



Julie Collins MP

**Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Minister for Small Business**

Ref: MC24-006364

Councillor Linda Scott
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Linda
Dear Councillor

Thank you for your letter dated 12 September 2024, concerning resolutions related to the agriculture, fisheries and forestry portfolio from the 2024 National General Assembly (NGA) of Local Government.

The Australian Government notes resolution 14 and acknowledges that weeds adversely affect our natural environment, agricultural productivity, cultural values, human health and community spaces, costing the Australian agricultural industry around \$4 billion annually in production losses and control costs. Weed management is a shared responsibility between land managers, community, industry and governments. The Australian Government provides national leadership and coordination and invests strategically in established pest and weed management where it is in the national interest.

The Australian Government, through established pest and weed biosecurity programs, has invested \$23 million in active projects seeking to support states and territories and land managers to control weeds (most ending June 2025). The aim is to reduce the impact of established weeds on Australian agriculture and the environment, through investment in research and development, on-ground efforts, capacity building and coordination. This includes working with states and territories to deliver national outcomes, intergovernmental decision making, and frameworks and strategies to deliver a national biosecurity system that engages all stakeholders. Recently, the department has supported the development of the National Established Weed Priorities initiative, which seeks to reduce the spread and impacts of established weeds. An Expression of Interest for nationally significant weeds closed on 20 September 2024.

The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) is a long running investment in environment protection, natural resource management and sustainable agriculture. Under the NHT, the Government has allocated \$302.1 million over 5-years from 2023-24 to 2027-28 to the Climate-Smart Agriculture Program.

Under the NHT's Climate-Smart Agriculture Program, the Government has committed \$153.4 million to Regional Delivery Partners (RDPs) for supporting on-ground sustainable agriculture projects, establishing a national network of Sustainable Agriculture Facilitators and maintaining operational capacity. This includes \$85.6 million for RDP project funding to target practical, on-ground climate-smart, sustainable agriculture activities in over 50 regions across Australia, including capacity building (e.g. field days, workshops etc.), on-ground trials, improving land management practices, soil testing, weed removal, controlling feral animals, erosion control, revegetation and other activities.

The Australian Government notes Resolution 145 and acknowledges the important role of red imported fire ant (RIFA) suppression in achieving the eradication of RIFA from southeast Queensland. The eradication of RIFA is a priority for all Australian governments who have nationally provided over \$1 billion to the National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP) since 2001. The Australian Government remains strongly supportive of eradicating RIFA in Australia by 2032, committing \$296 million to deliver eradication activities under the 2023-27 Response Plan.

Under Queensland's *Biosecurity Act 2014*, everyone – including individuals and organisations – has a general biosecurity obligation to take all reasonable steps to prevent the spread of fire ants. For local government, successfully discharging Queensland's general biosecurity obligation, means looking for and reporting fire ants and, treating fire ants when they are found on council owned land within the suppression zone. These responsibilities are supported by the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce (FAST), a Queensland Government funded initiative established in 2021 with investment of \$37.1 million until June 2026.

FAST works closely with the NFAEP to enable and incentivise fire ant self-management by all sectors of the community in the suppression area, support information exchange and cross-discipline cooperation and collaboration. FAST focuses on equipping all levels of government (including local Government), industry and communities in areas awaiting planned eradication treatment, with the supply of free fire ant treatment products, equipment, skills and knowledge to self-manage RIFA on land they own or manage. FAST supports engagement and collaboration of government departments across different levels of government (local, state and federal) to ensure coordinated and effective fire ant treatment across tenures. It is noted the important role local governments play to continue the intensive efforts to eradicate RIFA, or else we risk having to bear the ongoing management costs of their broad reaching economic, social and environmental impacts in perpetuity.

Finally, the Australian Government recognises the primary responsibility that state and territory governments have for the regulation of both domestic animals and invasive species management, and the important role of local governments in cat management.

These roles are explicitly recognised in the updated *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats* which the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is presently working to finalise, following the public consultation process. The updated plan identifies research, management and other actions that stakeholders, including local governments, across Australia can take to address the threat that feral cats pose to the long-term survival of native species and ecological communities. Its objectives include seeking to ensure that relevant legislative, regulatory and planning frameworks are more harmonised across the country, and that they are appropriately facilitative of best practice feral cat control and pet cat management.

Abating the threats posed by feral and pet cats requires a collective effort and the mobilisation of the resources of all three levels of government, together with land managers, Traditional Owners, non-government organisations and the private sector who deliver biodiversity protection and conservation. States and territories have agreed to work on this important biodiversity challenge and the threat abatement plan will guide that collective action.

The Australian Government's investment in feral cat management has included supporting the development of critical control tools – such as the Curiosity® feral cat bait and the Felixer™ feral cat trap – and a National Feral Cat and Fox Management Coordinator to help guide effective on-ground action by land managers across the country. The Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, also recently announced investment of more than \$60 million in 55 projects that will contribute to on-ground action to control feral cats for the benefit of native animals, as well as for research and the development of new tools.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to write to me. I hope the information provided is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely



Julie Collins MP

10 / 10 / 2024

cc: The Hon Kristy McBain MP, Minister for Regional Development,
Local Government and Territories