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SUBMISSION

Review of Weed Management in NSW

Natural Resources Commission
GPO Box 4206
Sydney NSW 2001

Friday 6 December 2014

INTRODUCTION

Mudgee District Environment Group (MDEG), based in the Mid-Western Region local government area in NSW, is working for the conservation of our natural heritage and a sustainable future for our children.

MDEG appreciates the opportunity to comment on the issues identified by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) in the review of weed management in NSW.

The impact of weeds on the natural environment and agriculture in NSW is a key area of common concern across the community. There is a strong willingness to work in a combined effort to achieve landscape scale control of major weed species.

Community members with a passion for the natural environment have dedicated many voluntary hours over many years to control the impact of weed infestation on biodiversity.

The development of the Landcare movement, catchment action plans and other processes have demonstrated a strong commitment to managing natural resources in a shared and wholistic approach.

The stop-start nature of funding programs that support community enthusiasm and voluntary participation in natural resource management programs is a key issue. Continuity and consistency of programs, monitoring and evaluation and long term success rates of community effort are threatened by regular changes to funding arrangements.

MDEG believes that the management of invasive species in NSW is a critical issue that needs a well resourced, well co-ordinated approach across all land tenures and jurisdictions.

The establishment of an Invasive Species Commission with powers to regulate and co-ordinate weed and feral animal control across the state would provide the best approach for efficient and effective use of resources to achieve positive and long term outcomes.

MDEG submits that the following key issues need to be addressed in the review of weed management in NSW:

1. Prevention of new weed escapes
2. High priority to environmental threats from weeds
3. Responsibility across all sectors for effective weed management
4. More systematic approach to weed eradication, containment and control
5. Sustainable funding model
6. Build research capacity

For any further information relating to this submission please contact:

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1. Prevention of new weed escapes

The introduction of new weed species into the wild in NSW is an ongoing issue that needs to be managed as a top priority. The sale and movement of plant species with the capacity to become invasive can be prevented through the establishment of a 'permitted list'. It is of great concern that many plant species that have escaped as weeds are still on sale through the nursery industry.

The identification of low risk plants that are permitted to enter the state would help to stem the tide of new invasive plants that add to the problem and costs of weed management.

Regulation of new plants introductions through a 'permitted list' is taking a strong *precautionary principle* approach in regard to management of new weed escapes.

2. High priority to environmental threats from weeds

Weed management needs to be recognized as a state environmental priority. The current emphasis on noxious weeds, having economic impact on agricultural production, ignores the widespread and detrimental impact of environmental weeds on biodiversity in NSW.

Competition from invasive plants has been identified as a key threatening process and requires greater recognition within environmental law and natural resource management activities.

The complex nature of natural ecosystems needs to be considered when assessing the impacts of weeds and appropriate management techniques.

A range of eradication, control and containment methods need to be researched and trialled in a systematic approach to environmental weed management. The historic dependence on blanket chemical applications to suppress weeds has not been successful on a widespread landscape scale and has had detrimental impacts on human and environmental health.

3. Responsibility across all sectors for effective weed management

A tenure-neutral approach for statewide weed management is needed so that all land managers, both public and private, are required to abide by the same weed laws.

Targetted education programs are needed to focus on methods of weed dispersal (eg vehicle movements) so that improved weed hygiene practices can be adopted.

This is particularly relevant for the management of weed species like Coolatai Grass that have major environmental impacts and can be spread by machinery such as Council graders.

All land managers should be required to take all reasonable and practical measures to prevent and minimize the dispersal of weeds. A review of the enforcement and compliance mechanisms in current weed laws is critical.

4. More systematic approach to weed eradication, containment and control

An overarching statewide body such as an Invasive Species Commission to co-ordinate the responsibilities of land managers and control of weed species and feral animals, in a similar approach to bushfire management in NSW would be the most efficient approach.

The Commission should have regulatory powers under a Biosecurity Act.

A key task would be the co-ordination of the various processes including regional weed committees, catchment action plans, Local Land Services, County Councils, activities through public land managers including Local Government, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forest NSW and Crown Lands and on private property.

The prioritization and co-ordination of pooled resources across agencies, Government funded programs eg Landcare and Bushcare through targeted campaigns across all tenures would achieve more effective and efficient outcomes with measurable response.

A prioritization of key weed threats in each region (eg Serrated Tussock, Coolatai Grass, Tiger Pear, Blackberry) is needed with a targeted campaign across all tenures that co-ordinated funding and labour resources, including community voluntary labour. This approach, together with a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanism would provide a systematic approach to weed eradication, containment and control.

5. Sustainable funding model

Weeds have been identified as farmers' most expensive natural resource management problem. Their threat to biodiversity is also a major public cost.

Long term funding guarantees are required to provide continuity and consistency in weed management programs. The development and dissemination of effective education programs, training and retention of skilled staff, building community capacity and relationships, and research into weed impacts and management are all important elements of efficient and lasting weed control across the state.

A funding model that determines a fair level of contribution from government, landholders and businesses/industries should be developed to provide the necessary resources for effective weed management campaigns.

6. Build research capacity

Ongoing knowledge building about weed impacts and cost effective management is essential to the successful eradication, containment and control of invasive plant species.

Research is a critical element of adaptive management processes towards successful natural resource management. Universities and research centres have an important role to play in better understanding the behavior of weed species, their dispersal and best practice management techniques.

The sustainable funding model must include adequate funding for research and development of best methods for eradicating, containing and controlling weeds across NSW.

Recommendation:

That the NRC review recommend the formation of a NSW Invasive Species Commission to co-ordinate the funding, prioritization and onground management of weeds across all tenures in NSW including research and development of new controls, the establishment of a 'permitted list' for new plant introductions and a clear monitoring, evaluation and reporting process for all weed management programs.