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New NSW fire ant detections increase pressure on nursery supply chains

Australia's nursery industry is urging businesses to review their biosecurity practices following recent detections of red imported fire ant in northern New South Wales.

Red imported fire ants, one of Australia's most serious invasive pests, were first detected in New South Wales at South Murwillumbah in November 2023, followed by detections at Wardell in early 2024 and Tweed Heads South in July 2025. These detections have triggered ongoing eradication efforts and movement controls across affected areas of Queensland and northern New South Wales.

Greenlife Industry Australia (GIA) CEO Sean Cole said the latest detections were a timely reminder of the importance of strong biosecurity practices in an industry that moves plants, growing media, soil and machinery frequently.

"Biosecurity depends on coordinated action between governments and industry," he said.

"Governments are investing significant resources to contain and eradicate fire ants, but those efforts can only succeed if industry plays its part.

"Nurseries sit at a critical point in the supply chain. Every business that follows movement requirements, checks incoming materials and strengthens on-site biosecurity helps reduce the risk of fire ants spreading into new areas.

"Strong coordination between governments and industry is essential if we're going to stay ahead of this pest."

Every day, Australia's nursery industry moves plants and other materials between growers, and the supply chain. In a sector that relies on the safe movement of plant products, fire ants represent not only a significant biosecurity threat but also an operational and commercial risk.

Movement controls add pressure to everyday operations

Movement controls remain in place in both Queensland and New South Wales to reduce the risk of fire ants spreading through regulated materials.

In Queensland, fire ant biosecurity zones regulate the movement and storage of carrier materials. In New South Wales, movement restrictions remain in place under the Biosecurity (Fire Ant) Emergency Order for affected areas, including South Murwillumbah and Wardell, with the current Order due to expire in August 2026.

Depending on where regulated materials originate and where they are travelling, businesses may require permits, certificates or supporting documentation before products can be moved. This may include a [BioSecure HACCP Certificate](#), [Plant Health Certificate](#) or [Plant Health Assurance Certificate](#).

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Movement requirements can influence how materials are handled, cleaned, stored, documented and dispatched. Failing to comply can lead to shipment delays, regulatory action and unnecessary disruption across supply chains.

"As fire ant detections expand, understanding movement requirements is becoming an essential part of doing business," Mr Cole said.

"Fire ants can arrive through supply chains, freight movements or materials sourced from affected areas.

"Knowing where products come from and ensuring the right checks are in place is one of the most effective ways businesses can protect themselves."

Practical steps businesses can take now

GIA is encouraging nurseries to strengthen routine biosecurity by:

- knowing where plants, growing media and other regulated materials originate
- checking current movement requirements before dispatching regulated materials
- inspecting incoming deliveries and other high-risk materials
- keeping vehicles, equipment and work areas clean to reduce the risk of spread
- regularly monitoring production areas and reporting suspected fire ants immediately.

Strong surveillance, good hygiene and accurate record keeping not only help businesses meet movement requirements but also strengthen the industry's ability to detect and respond to incursions quickly.

"Every successful eradication effort depends on early detection and strong compliance," Mr Cole said.

"The earlier fire ants are identified and contained, the better our chances of protecting individual businesses, maintaining supply chains and preventing this pest from becoming established in new areas."

What to do if you suspect fire ants

If you suspect fire ants:

- Do not disturb the nest.
- Report immediately through the relevant state reporting pathway.
- In Queensland, report online or call 13 25 23.
- In New South Wales, use the official online reporting form or call 1800 680 244.

Further information is available through [NSW movement restrictions](#), [Business Queensland](#), the [National Fire Ant Eradication Program](#) and [Greenlife Industry Australia](#).

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