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Inquiry into the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland

To the Research Director and the Agriculture and Environment Committee

As a grazier with significant experience in weed control (particularly targeting prickly acacia) I greeted the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry with great vigor. Prickly acacia infestations have devastated the Mitchell Grass Plains of north-western Queensland, and I am passionate about the eradication of this weed species not only on my own properties, but across the whole region. However, I am fighting an uphill battle to motivate graziers within the region who have been subjected to years of drought, and to many of whom prickly acacia is still seen as a valuable fodder source during hard times. These graziers must be educated as to the long-term negative impacts of not treating prickly acacia infestations. They must be incentivised to treat their infestations, and they must be reprimanded for not doing so. In short, we need a carrot and a stick.

Government needs to collaborate at all levels to maximise funding opportunities, and to heavily subsidise the initial eradication works required to bring infestations under control. Funding for graziers could operate on a sliding scale depending on the level of infestation (from 80 percent subsidies for dense infestations, to 50 percent for more lightly infested areas), and should be maintained for a period of at least five years in order to treat the majority of viable seed retained in the soil, as well as any emerging plants. After this initial eradication period the onus should be placed on the grazier to maintain the infestation reduction, and to treat any remaining infestation, as well as anything that emerges.

Crucial to ensuring the appropriate level of control is applied, and for enforcing penalties where control is insufficient would be the reintroduction of Stock Inspectors or Rangers to every Shire, with at least one of these Rangers continually roving the district recording and monitoring any new weed outbreaks to ensure timely eradication before spread can occur. Rangers could also oversee the introduction and maintenance of certified 'weed-free' properties, or regions, as well as authorising the movement or quarantine of stock from areas with weed infestations. Indeed, any stock being moved from weed infested areas without a permit signed by a Ranger or Stock Inspector should result in a large fine (in the order of \$50,000 for a first offence, and increasing to \$100,000 for offences

thereafter), as cattle are the major prickly acacia seed spread vector. Enforced control of weed species is not a new concept, with other Australian states requiring land owners to prepare and implement weed action plans that are overseen and enforced by officers operating under relevant pest and weed control legislation.

Chemicals (such as tebuthiuron) currently available for the control of prickly acacia are highly effective, long lasting, and economical, therefore, funding into new chemical control methods should be redirected into eradication programs, such as running courses in every Shire to demonstrate to graziers how easy it is to methodically poison weeds utilising just a GPS, an ATV, and a spoon or scatter gun to broadcast tebuthiuron pellets. I would be happy to make myself available to demonstrate the methodology to relevant people in each affected Shire, which is as simple as drawing GPS grid lines of 50-300m in width depending on infestation density, and, beginning on the higher country or at the top of a watershed poisoning between the lines in a zig zag manner until all country is covered. When country is almost free of weeds a helicopter with a single shot application can be brought in to eradicate any 'stragglers'. Infested properties along watercourses should be encouraged to run their eradication programs sequentially (beginning at the top of the watershed) in order to clean-up entire creek or river systems, and in order to stop the transportation of seed downstream re-infesting country that has already been treated.

I believe that in order for any significant weed eradication program to succeed a bipartisan agreement must be reached, and it must be acknowledged that when it comes to the distribution of State funding there is more to Queensland than just the Great Barrier Reef. I also believe that Local Governments should lead by example and ensure that town commons are kept free of weeds.

The facts regarding the economic, social, and environmental impacts of weed infestations are not new, but most of our so-called 'grazing bodies' do not want to mention the words 'restriction', or 'control' despite the treatment of these infestations being for the greater good. We cannot and must not introduce another system that relies on self-regulation and self-assessment – the time for this has long passed. We all have a duty of care towards the country we inhabit, and every one of us should be thinking of our grandchildren, as we are but custodians of the land for a very short time. We need to start making amends for the terrible damage we have caused or perpetuated, before it's too late.

Kind Regards

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