

**Pacific Ant Prevention Programme (PAPP) Update – 15 November 2006**  
**Coordinators Report**  
**Land Resources Division,**  
**Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)**

Since the previous update (13 March 2006) the PAPP has achieved some significant progress and we can report the following outputs:

- The delivery of the initial round of baseline Pacific Invasive Ant Surveillance as funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)
- The completion of the PAPP bid for the coming 3 years
- The formation of a Steering Group
- Preparation of SPC Pest Alert leaflets for Red Imported Fire Ants, *Solenopsis invicta* (RIFA) and Little Fire Ant, *Wasmannia auropunctata* (LFA)
- Preparation of a script for a 7min DVD and a short TV segment for the popular Pacific Way programme
- Responding to country requests from Palau, PNG, Tahiti, Vanuatu

**Pacific Invasive Ant Surveillance (PIAS)**

Through funding obtained from the MFAT via the Pacific Security Fund a significant and logistically complex piece of work has been completed. Baseline surveillance for RIFA has been completed at 18 different high risk locations at 9 Pacific Island locations. This involved training approximately 70 quarantine and customs staff from the various locations, collection of 6300 baited ant traps, and the identification of approximately 80 different species. No RIFA or LFA were found during surveillance activities despite the latter species being established at 4 of the countries visited. Additionally some interesting species were turned up, namely *Solenopsis globularia* and *Lepisiota sp.* As a result of the surveillance activities it is now thought that LFA is most unlikely to be detected at ports and airports due to the unfavourable conditions and surveillance specification focus. Going forward, we will need to give some thought on how best to detect this species and yet be able to include it in our surveillance programme.

We must also remember that this was just the initial baseline surveillance and it must occur at least annually, so although this is a major step forward we have some way to go before it becomes a regular part of the PICT surveillance scene. To improve the likelihood of this occurring a debrief meeting was convened and discussions conducted around ways of dramatically reducing the laborious data capture and technically complex components of the work. Despite the methodology shortcomings 3 of 9 PICTs visited have expressed interest in doing their own from now on, and this will be facilitated in the next surveillance season, subject to funding.

Prioritising which island locations receive surveillance activities has always been very challenging. Theoretically it is based on the volume of the trade with countries with resident RIFA populations. In practical terms it has been impossible to obtain meaningful trade volumes and linkages. In another attempt to improve the quality of risk assessment data a meeting was held with the head of the Oceanic Customs Organisation in Suva. We quickly determined that attempting to query any customs databases in the region for trade volumes from RIFA countries was impossible.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved in this work to make it the success that it was, namely all the PICT quarantine/customs staff who participated in some way, AgriQuality and AntiAnts from New Zealand for delivering the training and identifying the thousands of ant samples, Biosecurity New Zealand for administering the contract and facilitating the work, and SPC for supporting and facilitating the work. A special thanks must also go to MFAT for funding this important work.

Since the conclusion of the MFAT funded PIAS work, SPC staff have also trained quarantine staff in Niue and Tuvalu.

### **Pacific Ant Prevention Programme bid**

A significant amount of time has been spent formulating the PAPP bid for the ongoing implementation. Finalising scheduling and prioritising of planned activities was conducted with the assistance of PICT representatives at the recent Pacific Plant Protection Organisation meeting held in June at Nadi, Fiji. Additionally the Coordinator reported to delegates at this forum and at the following Heads of Agriculture and Forestry meeting on PAPP progress since the previous 2004 PPPO meeting representatives. Costs for the agreed activities have been estimated for the full 6 years and the bid prepared for the coming 3 years. This will be sent to target donor organisations soon as part of the wider SPC Land Resources Division bid.

### **Steering group formation**

Given the wide regional coverage of the PAPP, it was thought necessary to form a steering group with representatives from the major players in the region. Their role is to maximise the likelihood that PAPP objectives and activities can be implemented in each of the major regions and they will help facilitate any high level discussions and lobbying required.

The steering group will also review the PAPP and the activities. To that end the United States, New Zealand, SPC and French territory reps have been nominated. Australia has been approached for a steering group member but is yet to nominate someone. Steering group members have had the opportunity to comment on draft versions of the PAPP bid and their comments considered for the final version.

### **Public awareness activities**

Two *Pest Alert* leaflets have been prepared, one each for RIFA and LFA. Once these are finalised, these will be distributed to PICT quarantine agencies. A separate RIFA poster for Vanuatu is also being prepared on request. Permission was sought and obtained to use RIFA images from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Texas A & M University for this poster

Additionally permission to use invasive ant footage from two ant documentaries, "The Ant that Ate America", and "Red Crabs, Crazy Ants" has been obtained compliments of the New Zealand Natural History Unit. Ant surveillance video footage from Fiji has been obtained, and a script drafted for the compilation of a 6-7 min invasive ant awareness DVD which will be used in conjunction with the PAPP bid to lobby donor agencies for ongoing funding. A portion of same footage will be used for a short segment on the SPC-produced *Pacific Way* television programme – this is currently being developed.

### **Country requests**

Both prior to and since the Coordinator appointment, numerous requests for help with invasive ant issues have been trickling into SPC and the Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII).

- Palau requested help from PII with an insidious Singapore ant problem on Helen Reef and Tobi Island in the Hatohobei State. An assessment of the feasibility of eradicating Singapore ants from these two islands is underway. As part of the feasibility study, training on how to select, prepare, calibrate and apply treatment options and conduct and record systematic surveillance and monitoring for Singapore ants was provided to those involved in the project and other key stakeholders. The feasibility study is being carried out by an invasive ant expert in collaboration with the Hatohobei State and other key stakeholders with funding from PII. The PAPP Coordinator has been kept informed by PII on progress and has been providing advice to PII.
- Through SPC in Noumea a request for help with Little Fire Ant problem was received from Tahiti. In conjunction with the previously planned baseline RIFA surveillance work at the Papeete Port and Faa Airport, meetings were held with the departments of agriculture, research and the environment and lobbyists to discuss appropriate courses of action. Field visits were also made in to the heart of the infestation to assess first hand the impacts. The environment ministry has since planned surveillance activities on some offshore islands and some treatment of the smaller mainland infestations. Technical advice has been provided on effective surveillance strategies for offshore island surveillance work.
- Tokelau has been suffering the effects of significant Yellow Crazy ant numbers for some years and with help from Victoria University, are now in position to control numbers when impacts become too great. With support from PII and funding from Critical Ecosystem Partnership (CEPF), an awareness and training programme was run on Fakaofu and Nukunonu atolls. The PAPP has kept a watching brief over this project to ensure sustainable outcomes are achieved.
- Vanuatu recently requested help with their Little Fire Ant problem. It has been established for approximately 10 years now and management options appear to be limited to alleviation of impacts on locals by poison bait application. The high costs of imported toxic bait prohibit any long term management. A review of treatment, quarantine and surveillance methodologies is recommended to ensure maximum outcomes are obtained from the limited funding available currently and to explore alternative and affordable treatment options for ongoing ant management.
- Vanuatu also requested assistance in sourcing permissions for using various international RIFA images. Initial requests for permission by Vanuatu resulted in requests for payment for use of the images. Free use has subsequently been negotiated by the Coordinator and SPC is developing the Vanuatu specific RIFA awareness material.
- During PIAS activities at the port of Wewak (PNG) quarantine officers alerted the PIAS trainer of an existing ant problem in the residential area of Wewak. A preliminary examination revealed an infestation of LFA covering 6ha. There is significant potential for eradication from this site if it is the only infestation and not a satellite colony. Funding has been sought by a private consultant from the Regional Natural Heritage Programme (Department of Environment and Heritage, Australia) for an eradication feasibility project which includes

treatment, surveillance, tracing exercise, and public awareness. The outcome of the application appears to be unsuccessful.

- At the PPPO meeting (see below Conference and workshop section) PNG also requested more in the way of public awareness material and a poster of invasive ants of the region. Preliminary work has been done on sourcing suitable images, though quality ones are hard to come by. It is hoped we can work collaboratively with a private consultant and the Wildlife Conservation Society who are also developing similar awareness materials. See WCS collaborative project news item.
- Although not represented by SPC, Australia has been seeking input for their recent Little Fire Ant incursion in Cairns. To that end the PAPP Coordinator has been requested to be on the Scientific Advisory Panel for the eradication attempt. Advice has been given on the proposed eradication plan and on a return trip from Fiji the Coordinator conducted a field visit to parts of the infestation area and liaised with control centre staff.
- Australia's Threat Abatement Plan for Tramp ants has been signed off by the Minister for the Environment. The plan specifically mentions the PAPP initiative and need to work collaboratively on invasive ant issues. The ministerial sign off now sets in place the process for formation of the implementation committee by the Department of the Environment and Heritage.

#### Collaborative Project with Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

- WCS recently obtained funding to carry out RIFA and LFA public awareness and surveillance in Fiji. The previous SPC PIAS activities were restricted to ports of first entry at Suva and Nadi. The WCS project is looking at including Lautoka and some major importers premises which will fill some of the more important surveillance gaps.
- SPC is teaming up with them to ensure that no duplication of public awareness material occurs and that training in surveillance methodology is conducted in conjunction with SPC staff to ensure consistency in methodology.
- We anticipate that this project will be a very useful addition to the surveillance efforts in Fiji and will be useful model on how to cast the surveillance net wider.
- A meeting was held with WCS in Suva to discuss project synergies. Since then a summary of PIAS methodology and requirements has been provided to WCS along with public awareness material developed by SPC. SPC contacts have been supplied for the various project components to facilitate the collaborative approach.
- The new improved PIAS methodology has been drafted and trialled in Niue and supplied to WCS.

#### Conferences and workshops

##### Pacific Plant Protection Organisation (PPPO) meeting in Fiji

- The Coordinator reported on PAPP progress and emerging issues.
- Held a workshop to discuss the timing of proposed PAPP activities and rescheduled according to group wishes.

- Held discussions with various country representatives on their invasive ant issues.
- PPPO recommended that the scheduled PAPP activities form the basis of any subsequent funding bids.

#### Heads of Agriculture and Forestry (HOAFS) meeting in Fiji

- The Coordinator reported on PAPP progress, emerging issues and sought HOAFS endorsement of SPC continuing PAPP implementation.
- HOAFS endorsement received.

#### Australian & New Zealand Entomological Society conference (Adelaide)

- The Coordinator attended and presented at this conference.
- An excellent symposia on invasive hymenoptera was the highlight of the conference.

#### RIFA Technical Advisory Group meeting (NZ)

- NZ has experienced its 3<sup>rd</sup> RIFA incursion
- The Coordinator attended as an observer at the 1 day technical advisory group meeting, but also provided comments to the Group.
- The single nest found was polygyne and technical aspects of the proposed management plan reflected this.

#### Argentine ant management workshop

- The coordinator attended a 1 day national work shop on the technical and social aspects of treating Argentine ant incursions in urban situations.
- The coordinator presented a paper on the larger regional invasive ant context. The common threads affecting all invasive ant management issues were highlighted.

#### Biosecurity Summit

- The PAPP coordinator and SPC Land Resource Division director attended this two day forum.
- The coordinator also presented a paper on the challenges and recent achievements in invasive ant management which was well received.

### **In conclusion**

SPC would also like the opportunity to thank the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund and Conservation International for funding the PAPP Coordinator position and associated activities. Their support has allowed critical start up work to commence and has placed the PAPP in a position where ongoing funding is likely.

SPC would also like to thank The Nature Conservancy who likewise provided some of the critical start up funding and has allowed the production of much needed public awareness material.

Lastly we would like to acknowledge the ongoing support provided by Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII) at ISSG Headquarters at Auckland University. Without their continued support the PAPP would still just be a concept.

Next update expected mid February.

Simon O'Connor  
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Secretariat of the Pacific Community