

Issue

Overview of weed management in NSW

Background

In NSW, responsibilities for the control and management of listed noxious weeds are assigned under the Noxious Weeds Act 1993 (the Act) to landholders, local government, State government and finally to the Minister for Primary Industries. The Act allows the Minister to declare plants as noxious weeds and their control category specified, and places the responsibility for noxious weed control on the occupier of the land, irrespective of who is the legal owner. Note there are no legislative obligations for landholders to manage weeds that are not declared noxious.

The Local Control Authority (LCA) has a mandate under the Act and can be the local council, a weed county council or another authority such as the Lord Howe Island Board or the Western Lands Commissioner. LCAs coordinate the control of noxious weeds within their districts and liaise with adjoining authorities and occupiers. They have an obligation to control noxious weeds on roads and reserves to prevent the spread to privately owned or any other land. LCAs may compel an occupier to take actions by issuing a notice specifying the control measures to be taken, and may also initiate a prosecution and/or issue an on the spot fine. Failure to comply may allow the LCA to enter the property and control the noxious weed/s as specified in the notice.

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has developed a draft NSW Invasive Species Strategy to provide the structure for the control of all invasive species (weeds, animals, aquatics) in NSW. The Association is advised that a draft will shortly be released for public consultation. DPI provide the bulk of the research and extension for agricultural weeds and their local District Agronomists are able to provide significant local information on a weed's spread, significance and best control methods. Note the Rural Land Protection Boards provide assistance for landholders in fulfilling their obligation to control pest animals and insects, and do not have a key role in weed management.

Noxious Weeds Advisory Committee

The Act establishes the Noxious Weeds Advisory Committee (NWAC) to provide advice to the Minister on all aspects of noxious weed declaration. The Committee reports direct to the Minister, and the Department of Primary Industries provides administrative support. In 1995, the NWAC established the Policy on Declaration of Weeds No.1 to assess all proposals to amend the noxious weeds list. Under that policy, the NWAC considers the following criteria before recommending changes in the noxious weeds declarations to the Minister: weed potential; need; benefit; means; intent; distribution. On 1 March 2006, the Minister revoked the noxious weed declaration status of galvanised burr. This was the result of a review undertaken by the NWAC in February 2004 using these criteria.

In earlier 2006, the NWAC determined that the assessment criteria should be reviewed, but deferred any actions on this review pending the establishment of the new Committee. It was considered that the criteria for noxious listing should primarily be based on the economic, environmental and health risks created by a weed, and not on the cost of the weed control. The Association has been advised that this review will be a priority issue for the new NWCA.

The new Committee has been appointed by the Minister and will meet for the first time in November 2006. It will be chaired by Mr Reg Kidd (the Association's Executive Councillor, Orange Branch Chairman and Central West CMA Board member) and has representatives from:

- Catchment Management Authority;
- Shires Association;
- Rural Lands Protection Board;

- Local Government Association;
- Community
- Nature Conservation Council
- NSW Farmers Association - represented by its President, Mr Jock Laurie;
- Department of Primary Industries.

What is the Association doing about weeds?

Galvanised Burr

The noxious weed declaration status of Galvanised burr was revoked on 1 March 2006. Under the new arrangements, farmers need an approved Property Vegetation Plan to control the impacts of Galvanised burr on their land.

In response to this decision, the President of the Association wrote to the Minister for Primary Industries requesting his immediate intervention to reverse the decision. The Association also requested that the NWAC undertake a review of the criteria used to assess proposed changes to the noxious weeds list.

As a result of lobbying by the Association, the Minister for Primary Industries re-instated Galvanised burr on the Noxious Weeds list. As a result of the Association's efforts, the burr can now be cleared without needing consent under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*. Under a new Weed Order gazetted on 28 February 2007, the burr must be controlled where it impacts on normal agricultural practices including cropping and pasture management.

Community consultation

The Bega Branch of the Association established the Fire Weed Committee to develop a grassroots response to the growing problems related to that weed. A delegation has recently met with Senator Eric Abetz, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation to discuss options for increased Commonwealth funding for fire weed control, and its possible listing as a Weed of National Significance.

The NSW/ACT Serrated Tussock Working Party has also been established to take ownership of weed problems and facilitate cost effective solutions based on local initiatives. This Working Group is based in southern NSW and has state wide representation.

Government funding of weed control

The Association is currently preparing a range of funding bids as part of its budget submission to NSW Treasury. In general terms, the Association is seeking:

- a greater funding commitment to the operational budget of the National Parks and Wildlife Service to improve critical land management activities, including weed control, in the reserve system; and
- funding to employ a Weeds Extension Officer to coordinate and facilitate community action groups within farming communities.

Summary of key facts

- Weeds cost Australian agriculture approximately \$4 billion per annum;
- In NSW, the cost of weeds to agriculture is \$1.2 billion per year, with a total annual cost of approximately \$2.0 billion. The total cost of weeds includes the impact on water, natural environment and biodiversity;
- Weeds pose a threat to 45% of the biodiversity in NSW;
- In NSW, 127 weeds species threaten 204 threatened plant and animal species - note 82 weeds species were introduced as garden plants;
- The NSW Government developed the NSW Weeds Strategy in 1997. This is under revision and the NSW Invasive Species Plan is currently under development;
- Noxious Weed Grants to public and local authorities was \$7.89 million in 2006-07, or \$70 million since the release of the weeds strategy in 1997;
- NSW DPI has invested approximately \$6 million in 2006-07 for extension, coordination and research work related to weed control;
- NSW Government jointly funded NHT 2 weed projects at a cost of \$17.6 million between 2002-2005 – this represented 25% of the investment in weeds control in Australia;
- NSW Government supports 961 Landcare groups working on weed management, up from 559 in 1999;
- NSW Forests spent \$962,744 in 2004-05 on weed management;
- the Department of Lands funded 123 projects weed control projects totalling \$585,000 in 2004-05; and
- the Department of Environment and Conservation spent \$612,000 on pest weed and animal control in national parks.