

# Yellow crazy ants: still threatening the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area

## An open letter to Prime Minister of Australia, Hon. Scott Morrison and Premier of Queensland, Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk.

A copy of this letter will be provided to relevant ministers, leaders of the major parties and shadow spokespeople.

**We, the undersigned, call on your governments to equally fund the \$6 million a year needed over seven years to complete the eradication of yellow crazy ants from the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.**

With funding from the Australian and Queensland governments, the Wet Tropics Yellow Crazy Ant Program has drastically reduced ant numbers and is on track to achieve eradication as part of a ten-year program. The first round of three-year funding runs out in June 2019. Ongoing funding is vital for success. We cannot waste the gains made to date.

**The Wet Tropic World Heritage Area remains under threat from yellow crazy ants.**

On the list of 100 of the world's worst invasive species, yellow crazy ants have the potential to spread rapidly and devastate the unique fauna and flora of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Under threat is the oldest continuous surviving tropical rainforests on earth and the greatest biodiversity found anywhere in Australia. Rainforest Aboriginal people have managed these lands for the past 40,000 years.

**The Eradication Program has developed innovative partnerships to find new infestations and prevent further spread of the ants.**

The program now has a professional management team and up to 50 trained field staff, including two Indigenous ranger groups. Partners include Traditional Owners, landholders, community and conservation groups, sugar industry, tourism, housing developers, councils, schools, researchers and the media.

**Eradication is far cheaper than dealing with ongoing impacts later.**

Uncontrolled spread of yellow crazy ants will lead to catastrophic environmental impacts on the irreplaceable Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. Increased densities of these ants over large areas will be costly and significantly impact the viability of local agriculture and quality of life for local residents.

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

- **Tom Gilmore:** Mayor, Mareeba Shire Council
- **Carole Sweatman:** CEO, Terrain NRM
- **Peter McGuane:** CEO, Fortress Property Innovation
- **Frank Teodo:** Cane farmer and rural landholder
- **Dino and Stella Zappala:** Cane farmers
- **Paul Davis:** Managing Director, Safeway Pest Control
- **Jeff Pezzutti:** Former City of Cairns Deputy Mayor, 30 years in local government and cane farmer representative
- **Paul Hales:** Healthy Landscape Manager, Northern Savanna, Bush Heritage Australia
- **Mikhaila Jacoby:** Russett Park resident
- **Andrew Cox:** CEO, Invasive Species Council
- **Darren Grover:** Head, Living Ecosystems, WWF Australia
- **Matt Hession:** Cane Supply Field Officer, MSF Sugar
- **Denis Walls & Roz Walden:** President & Director, Cairns and Far North Environment Centre
- **Cathy Retter:** President, Kuranda Envirocare
- **Gudju Gudju Fourmile:** Director, Abiculture and Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Elder
- **Alan Oliver:** Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Elder
- **Jenny Lynch:** Director, Abiculture
- **Col McKenzie:** Executive Director, Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators Pty Ltd – AMPTO
- **Adam Gowllett:** Project Manager, Kenfrost Homes
- **Karl Kuhle:** CEO, Seawalker Australia
- **Samantha Vine:** Head of Conservation, Birdlife Australia
- **Bob Manning:** Mayor, Cairns Regional Council







# Why full yellow crazy ant eradication funding is needed

## A grave risk to biodiversity

"Yellow crazy ants are a major threat to not only the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area but are a serious environmental and agricultural pest. The unique biodiversity of the Wet Tropics is at grave risk from these ants including iconic species such as the endangered Kuranda tree frog, small mammals, lizards, and nesting birds. However, great progress has been made to eradicate yellow crazy ants from the Wet Tropics but we cannot afford to reduce efforts just as success is in sight."

**Darren Grover**  
Head, Living Ecosystems, WWF-Australia

## Sugar industry under threat

"The Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program has successfully reduced ant numbers on our farms and allowed the sugar industry to continue to operate with little inconvenience. If the ants return to former densities, they will quickly spread and damage sugar cane production and could make the industry unviable."

**Dino and Stella Zappala**  
Cane farmers

## A threat to quality of life

"Living in the thick of yellow crazy ants is both unnerving and devastating – they invade every corner and surface of your home, garden - and mind. There was a time when I wondered what will happen to the value of my home, quality of life, wellbeing of my pets, and whether I should just leave? I had grave concerns for the surrounding endemic, irreplaceable wildlife, and ancient World Heritage Rainforest against these armies of

ants. It may sound dramatic, but it was truly very upsetting! Until now. With utter relief the progress of the eradication program is astounding. The height of the yellow crazy ant invasion is behind us and I plead that these efforts can continue so it can remain that way."

**Mikhaila Jacoby**  
Russett Park Resident

## Protect cultural heritage

"Abiculture has employed Gimuy Walubara Yidinji community members since 2012. We utilise traditional ecological knowledge to manage and care for country. Abiculture is proud to partner with the eradication program to protect cultural heritage, ecological integrity and community health of the Yidinji territory. Together we have the right skill set, determination and methods to completely eradicate the ants – all that is required is continued investment."

**Gudju Gudju Fourmile**  
Director, Abiculture and Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Elder; **Alan Oliver:**  
Gimuy Walubara Yidinji Elder; **Jenny Lynch:** Director, Abiculture

## An ecological disaster

"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

## Spectacular results

"Recent results from the current Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program have been spectacular. The methodology has been fine-tuned and the highly trained staff are reaping the benefits and having unparalleled success. This can set the benchmark and allow for future eradication of YCA all over the country. It's absolutely vital that this particular program is given sufficient funding to achieve full eradication."

**Frank Teodo**  
Cane farmer and rural landholder

## A long-term commitment

"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 continued support from all levels of government. Extensive work that has been completed to date has achieved many positive results. The long term impact on the agricultural and tourism sectors will be substantial unless government support for the program is a long-term commitment."

**Peter McGuane**  
CEO, Fortress Property Innovation





# Why full yellow crazy ant eradication funding is needed

## Community effort

"The Kuranda community yellow crazy ant taskforce has over 100 volunteers dedicated to helping on-ground efforts and research for the eradication program. Our community kick-started research with James Cook University and has raised awareness and developed local land management plans with local community. The continuation of this successful WTMA eradication program will continue to provide necessary research and ensure we can move successfully from management and containment to full eradication of this invasion."

**Cathy Retter**  
President, Kuranda Envirocare

## A great threat to World Heritage

"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

## An investment in the future

"In over 20 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

## Don't lose staff expertise

"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 am also concerned that yellow crazy ants destroy every living thing on the rainforest floor and along the creeks. I urge the Australian and Queensland governments to continue to fund to the eradication program so that we don't lose the key staff and expertise that have been developed."

**Jeff Pezzutti**  
Former Deputy Mayor, City of Cairns  
and 30 years in local government

## We have too much to lose

"We cannot wait. Yellow crazy ants must be stopped from spreading throughout the Wet Tropics rainforests and the forests and woodlands and grasslands of northern and eastern Australia. We have too much to lose, including ground-nesting birds, mammals, reptiles, frogs and insects, along with impacts on tourism, residential areas, cropping industries and beyond."

**Andrew Cox**  
CEO, Invasive Species Council

## Threat to sugar productivity

"MSF Sugar in cooperation with the Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program are continuing to assist the farmers of the sugar cane industry around Cairns in our shared goal of eradicating the ants from the precious resource we farm. The aggressive invasive ant continues to be a significant threat to the soil health and productivity of our local industry. As an industry, we have no effective control for the ants in sugar cane situations. The continuation and success of the program is paramount to a productive and successful sugar industry."

**Matt Hession**  
Cane Supply Field Officer, MSF Sugar







# Why full yellow crazy ant eradication funding is needed

## Natural attractions under threat

"We are the peak industry body for marine tourism within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and most of our members operate in and around the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics region of Far North Queensland. Our members are reliant on the natural areas and abundant biodiversity found in Far North Queensland. Their businesses and the continuing employment of 64,000 people in Queensland depend on these natural attractions. We are very concerned about a potential gap in funding of the Wet Tropics Management Authority's Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program. I am asking that you work closely with government at all levels, and the Wet Tropics Management Authority to ensure that eradication of yellow crazy ants is not put in any doubt."

**Col McKenzie**  
Executive Director, Association of  
Marine Park Tourism Operators Pty  
Ltd – AMPTO

## Economic and environmental damage

"Yellow crazy ants are listed as one of the world's 100 worst invasive species. Unfortunately, they have gained a foothold in the Cairns Wet tropics, affecting over 1600 hectares of land near Edmonton and an area near Kuranda. Through funding from the Australian and Queensland governments, the Wet Tropics Management Authority has

been working hard to eradicate the ants and appear to have had success in preventing their spread. Now is not the time to rest, the Wet Tropics Management Authority needs ongoing funding to ensure this pest is eradicated and the Wet Tropics protected from the economic and environmental damage Yellow Crazy Ants could cause."

**Adam Gowlett**  
Project Manager, Kenfrost Homes

## Defending landscape-scale conservation

"Bush Heritage Australia is committed to landscape-scale conservation across all terrain types in Australia. The spread of yellow crazy ants from their current locations through the Wet Tropics and out into the Dry Tropics and their subsequent impacts on biodiversity in protected areas and on agricultural outputs cannot be taken lightly, whether this pest makes it to our reserves or not doesn't diminish our concern for others being affected by this invasion and we urge governments to continue to fund the ongoing work to eradicate this pest from Far North Queensland."

**Paul Hales**  
Healthy Landscape Manager,  
Northern Savanna, Bush Heritage  
Australia

## Saving the Wet Tropics

"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 & Roz Walden**  
President & Director, Cairns and Far  
North Environment Centre

## Nature's survival

"Nesting birds and young chicks are vulnerable to high densities of yellow crazy ants. Swarms of ants monopolise the forest floor and climb trees, spraying formic acid to subdue their prey. Yellow crazy ants also compete with birds for food such as frogs and lizards and a range of ground-dwelling invertebrates. They are a potential threat to the endemic and threatened birds within the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area."

**Samantha Vine**  
Head of Conservation,  
Birdlife Australia

