

Two Samoas meet to discuss the case of the invasive Little Fire Ant

In late December 2018, the establishment of the Litter Fire Ant (LFA) in some parts of American Samoa was officially confirmed by the Director of the Agriculture, Community and Natural Resources (ACNR) and Land Grant Program of the American Samoa Community College (ASCC), Afioga Aufa'i Apulu Ropeti Areta. This prompted the Government of Samoa to call an urgent meeting with officials of the territory to discuss the current status and situation on the LFA in the territory and the risks of the ant entering Samoa.

The delegation from Samoa includes Tofā Ulu Bismarck Crawley the Chief Executive Officer for MNRE, Afioga Lupeomanu Pelenato Fonoti - Assistant Chief Executive Officer for Quarantine Division of MAF and Seumaloisalafai Lalau Afele Faiilagi - Assistant Chief Executive Officer for Division of Environment and Conservation of MNRE.

The officials from Samoa departed this morning of 1st February 2019 for the Territory for the 2 day meeting. The main items on the LFA agenda are discussions on the current monitoring, detection, and control operations of the LFA in the Territory as well as strengthening biosecurity measures between the two countries. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to review any detection and emergency response plans to coordinate detailed interventions and strategic approach to be taken for the prevention, control and overall management of LFA in the two countries.

Furthermore it includes field excursion to the areas where the LFA are established and laboratory demonstration by the ASCC-ACNR-LFA detection, delimitation, and identification procedures. The demonstration will also include the granule and gel bait application methodology for LFA control in the Territory.

“The confirmation of the LFA establishment in American Samoa is a serious issue and is a national concern for Samoa. Once this invasive ant establishes, it can have major impacts on our biodiversity, agriculture as well as the health and safety of our people. We need to act now rather than later to ensure appropriate and strict biosecurity measures are put in place at our borders as the risk of a LFA invasion into our country is now very high. Thus, the urgency to meet with our closest neighbor as soon as possible while the LFA case is at the prevention stage. We look forward to learning from our colleagues in American Samoa on the steps they've taken so far on the LFA and we are hoping they are able to eradicate the ant before it becomes widespread in the country” – Ulu Bismarck Crawley, CEO MNRE and is the Chair of Samoa National Invasive Task Team (SNITT) Committee for Invasive species.

The outcome of the 2 day meeting will inform the next step for Samoa's biosecurity border control and what is required to protect our country from LFA invasion. The government senior officials are due to return to Samoa on Saturday evening, 2nd Feb 2019 (Samoan time).

In the meantime, the public especially those travelling between Am. Samoa and Samoa are advised to adhere to the following precautionary measures to avoid LFA from entering Samoa's borders:

(1) To be especially vigilant at this time and to check all cargoes (especially boxes, cooler bins and agricultural produce) for small, orange coloured ants.

(2) In effect is the suspension of import permits for all fresh flowers and nursery stocks and any other planting materials for plants from American Samoa, Hawaii and other countries that recorded the presence of this Little Fire Ant such as New Caledonia, Tahiti, Guam, Wallis & Futuna, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.

(3) Operational enforcement of the use of low toxic insect sprays to apply on all incoming cargoes from the countries listed above at all entry points into Samoa on both sea and airports.

The Government of Samoa wishes to acknowledge the support from its key partners the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Programme (SPREP), Samoa Conservation Society (SCS), Conservation International and the wider community for making sure the message on the invasive ant gets out to the public.

The Government of Samoa also wishes to convey its appreciation to the President of the American Samoa Community College, Dr. Rosevonne Pato and Director Aufai Apulu Ropeti Areta of the Land Grant program of the ASCC for the invitation to discuss this important issue of national concern for the protection of our environment, agriculture development and health of our nations.