of life, including the economy, environment, community, native flora and fauna, businesses and human health." The potential impact is enormous, and without eradication, the cost to the Australian economy will sit at a conservative \$2 billion annually.

"If we don't stop it, the fire ant invasion will make the cane toad problem pale into insignificance," says Joanna. Additionally, RIFA is likely to cause population declines in 45% of birds, 38% of mammals, 69% of reptiles and 95% of amphibians within infested areas. If RIFA becomes endemic, 98% of Australians are likely to come into contact with it and 700,000 people are expected to seek medical treatment for stings.

Fire ants have been present in Queensland for many years, and despite significant investment in containment strategies, their presence has increased. Over 20 years, the infested area has climbed from 40,000 ha to close to 800,000 ha which shows the current plan is not working.

Joanna said, "With the recent appearance of fire ants in New South Wales and Biosecurity Tasmania reporting the detection of a worker (non-reproductive female), this threat is growing and urgently requires national intervention to resolve."

The government's current promised funding will not succeed in removing fire ants from the Australian landscape. All evidence indicates that eradication is the best – and only – response to fire ants. GIA believes there is no single more important invasive species deserving of our national focus.

Hesitation, delay, or anything less than a full commitment to eradication threatens the efficacy and cost of any government response. The nation is relying on the federal government to avert the crisis posed by the spread of RIFA in Australia.

GIA urges the federal government to:

1. recognise the real threat that fire ants pose to the Australian way of life and national economy
2. commit to nothing short of eradication of fire ants from the Australia landscape
3. allocate \$3 billion over five years to this work
4. work with states and territories to agree cost sharing
5. form a new statutory body to run the fire ant eradication program

All levels of government across each state must work together and commit to an aggressive and intensive eradication program that attacks the pests on all fronts, to avoid damage to both the Australian economy and way of life.

The full submission is available at:

[www.greenlifeindustry.com.au/communications-centre/rifa-submission](http://www.greenlifeindustry.com.au/communications-centre/rifa-submission)

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**Spokesperson available for interview:**

Joanna Cave, CEO

**About GIA**

GIA is the peak national body representing producers, retailers and allied trades involved in the production of plants across all states and territories of Australia. Supported under the levy-funded biosecurity program, GIA coordinates the national response of the greenlife industry to pests and diseases that threaten Australian plant life and has been engaged in this work for over twenty years.

**More information**

<http://www.greenlifeindustry.com.au/communications-centre/october-nursery-paper> – RIFA nursery paper