



ACT Government
2005-2006 BUDGET

MEDIA RELEASE

**INCREASED FUNDS FOR RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT
ERADICATION PROGRAM**

The ACT Government will commit \$264,000 in extra funding for the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (RIFA) as part of this year's Budget, Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment Jon Stanhope announced today.

The increase to the ACT Government's contribution for this national program is in response to modifications and an expansion of the national eradication program, which aims to eliminate this invasive pest. The ant poses risks to public amenity, urban infrastructure and agriculture.

An extra \$92,000 has been committed for 2005-06 and another \$172,000 for 2006-07. The eradication program is supported by all States and Territories. The ACT's contribution to the increased cost of the program is 0.85 per cent of the \$37.5 million.

"Red Imported Fire Ants have a history of attacking and even killing animals," Mr Stanhope said. "Their sting can cause blisters and life-threatening allergic reactions in humans. The ant is also an agricultural pest, causing crop and stock damage and loss of production.

"The ant is native to Paraguay and southern Brazil. It entered the United States in the 1930s and is now estimated to cost that country \$US1 billion a year in control costs, damage and losses to agriculture.

"In early 2001 two colonies of the ant were discovered in the Brisbane area and in August 2001 the ACT Government agreed at the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ) to contribute financially to an eradication program.

"Infestations of Red Imported Fire Ants in the ACT could severely affect our lifestyle, our urban infrastructure, our tourism, our natural areas and the agricultural sector," Mr Stanhope said.

"The ants have the potential to infest our parks, open spaces and residential back gardens.

"The ACT Government is committed to supporting the RIFA Eradication Program to ensure that these ants do not make their way to the ACT."

Statement ends