

Yellow crazy ants, a threat to Queensland's Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

An open letter to the Premier of Queensland Anastacia Palaszczuk, Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt and Deputy Prime Minister of Australia Barnaby Joyce

We, the undersigned, are deeply alarmed that yellow crazy ants have started to invade Queensland's Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The Wet Tropics are home to the oldest continuously surviving tropical rainforests on earth and harbour the greatest diversity of animals and plants found anywhere in Australia. Rainforest Aboriginal people have occupied, used and enjoyed the Wet Tropics for at least 40,000 years.

But without urgent action a horror story will unfold in and around this unique World Heritage Area. Aggressive, acid-spraying yellow crazy ants have already infested 830 hectares of rainforest, cane farms and people's homes.

These ants are considered among the world's 100 worst invasive species. Swarms of yellow crazy ants can devastate local fauna and turn rainforest into wastelands. If not eradicated they develop into super colonies, capable of causing massive destruction within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and its surrounds.

Crazy ants also ruin the lives of local residents.

Formic acid can burn the skin and eyes of people and pets and make it impossible to enjoy life outdoors. Crazy ants will also invade indoor areas and destroy electrical equipment. Local canefarmers have suffered financial losses from the impacts of yellow crazy ants on their crops.

Our opportunity to act is now.

With the aid of the local community and industry a successful treatment program is keeping the deadly ants in check. But more funding is required to eradicate the ants and save the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Without continued treatment, all will be lost. Our chance of eradicating these ants will become impossible as they spread further and community effort becomes fruitless.

The Wet Tropics Management Authority has asked for \$15 million over three years as part of a ten year eradication program. The cost of eradicating yellow crazy ants now is tiny compared to what it will cost the natural values of our Wet Tropics World Heritage Area if we fail to act. Economically, the Wet Tropics contribute more than \$2.6 billion each year to the tourism industry.

We are calling on the Queensland and federal governments to fully fund an effective eradication program. We have an international obligation and a moral imperative to manage the threat of yellow crazy ants in the Wet Tropics.

- **Invasive Species Council:** Andrew Cox, CEO
- **Terrain NRM:** Carole Sweatman, CEO
- **Conservation Volunteers Australia:** Michelle Wood
- **The Fortress Group:** Peter McGuane, CEO
- **Cairns Regional Council:** Cr Bob Manning OAM, Mayor
- **Rob Pyne MP:** State Member for Cairns
- **Frank Teodo:** Cane farmer and rural landholder, Sawmill Pocket
- **Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (CAFNEC):** Denis Walls, President
- **Russett Park Yellow Crazy Ant Community Taskforce:** Mikhaila Jacoby, Coordinator
- **MSF Sugar:** Matt Hession
- **Safeway Pest Control:** Paul Davis, Managing Director
- **Kuranda Envirocare:** Cathy Retter, President
- **Jeff Pezzutti:** Former City of Cairns Deputy Mayor, 30 years in local government and cane farmer representative
- **Seawalker Australia:** Karl Kuhle, CEO
- **MacKillop Catholic College:** Luke Reed, Principal
- **WWF Australia:** Dermot O'Gorman, CEO
- **Neil Boland:** Russett Park resident
- **FNQROC and Mareeba Shire Council:** Cr. Tom Gilmore, Chair and Mayor



Why we are concerned about yellow crazy ants

The Fortress Group

"The invasion of yellow crazy ants in the Queensland Wet Tropics World Heritage Area and the devastation they are causing to local wildlife and rainforests is an environmental tragedy that needs immediate support from all levels of government.

"As a business person I see the economic impact that could occur. The yellow crazy ants are having an immediate impact on our cane farming industry and could impact the future of our vibrant tourism sector. The time to sit back and pretend things will be fine is long past. It is time to act urgently before it is too late."

Peter McGuane
CEO, The Fortress Group

Terrain NRM

"Yellow crazy ants pose one of the greatest threats to the world heritage values of the Wet Tropics but through hard work we have developed the skills, established the community networks and trained on-ground teams to systematically contain and eventually eradicate these pests from the region. On-going funding is now critical to ensure the continued success of this program."

Carole Sweatman
CEO, Terrain NRM

Mikhaila Jacoby

"The community taskforce of around 90 volunteers has rallied together in response to the scarcity of resources dedicated to combating the rapid environmental destruction the invasion of yellow crazy ants is causing. While the taskforce has achieved a lot we need your support to complete the work."

Mikhaila Jacoby
Russett Park Yellow Crazy Ant
Community Taskforce Coordinator

MSF Sugar

"Yellow crazy ants pose a potential threat to the productivity of cane farms in the affected area. The biodiversity of the adjacent rainforest and riparian areas is also of concern to my company. Eradication efforts so far are to be commended and it would be hugely disappointing if they failed purely because we did not provide necessary, ongoing funding."

Matt Hession
MSF Sugar

Jeff Pezzutti

"I represent the interests of cane farmers in the region affected by yellow crazy ants. I have seen the impacts of yellow crazy ants on cane. Crazy ants cause diminished yields and financial losses to cane farmers. They are a silent, formidable enemy and they never stop. People outside the region have no idea of the damage they do. I urge the Queensland Government to contribute funds to eradicate this pest from our region."

Jeff Pezzutti, former Deputy Mayor of the City of Cairns and 30 years in local government

Frank Teodo

"I have seen firsthand the effects of yellow crazy ants when they develop into super colonies. I suffered temporary blindness twice when crazy ants sprayed formic acid in my eyes at night while I slept. If we fail to totally eradicate this pest, we will forever regret our lack of action. Do we really want to be remembered as people who had an opportunity to eradicate this menace and neglected our responsibilities and obligations? If we fail, crazy ants may cause the extinction of irreplaceable species like the cassowary. Will that be our legacy?"

Frank Teodo
Cane farmer and rural landholder,
representative for the Sawmill Pocket,
Mt Peter area

Safeway Pest Control

"In 17 years of pest controlling in Cairns and the Torres Strait Islands, I've never seen anything like this in Far North Queensland. Eradicating yellow crazy ants from the region should not be considered an expense but an investment in the future of our region. It is an investment to curb the economic burden that will otherwise come at the expense of landholders as well as costing the region billions of dollars in agricultural losses, diminished land values and lost tourism revenue."

Paul Davis
Managing Director, Safeway Pest
Control



Why we are concerned about yellow crazy ants

Cairns and Far North Environment Centre

"During the 1980s the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre worked to secure world heritage listing and legislative protection for the Wet Tropics rainforests. We now seek to protect the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area from the devastating impacts yellow crazy ants would have if left to spread uncontrolled in the region. The state and federal governments must jointly, fairly and fully fund the proposed eradication program. If we are to have any chance of saving the Wet Tropics from these highly invasive ants, we must do all we can now."

Denis Walls
President, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre

Neil Boland

"In the same way that the crown of thorns starfish is threatening the reef, the yellow crazy ant invasion has the potential to change the Wet Tropics forever, for the worse and irreversibly. We see this every day when we go into the affected parts of the rainforest and find ... eerie silence. Our community is acting to prevent yellow crazy ants becoming the crown of thorns starfish of the Wet Tropics, please help us."

Neil Boland
Russett Park Resident

Seawalker Australia

"The ecological disaster threatened by yellow crazy ants bordering the world heritage-listed Wet Tropics rainforest near Edmonton is only a few kilometres away from the mangroves of Trinity Inlet - and a short boat ride from there to OUR reefs and islands. One solid flood through the streams that feed Wrights Creek will float yellow crazy ants (yes, they form 'rafts' and float) right down to the Reef Fleet Terminal, Esplanade Park and Lagoon Swimming Pool, onto Admiralty Island and across to East Trinity. Who will stop them then?"

Karl Kuhle
CEO, Seawalker Australia

Kuranda Envirocare

"The Kuranda community appreciates the need for basic scientific research on the yellow crazy ant lifecycle to ensure on-ground management costs will reduce over time, using more effective methodologies, based on this research. Our community is kick-starting research at James Cook University with personal and community donations because the advancing ants will not wait for government funding and this research has not been undertaken to date. The urgently-needed eradication program will provide necessary research and ensure we can move from management to eradication of this invasion."

Executive committee, Kuranda Envirocare

Invasive Species Council

"Those that have experienced yellow crazy ants understand that we do not want them. The determination of the Cairns and Kuranda communities to eradicate yellow crazy ants demonstrates this. For the sake of all communities, the Wet Tropics rainforests and the animals and plants across eastern and northern Australia we must act now while we can."

Andrew Cox, CEO, Invasive Species Council

