

Electric ant progress report

To residents and businesses in our community

Environmental monitoring

We have undertaken an ecological impact assessment, and ongoing environmental monitoring will continue throughout the electric ant program.

Surveillance by the community

Biosecurity Queensland aims to actively promote awareness of the potential impact of electric ant infestation and how to spot an electric ant. We value the surveillance effort contributed by the community to help find all the ants.

Keep a lookout—you know your property best!

If in doubt, please call DPI&F on 13 25 23.

Program information available

Electric ant information on the DPI&F website is updated as the program progresses and can be viewed at www.dpi.qld.gov.au/ants

On our website you can find:

- maps of the Smithfield Residential and Kewarra Beach Restricted Areas
- information on movement controls
- information on the treatment program and chemical applications
- an electric ant fact sheet
- a link to the *Plant Protection Act 1989*.

This report has also been produced to keep the community informed of the program's progress.

Community talks

These provide an opportunity for community groups to understand the ant problem and how they can help.

Since August 2006, a community engagement officer has conducted over 45 presentations to community groups, schools and service clubs. At these presentations, people can get answers to questions about areas of concern, ant identification, and movement controls that may affect them, their families or businesses.

Numerous training/information sessions have also been delivered to businesses throughout Far North Queensland to help them understand movement controls and how they can help identify electric ants.

Displays

Since August 2006, 27 displays have been held at events and festivals as well as the Smithfield, Clifton Village, Stockland and Raintrees shopping centres. These displays included samples of electric ants, information on where to look for ants and what to do if suspect ants are found, and sample kits to collect ants for identification.



Electric ants on paddle pop stick, attracted by peanut paste P Zborowski, DPI&F

Further displays are planned at a number of centres in and around Cairns to make everyone aware of the potential impact from electric ant infestations

How you can help

Be on the lookout!

Electric ants:

- are tiny, about 1.5 mm long (queens and males are larger—about 4 mm long)
- are a light to golden-brown colour all over
- are relatively slow-moving
- are social—they like to be with each other, often in large numbers
- do not have nests—electric ants establish colonies anywhere and have been found under stones, in garden waste, leaf mould, soil, trees, swimming pools and water courses, and may be found in wall cavities, clothing, bedding or camping gear
- can be found in wet or dry conditions
- like water—they may 'jump' into swimming pools and form a 'raft'.

It is very important to stop the infestation spreading any further, and this can only be done **with your help**.

Check your property and workplace regularly. If you find suspicious ants, please contact DPI&F on 13 25 23 so a sample can be collected and identified.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated and will speed the eradication of this serious pest.

Contact us

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Welcome

Dear community members,

A number of control and containment activities are being conducted by Biosecurity Queensland for the National Electric Ant Eradication Program. Several rounds of treatment have already been carried out with two more due this year. We are monitoring how effective treatment has been and movement controls are in place. An upcoming survey about the movement of materials over the last five years will help us trace possible movements of the ants. This is a very important part of the program and will help us track down any other infestations. I ask that you assist staff when they contact you for information.

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce Charlotte Greer who has just joined us and is now coordinating the electric ant eradication program in Cairns. Charlotte previously worked in the plant biosecurity unit in Toowoomba.

We thank you for your assistance in reporting suspect ants and helping our operational activities. Please continue to be vigilant during pre-wet season clean-ups and make sure that all green waste from the restricted area is covered and transported to the Smithfield Transfer Station. Call 13 25 23 to arrange for an inspection before moving any of the high-risk materials.

We look forward to your continued support in eradicating electric ants from Queensland.

Yours sincerely

Keith McCubbin
General Manager
Biosecurity Queensland Control Centre



Electric ants are approx 1.5 mm in length. P Zborowski, DPI&F

Background

In mid-May 2006, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) confirmed the presence of an exotic ant species called the electric ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*) in Smithfield. A smaller infestation of the ants was discovered in Kewarra Beach in February 2007. Electric ants are environmental pests and are one of the world's top 100 invasive species. When these ants sting they inject venom, raising a painful, itchy welt.

The electric ant program is now managed by Biosecurity Queensland—a new agency of DPI&F. The program is based on three fundamental activities—surveillance to find the ants, treatment to kill the ants and containment to stop them spreading—with community and business playing a crucial role.

Impacts on our community

Electric ants can cause harm to people, as well as their businesses and lifestyle, and are widely regarded as environmental pests.

Electric ants can harm:

- people, including agricultural and maintenance workers, and residents in their home and backyard
- animals, including pets and native animals (such as other ants and insects)
- plants, by 'farming' sap-sucking insects.

The benefits of treatment are already being noticed in the Smithfield area.

Past and current activities

Since May 2006, the presence of electric ants has been confirmed on 108 properties in Smithfield. The area has been declared a Restricted Area and movement controls to prevent the spread of the ants have been put in place until further notice.

In February 2007, electric ants were discovered at a Kewarra Beach property. A vigilant resident called the Electric Ant Control Centre (EACC) to ask if suspect ants he had found on his property could be collected. It is possible that the ants were accidentally moved from Smithfield to the Kewarra Beach property some time over the past 12–18 months. The infestation in Kewarra Beach has now been confirmed on eight properties and a Restricted Area has been declared.

Since electric ants were first identified in Smithfield, four treatment rounds have been conducted. This means each property and public area in our treatment area has been visited by field staff distributing broadcast bait using hand-held applicators. Three rounds of treatment have also been carried out in Kewarra Beach since February. One more treatment round is planned for the area by the end of this year.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your help and cooperation in reporting suspect ants and assisting our control, containment and eradication plan.

Ongoing control and containment activities

Activities include:

- continuing monitoring and treatment
- identifying samples
- enforcing movement controls to stop the spread of electric ants
- keeping in touch with the community
- researching new treatment methods
- checking for possible movements from infested properties.

Surveillance and treatment

Biosecurity Queensland conducted extensive surveillance following the detection of this ant in Smithfield, and again after the Kewarra Beach detection. This showed where the ants are, but also where they are not. We confirmed the size of each infestation, a buffer zone was established and a treatment area mapped. The first treatment was conducted in Smithfield in August 2006 and in Kewarra Beach in February 2007.

Treatment rounds are usually followed by surveillance to check how effective the program is. This follow-up monitoring in both areas has indicated a strong impact on the electric ant populations has been achieved. Several more rounds of treatment and monitoring will need to be conducted each year as the program progresses.



Electric ants form loose colonies instead of structured nests. DPI&F

Treatment and surveillance is dependent on weather conditions to ensure the effectiveness of the bait and safety of staff—we hope to complete one more round of treatment before the start of the wet season.

The bait used to treat the affected area consists of corn grit soaked with soybean oil (which is attractive to electric ants). The bait is impregnated with one of two chemicals, *hydramethylnon* or *methoprene*, which act in different ways but both lead to the death of the electric ant colony. These chemicals are approved by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority.

With either chemical, the corn grit bait:

- has low toxicity to animals and people
- breaks down in a few days
- is spread thinly—half a teaspoon per square metre
- is distributed over the entire treatment area to reach and affect unseen colonies.

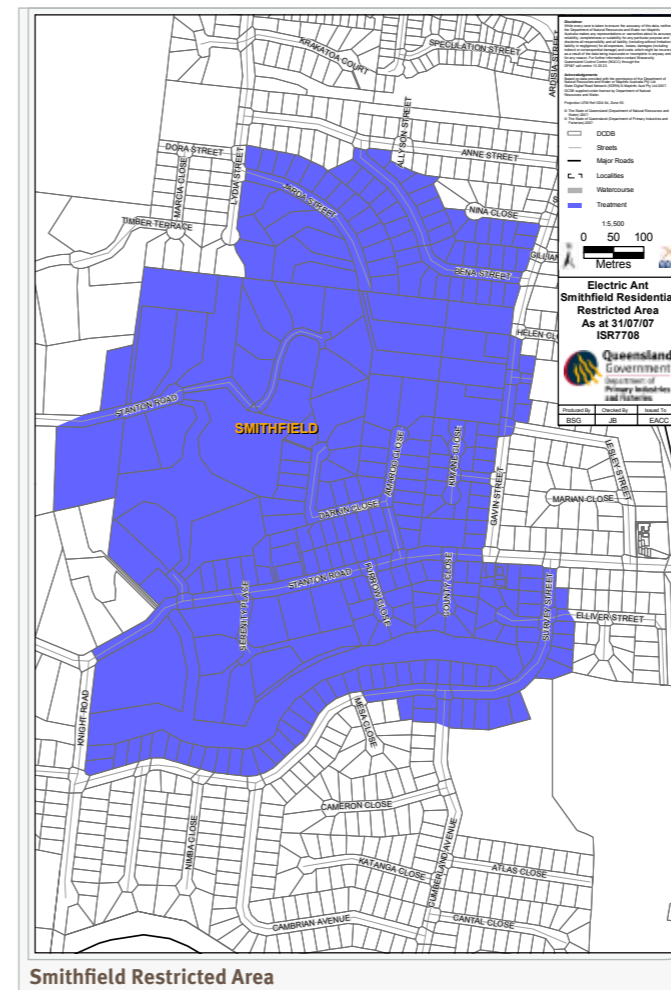
Biosecurity Queensland is working in partnership with the community to conduct a passive surveillance program to find electric ants. All members of the community are urged to check their yards and neighbourhoods, and report any ants that might be electric ants. Communities are the most valuable asset in the fight against electric ants—public vigilance is an essential part of the search for further signs of ant infestation.

The table below provides statistics on the program to the end of August 2007.

Electric ant eradication	
Restricted area	222 ha
Treatment area	80 ha
Area surveyed to date (multiple passes over 2291 sites)	4362 ha
Client calls to date	622

Movement controls

Under the *Plant Protection Act 1989*, the electric ant is a ‘notifiable pest’, placing a legal obligation on everyone to inform the Queensland Government of possible electric ant colonies.



Smithfield Restricted Area



Kewarra Beach Restricted Area

The Restricted Areas in Smithfield and Kewarra have been declared under the Act. These areas surround the electric ant infestation and place restrictions on the movement of high-risk materials, which are necessary to prevent the spread of electric ants.

Movement controls apply only in the restricted area and only to high-risk materials. These materials include:

- plants, pot plants and plant cuttings
- potting mix
- mulch
- turf
- baled hay and straw
- landscaping and construction materials
- garden waste
- soil, sand and similar materials
- any other materials that may have come in contact with the ground.

Thank you for observing the movement controls. By doing this you are helping to prevent the spread of electric ants to other areas. Movement controls will be in place until further notice.

High-risk materials and equipment—such as excavators, backhoes and trenching equipment—**must be inspected by a DPI&F inspector before they are moved off a property in the restricted area.**

Please call DPI&F on 13 25 23 to arrange an inspection.

Penalties

Penalties exist for breaching these regulations. Individuals and corporations may be charged under the *Plant Protection Act 1989* if movement restrictions are not observed. There are no penalties for having electric ants, but DPI&F must be notified if the presence of electric ants is suspected.

There is an exception...

Garden waste can be moved without an inspection, but **must** be taken to the Smithfield Transfer Station for disposal.

Future activities

Tracing survey

To establish if electric ants have been accidentally moved to other areas over the past five years, a staff member from Biosecurity Queensland will contact all residents living in the restricted areas soon. **Residents will be asked to answer a number of questions about materials that may have been moved from their property to other areas.** Once we have gathered this valuable information, we can start to identify other possible infestation sites.

Identifying suspect samples

Biosecurity Queensland will continue to identify samples of ants collected after public call-outs as well as in sample kits. **Thank you to everyone who has called us or sent in a sample.**