



THE GOVERNMENT OF NORFOLK ISLAND

MEDIA RELEASE

Waste Management implications in next stage of Argentine Ant eradication

The Minister for the Environment, Education and Social Welfare, Vicky Jack, has announced that the first stage of the mass eradication of Argentine Ants was very successful. The baiting exercise undertaken on the western seaboard of Norfolk Island late in 2008 has effectively eliminated Argentine Ants from open pasture areas. Mrs Jack said there was a need to conduct some secondary treatment of residual Argentine Ant nests in and around trees, which will be done as soon as practicable. The focus of the treatment programme will now move to the other areas of infestation within the boundaries of the Waste Management Centre.

As previously announced, the eradication program arose from a visit to Norfolk Island in May 2008 by John and Vivienne Van Dyk of Flybusters New Zealand, and Peter Davis, an entomologist based at the Western Australia Department of Agriculture & Food. At a meeting held during that visit, members of the public were informed that Argentine Ants were endemic in Australia and much of Europe, and that it was now considered impossible to eliminate them in those areas. However, since the outbreaks in Norfolk Island were in relatively contained areas, it could still be possible to eradicate these invasive pests which posed risks to local fauna and nuisance to humans. Following that visit, Peter Davis presented a report to the Administration, which outlined two possible methods of eradication: a spray application of the insecticide Fipronil at the rate of 50gai (grams of active ingredient) per hectare, or the ant bait Xstinguish® in paste form at a rate of 0.3 to 0.6gai per hectare. The paste form was recommended as being more effective, since the ants convey it back to the nest causing the entire nest to be eliminated. The spray application works faster on ants actually sprayed, but does not eliminate underground nests.

To supervise the eradication exercise, the Norfolk Island Government contracted the services of Flybusters, who obtained agreement from the Swiss manufacturers of Xstinguish© for the use of that product in the Norfolk Island eradication programme. The Government also obtained approval for the exercise under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Control Act 1999* (Cth). Mrs Jack expressed her thanks to the many workers who laid baits in the first stage of the programme, as well as to Norfolk Island National Park staff and to Australian Government for funding through the Natural Heritage Trust, which covers a part of the cost of the Argentine Ant eradication programme.

Mrs Jack said that the next major phase of the eradication exercise would take place at the Waste Management Centre. This would involve some changes to current arrangements for treatment of waste, which are detailed below. The Minister said that there was some urgency in preparing the Waste Management Centre for the eradication programme and in laying the baits, as Argentine Ants were most active during warmer months and therefore the baits were not as effective in cooler periods.

The expert advice to the Government was that for greatest effectiveness, baits at the Centre would need to be laid in a grid matrix measuring one metre by one metre, on relatively flat surfaces. The Minister said that providing safe and stable flat working surfaces it was also necessary to minimise occupational health and safety risks. This meant that large amounts of green waste and builder's waste would have to be eliminated before the ant eradication could begin. Moving the waste to Headstone for burning posed risks of transporting or spreading the ant infestation, so it was proposed to conduct controlled burning of those materials at the Waste Management Centre site.

Mrs Jack said that there had been substantial accumulation of waste materials at the Waste Management Centre in recent months due to several factors. Because of residents' concerns in the Headstone area, tests for dioxins and other pollutants had been taken of water, soils and sediment. External expert assessment had shown that there were negligible risks posed to human health, but during the testing period there had been no refuse burning at Headstone when there were onshore winds, resulting in the loss of 84 burning days. As well, once it was established that there were a number of Argentine Ant infestations at the Centre, transport of burnable builder's and green waste to Headstone had ceased. There had also been mechanical problems with the Waste Management Centre loader. All of these issues had resulted in a large accumulation of waste materials at the Centre.

Mrs Jack said that the necessary emergency legislation to enable the extermination of Argentine Ants at the Waste Management Centre had already been drafted, and it would be presented to the Legislative Assembly for consideration at a special sitting next week. In preparation for the sitting, the Minister has requested written reports and risk management assessments from the Administration CEO and the officers responsible for waste management, fire services and environmental management.

As announced on Radio Norfolk on Wednesday 4th February by Minister Jack and Chief Minister André Nobbs, **effectively immediately the public will not be allowed to remove materials of any sort from the Waste Management Centre.** This measure is being taken to prevent the transportation of Argentine Ants to any other part of the Island. The Ministers also announced that effective on and from Monday 9th February and until further notice, **the Waste Management Centre will not accept any builder's waste or green waste.** These emergency measures are being taken to ensure the greatest chance of success for the Argentine Ant eradication programme at the Waste Management Centre.

The Waste Management Centre will still accept household refuse and recyclable materials such as paper, bottles and cans, as well as asbestos on restricted conditions as at present. Some household waste materials will continue to be transported by Administration staff to Headstone for burning.

Mrs Jack said that in the short-term while the Waste Management Centre is being prepared for Argentine Ant eradication residents with green waste would have several options open to them. The best option was to compost as much green waste as possible to provide garden mulch and soil improvement materials. Those with large amounts of prunings or green waste could make use of the services of the private contractors on the Island who already provide chipping and disposal services. She said that it was intended that the green waste machine from the Waste Management Centre would be thoroughly cleaned and treated to remove any traces of Argentine Ants, then moved to the Works Depot. It would be available for hire, together with an operator, for members of the public with particularly large amounts of green waste. Other options are being considered for the handling of green wastes until the operations at the Waste Management Centre can be verified as posing no further risk for spreading the Argentine Ants.

Further information is available from the Administration's Acting Manager, Land Use & Environment, Alan McNeil on telephone 23595, email amcneil@admin.gov.nf or at his office at the cellblock to the rear of the New Military Barracks in Kingston.

Stephanie V Jack
Minister for the Environment, Education and Social Welfare

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