

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House QLD 4000

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

The Gomaren and Doctor's Creek Catchment Landcare Group was established in 1997, with its base in Goombungee, and an annual membership of approximately 50 local farming families. Our members live in the areas surrounding Goombungee, Kingsthorpe, Gowrie Junction, Silverleigh and Groomsville in the north-east Darling Downs and are beef or dairy cattle producers, grain farmers, sheep meat producers or horse breeders.

We undertake many on-farm Landcare activities including tree and pasture planting, habitat enhancement, weed control, soil carbon improvement and erosion mitigation. It is estimated that we have successfully acquitted more than \$500,000 worth of State or Federal Government funded Landcare initiatives over the years, with many more dollars 'in-kind' landholder contributions (labour, machinery use, fuel chemicals and administration).

Fireweed in our catchment

Fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*) has not yet been reported in our catchment area but has been found in neighboring catchment areas. The Toowoomba Regional Council has identified fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*) in their pest management plan as a declared plant of concern due to spreading. This document states that the weed is localised to the northern and central areas of northern region.

Fireweed is easily spread by wind and our catchment area will be likely be impacted by the introduced fireweed species the near future.

The native fireweed infestation (*Senecio brigalowensis*) which also is toxic is widespread and increasing within our catchment area. The majority of our members have reported in increase in the native fireweed on their properties over the last two years. As both the native and introduced fireweed species are toxic to livestock and an invasive agricultural pest impacting on costs and productivity, producers are equally concerned about both species.



Persistent fireweed in pasture January 2017



Common fireweed seen in our catchment. January 2017.

The number of livestock deaths associated with fireweed in our catchment area is hard to identify due to the requirement of an autopsy however local veterinarians have diagnosed deaths in cattle from liver failure attributable to native fireweed, particularly when paddocks are bare of other pasture and fireweed is predominate. Stock mortality is likely to increase as the weed increases in prevalence.

The Toowoomba Regional Council has approximately 11000km of road network and a 13,000 square km council footprint which is a large area to cover. Landcare groups across our region could play a crucial role in the eradication of this weed if given the opportunity to participate in a coordinated approach with Council.

**Costs of fireweed control.**

Landholders have found the fireweed difficult to control with estimated costs on one property belonging to a GDCLCC member provided for example:

**Location of property:** Cutella (3km north of Kingsthorpe, 15 km from Toowoomba airport)

**Area:** 50 ha Farm type: Beef cattle (F1 Waygu breeder- 20 head plus calves)

**Vegetation:** native and introduced pasture.

*Table 1 2014-2015 Financial Year Fireweed control*

Area impacted	10 ha	Heavy infestation 4 paddocks, lighter infestation 5 paddocks
Chemical costs	\$283	
Contractor costs		
Landholder time	40 hrs	Spot spraying and manual removal, trips for purchasing chemicals, time for coordination of spray programs
Costs of landholder labour @\$25 per hour	\$1000	
Repair and maintenance spray equipment	\$422	
Total costs	\$1705	

*Table 2 2015-2016 Financial Year Fireweed control*

Area impacted	30 ha	Heavy infestation 4 paddocks, lighter infestation 5 paddocks
Chemical costs	\$588	
Contractor costs	\$3582	Spot spraying

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Landholder time	20 hrs	Spot spraying and manual removal, trips for purchasing chemicals, time for coordination of spray programs
Costs of landholder labour @\$25 per hour	\$500	
Repair and maintenance spray equipment		
Total costs	\$4670	

Table 3 2016-2017 (year to date) Fireweed control

Area impacted	40 ha	Heavy infestation 4 paddocks, lighter infestation 5 paddocks
Chemical costs	\$430	
Contractor costs	\$418	
Landholder time	45 hrs	Spot spraying and manual removal, trips for purchasing chemicals, time for coordination of spray programs
Costs of landholder labour @\$25 per hour	\$1125	
Repair and maintenance spray equipment	\$457	
Total costs	\$2430 (6months)	

**Summary** - Efficacy of fireweed control on this property is poor, despite landholder's efforts. Neighbouring properties and roadsides means reinfestation is likely. Now fireweed is persisting nearly all year round on this farm, with actively growing/ flowering and seeding plants in mid-summer as well as late winter-spring. Fireweed seems to be behaving as a perennial species and summer spraying is also needed. This is a small property compared to the average Darling Downs farm, but fireweed control costs in proportion to farm income is high (13% in 2014-15 and 17% in 2015-16)

Gomaren and Doctors Creek Catchment Landcare Group recommendations.

- Declare fireweed, whether native or introduced, a weed of significance
- Provide public notices (newspaper ads or roadside billboards) declaring fireweed presence and need for control, including on small acreage and vacant lots
- Coordinate control programs in districts via Government, Local Councils and through Landcare organisations.
- Provide landholder grants (available for control programs in Spring 2017) to manage fireweed, via these coordinated control programs.
- Investigate biological controls

The Gomaren and Doctors Creek Catchment Landcare group is contactable if further information is required for this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Toni Gorry

