



Southern Downs
REGIONAL COUNCIL

23 December 2017

Mr Rob Hansen
Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

**Please address all
communications to:**

The Chief Executive Officer
Southern Downs
Regional Council
PO Box 26
Warwick Qld 4370

mail@sdr.c.qld.gov.au
www.sdr.c.qld.gov.au

abn 59 786 792 651

Warwick Office

64 Fitzroy Street
Warwick Qld 4370

Stanthorpe Office

61 Marsh Street
Stanthorpe Qld 4380

t **1300 MY SDRC**
(1300 697 372)

f **07 4661 0333**

Dear Mr Hansen

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

Southern Downs Regional Council appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland. On behalf of Council, I offer the following points as they relate to the terms of reference.

The responsibilities of local governments in relation to the control of prohibited, restricted and invasive plants imposed under s.48 of the Biosecurity Act 2014 are reasonable, and local governments are meeting those obligations.

The obligations imposed on Council are reasonable and Southern Downs Regional Council is certainly meeting them. It is noted that Biosecurity Queensland have largely stepped away from playing an active role in managing established pests in favour of dealing with prevention and new incursions (i.e. the 'cheap' end of the invasion curve). It is disappointing the *Biosecurity Act 2014* did not deliver local governments the degree of autonomy in managing invasive pests that consultation on the Bill led Councils to believe would be provided. Restricting local governments' function to managing compliance with restricted and prohibited matter effectively means invasive pests management is 'list based', does not provide local governments discretion to enforce (or not) control of invasive pests not included in restricted and prohibited schedules, and, retains the need to use the *Local Government Act 1994* to declare other species under Local Law. The fact Councils are required to continue to manage invasive pests under two different pieces of State legislation following a major overhaul and consolidation of biosecurity related regulation seems illogical and inefficient.

Similarly, the prescriptive nature of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* brought with it an increased compliance burden by placing a requirement on local governments to enforce control on invasive pests that were formally considered environmental weeds (class 3) whereby control could only be enforced under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* when the pest imposed impacts on environmentally significant areas, or via Local Law. Should a Council receive a complaint about one of these pests, they are now obliged to enforce control on pests that are not strategic priorities for enforcement.

Programs for the control of weeds on Crown land administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM) are effective.

Council has enjoyed good cooperation from DNRM in the event Crown land in the Southern Downs Region requires weed control. Council sporadically undertakes minor weed control works on Unallocated State Land by contract arrangement with DNRM, which is probably the most efficient course of action for both parties. Similarly, DNRM oblige Council's requests to correspond to lessees regarding their weed control

responsibilities. Council would however like to see weed control conditions applied to leased lands enforced by the Department as a matter of course.

Biosecurity Queensland's weeds programs, including biological controls and new technologies, are adequately funded and effective at controlling weeds.

There are no Biosecurity Queensland weeds programs operating in the Southern Downs Region. As mentioned previously, Biosecurity Queensland's role in invasive pest management seems to be increasingly removed from on ground management of established pests. Therefore, Council believes it is critical Biosecurity Queensland at least maintain the current levels of resourcing of biological control and other applied research. Council understands the value of biological control in terms of its return on investment and would ideally like to see more research conducted on more biological control agents for more established pests. Council does not believe local governments should fund any such increase through precept payments however, given the State's move away from on ground established pest management. Council recognises the co-investment approach being taken with precept monies and appreciates the opportunity to directly inform research priorities.

Environmental programs administered by Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) impact favourably on weed control programs administered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and local governments.

Invasive plants are generally well managed on National Parks in the Southern Downs Region. State Forests located in and adjacent to the region such as Leyburn, Talgai and Arcot however have serious, unmanaged velvety tree pear infestations which detract from Council's compliance and control programs. Council controls tree pear on its own lands and enforces control on private lands, yet large tracts of State lands are not subject to control. Council believes DEHP's *Good Neighbour Policy* as it relates to the management of invasive pest animals is deeply flawed. The policy means no action is taken by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) until adjoining landholders are experiencing and can demonstrate sufficient stock losses to the satisfaction of QPWS. The policy is not predicated on best practice control methods as it ignores evidence based knowledge of wild dog and other invasive pest animals' ecology and migration patterns. That is, wild dogs breed up in certain areas according to the availability of food, water and shelter, but progeny must disperse to other areas to find their own territory. If breeding areas are not subject to best practice control methods (i.e. aerial baiting in areas inaccessible by ground), there will be a continual stream of wild dogs leaving these areas in search of territory further afield. Council does not seek to 'blanket bait' all National Parks and State Forests in the region and appreciates the access provided to some parts of some protected areas to date. It does however seek access to selectively aerial bait more strategic habitat and movement corridors within these lands.

Federal, state and local government weeds programs are coordinated to maximise their achievements and to have a whole of government approach.

The Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) program made great gains in achieving whole of government coordination to the management of WoNS species, which had a flow on effect to other species. The demise of the program and subsequent loss of dedicated WoNS Coordinators has seen much of the coordination dissolve.

With regard to the inquiry case studies, I offer the following points on behalf of Council.

Prickly acacia

It is believed the climate of the Southern Downs Region is not suitable to the establishment of prickly acacia. Council does however recognise the serious impacts to other parts of the State and supports increased research and control efforts by the State.

Giant rat's tail grass

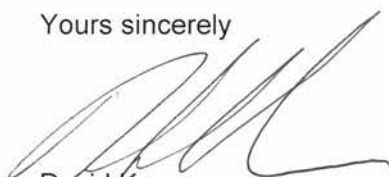
Giant rat's tail grass (GRT) is in the early stages of invasion in the Southern Downs Region and is known to exist in only several locations. Unfortunately the terrain in which it has established means effective control may be confounded. Council will use the provisions of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* to enforce control of GRT but supports further research into herbicide and biological controls and other adaptive management such as fertiliser application to augment compliance efforts.

Fireweed

Good late winter and early spring rains in 2016 saw unprecedented levels of fireweed infestation across the Southern Downs Region. The fact that previously uninfested areas were affected demonstrated the level of seedbank present prior to the rains. That is, the spread from other areas had occurred and seeds lay dormant until suitable weather conditions arrived. The dispersal mechanisms of fireweed are such that containing spread at any scale is difficult at best. Similarly, the rapid lifecycle and subsequent control window for fireweed mean enforcing provisions of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* is challenging at best. Plants are only readily visible once flowering has occurred and seed set occurs shortly after flowers appear. The efficacy of selective herbicides diminishes once plants have matured to the stage of flowering. Further, plants all but disappear following flowering, which hampers monitoring compliance in widespread infestations. Council supports further research into herbicide and biological controls, as well as best practice adaptive management guides.

I trust this information is of value to the inquiry and on behalf of Council, I thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely



David Keenan
Chief Executive Officer