



16 January 2017

Research Director  
Agriculture and Environment Committee  
Parliament House  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Sir / Madam,

**LGAQ Response to the Inquiry into the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the inquiry into the invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland.

Effective management of weeds to reduce their impacts on the community, environment and industry is an important issue for Queensland's local governments. Collectively, local governments expend tens of millions of dollars of limited resources per annum to reduce the impact of invasive plant and animal species. Local governments have the local knowledge and the community networks necessary to continue to build weed management capability and commitment within communities. However, local governments need resourcing and support to continue to play this vital role.

Please find enclosed the LGAQ's detailed submission developed in consultation with Queensland local governments.

Please don't hesitate to contact Ms Kristy Gooding, Senior Advisor – Natural Assets and NRM on [REDACTED] should you wish to discuss any aspect of these comments.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Buckler  
GENERAL MANAGER – ADVOCACY



**Parliamentary Committee Inquiry  
Into the  
Impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and  
their control in Queensland**

**Submission**

**Local Government Association of Queensland Ltd**

**16 January 2017**

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. It is a not-for-profit association setup solely to serve councils and their individual needs. The LGAQ has been advising, supporting and representing local councils since 1896, allowing them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities. The LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places that count; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and delivering them the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

## 1 General

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland. Local governments in Queensland view biosecurity matters and invasive plants and animals as one of the most significant threats to productivity, human wellbeing and the environment. Collectively, local governments expend tens of millions of dollars of limited resources per annum in an effort to reduce the impacts of invasive plant and animal species. Local governments have the local knowledge and community networks necessary to continue to build weed management capability and commitment within communities. However, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is not appropriate in Queensland in regards to support from other tiers of government which must be commensurate to local governments' geographical and resource constraints.

## 2 Response to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

The Agriculture and Environment Committee has resolved to investigate and report on the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland, with regard to the following terms:

1. 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* (the Act) are reasonable, and local governments are meeting those obligations;
2. Programs for the control of weeds on Crown land administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines are effective;
3. Biosecurity Queensland's weeds programs, including biological controls and new technologies, are adequately funded and effective at controlling weeds;
4. Environmental programs administered by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection impact favourably on weed control programs administered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and local governments; and
5. Federal, State and local government weeds programs are coordinated to maximise their achievements and to have a whole of government approach.

For the purposes of this submission, the LGAQ will focus comments on numbers 1, 2, 3 and 5. The LGAQ would also like to provide comment on the Department of Natural Resources and Mines funding of Natural Resource Management groups across Queensland in relation to the management of invasive plants.

The Committee has also resolved to examine the impact of three invasive plant species as case studies for the inquiry: Prickly acacia; Giant rat's tail grass; and Fireweed.

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

### 3.1 Compliance and Enforcement

Local government's obligations under s.48 relate to ensuring landholders are meeting their general biosecurity obligation under the Act through compliance and enforcement activities. As per s.48 of the Act, local government play a significant role in the delivery of compliance activities for the control and management of invasive plants.

Compliance activities are resource intensive. For adequately trained and experienced staff, the responsibilities of the Act are reasonable. However, this does not take into account the diversity of local governments across Queensland and the difficulty in rural and regional communities in attracting and retaining qualified staff and the resource constraints that these local governments face. Whilst the new Act is in its infancy, local governments require ongoing support in terms of compliance and enforcement including the development of a number of templates and materials to ensure quality assurance and consistency across Queensland.

Local government enforcement activities include: land surveys; direct engagement of landholders to discuss biosecurity issues on their land and approaches for reducing impacts; issuing Biosecurity

Orders; and ensuring compliance with the order and if necessary, engaging a contractor to undertake the required work. Whilst local government has the primary responsibility for enforcement, many local governments prefer to take a conciliatory approach and work with landholders through education and awareness raising. Officers and councils in small communities often find the use of enforcement mechanisms difficult and lack the quantity of staff to ensure appropriate levels of enforcement.

### **Recommendation 1**

The LGAQ recommends Biosecurity Queensland:

- develops a template Compliance Strategy to assist local government to adequately fulfil the compliance role under the new Act.
- develops an expanded range of documented scenarios that can be used by local government to demonstrate how to comply under the new Act.
- develops a standard enforcement business case for councils to allow councils to seek a commitment to develop a strategy that will provide the reasons why and when enforcement should be undertaken.
- acknowledge the difficulty of enforcement in small communities and subsequently provide support to set up regional enforcement groups or external 'sweep' teams to undertake enforcement work in areas where this is sought by local governments constrained geographically and / or by resources.

### **3.2 General Biosecurity Obligation**

Local governments would be better supported in their compliance and enforcement work, if the general public had a greater understanding of their General Biosecurity Obligation (GBO) under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. Education about the GBO is a State responsibility which will greatly benefit all parties who play a role in biosecurity management. The State is best placed to deliver: a consistent state wide public awareness campaign about the GBO; provide an explanation of roles and responsibilities under the Act; and provide information about who to contact for further information.

Pest Advisory Forums are a useful existing mechanism for communicating with the public regarding invasive plant management, however, the occurrence of these forums is ad hoc and sporadic across the State. Regular Pest Advisory Forums that provide information to the community about regionally significant weeds and the tools and strategies available to address them, would be a useful additional method in creating greater awareness of the GBO as well as providing a regular dialogue between all the parties responsible for managing invasive plants.

### **Recommendation 2:**

The LGAQ recommends that Biosecurity Queensland:

- develop and implement a state-wide campaign, in consultation with local government, to generate awareness of the GBO outlining what the general public can do and who they can contact.
- support and resource implementation of regular Pest Advisory Forums to provide a consistent and reliable mechanism for information sharing and communication with communities across the state.

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

Local government feedback has regularly reported significant weed problems on Crown land where there is little or no management action. These unmanaged lands are a reservoir for weeds and dilute the efforts of local government in controlling weeds adjacent to unmanaged lands. This is a significant concern for local governments when their own management and enforcement efforts, and the efforts of private landowners and regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies, are undermined by the inconsistencies and failure of State Government departments to meet obligations under State legislation on lands under their management. Departments regularly cited include the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

The new Act places a General Biosecurity Obligation (GBO) on all persons and the LGAQ requests that the State demonstrate leadership with respect to upholding the GBO and acknowledge the need for shared responsibility.

---

**Recommendation 3:**

The LGAQ recommends that the State investigates the funding requirements of State departments to enable an acceptable level of compliance with obligations under the Act.

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

Biosecurity Queensland works in partnership with local governments and the LGAQ to deliver research and onground programs for the management of invasive species. Local government contributes funding for some of this work through the Land Protection Fund. The work of Biosecurity Queensland is considered valuable by local governments across the State, however, the resourcing of this section of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is a concern and should be examined.

The chief concern is that the underfunding of Biosecurity Queensland sends a clear signal that biosecurity matters, in particular invasive plants, are not an important issue. This contradicts the State's own environmental policies and the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy.

The Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review identified that future population growth will place pressure on maintaining the biosecurity of Queensland and increase the service delivery demand on local government. This is a key concern because local government is a key service delivery partner in ensuring Queensland's biosecurity. Local governments are already resource constrained and further pressure may result in a decline in biosecurity outcomes for the State. The underfunding of Biosecurity Queensland directly impacts on the levels of support provided to local government, particularly in rural and regional communities.

**Recommendation 4:**

The LGAQ recommends that the State reviews funding to Biosecurity Queensland to ensure that the implementation and enforcement of the new Act reflects the importance of biosecurity and invasive plant matters in Queensland.

**5.1 Resourcing, strategic direction and clearly defined roles and responsibilities**

In order for local government to meet their biosecurity obligations, roles and responsibilities within the biosecurity system need to be clearly defined. Currently the lines of responsibility within and between State Government departments are unclear and lack oversight and coordination. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries needs to provide strategic direction and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders. This direction should be provided through the finalisation of strategies, development of action plans as well as resourcing and reviewing the current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), Biosecurity Queensland, the LGAQ and the Queensland Natural Resource Management Regional Groups Collective. This MoU identifies strategic management actions and should clearly outline the respective roles of regional bodies, local government and DAF.

**Recommendation 5:**

The LGAQ recommends that DAF finalise and release the Biosecurity Strategy including:

- the development of the Queensland Pest and Animal Strategy
- the development of action plans in partnership with local government to underpin the Biosecurity Strategy.
- resourcing the review of the MoU between DAF, Biosecurity Queensland, the LGAQ and the Queensland Natural Resource Management Groups Collective for invasive weed and pest animal management throughout Queensland.

**5.2 Increased support for local government**

Local government would also greatly benefit from increased support from local biosecurity officers, particularly in rural and regional areas, to provide: control methodology advice; updates on current research; and assistance in engaging with landholders. The provision of extra support will undoubtedly result in the improved control of invasive plants in Queensland. The LGAQ acknowledges the difficulty Biosecurity Queensland has had in retaining staff in regional and rural areas in the past. To overcome

---

this, it is suggested that an agile 'roving' team of biosecurity officers could travel around the state to attend to key concerns as needed.

**Recommendation 6:**

The LGAQ recommends that Biosecurity Queensland is greater resourced to deliver awareness, extension and education programs to support stakeholder capability and capacity building, particularly through the creation of a 'roving' biosecurity team.

### 5.3 Land Protection Fund

Local government contributes annual payments known as 'precept payments' to the Land Protection Fund (LPF) in accordance with the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. This funding is utilised by Biosecurity Queensland to undertake collective activities to manage weeds (and pest animals) that benefit all local governments, whilst individual local governments focus on specific weeds in their own local government areas. The current project to implement the Invasive Plants and Animals Co-investment model will increase transparency and accountability issues that have been identified as issues by local governments in the past. However, the LGAQ seeks ongoing and regular communication from Biosecurity Queensland to ensure local governments have input into the prioritisation process and to ensure that local governments are aware of where the LPF funding is being spent. Additionally, the project encourages the formation of Regional Pest Management Sub-committees which are current being formed across the State. The LGAQ seeks an ongoing commitment from Biosecurity Queensland to support these sub-committees beyond the life of the implementation project.

**Recommendation 7:**

The LGAQ recommends the State Government continues to work with the LGAQ to improve the accountability and transparency of the Land Protection Fund precept payment expenditure.

**Recommendation 8:**

The LGAQ recommends that Biosecurity Queensland provide continued support of Regional Pest Management Sub-committees.

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

Local government feedback indicates there is currently a lack of coordination between existing federal, state and local government programs. The LGAQ proposes a whole of government approach to appropriately manage issues of biosecurity. 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.

The LGAQ notes that the Federal Government have recently released the Intergovernmental Agreement of Biosecurity Review Draft Report which highlights the lack of coordination and the need for an overarching national body to clearly define roles and responsibilities. Whilst the LGAQ will be providing feedback on the draft report, it is important to note that the LGAQ supports the development of a National Statement of Intent and the inclusion of local government (through the Australian Local Government Association) as a partner. The LGAQ believes that Biosecurity Queensland needs to be actively involved in this process to ensure the biosecurity needs of Queensland are adequately represented at a national level.

The LGAQ and Biosecurity Queensland are working in partnership to deliver the implementation of the Invasive Plants and Animals Co-investment Model. This project focuses on the development of Regional Pest Management Sub-committees across the State that include local governments, Biosecurity Queensland, Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups and in some cases other State Government departments such as Queensland National Parks and Wildlife. The aim of this project is to improve collaboration on a regional scale and to maximise the benefits from existing resources. Whilst the project is still in its early stages, reports on the use of a regional collaborative approach are positive. This project highlights opportunities to achieve a far greater impact in the management of invasive plants through regional investment in local government authorities and regional NRM groups.

**Recommendation 9:**

The LGAQ recommends that Biosecurity Queensland:

- is actively involved in the development of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity given the importance of acting on biosecurity issues in Queensland for the benefit of the whole country.
- continues to work in partnership with the LGAQ and local governments and provide ongoing support to Regional Pest Management Sub-committees.

**7 Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM) Funding of Regional Natural Resource Management Groups**

The LGAQ would like to provide additional comment beyond the scope of the Terms of Reference in relation to the DNRM funding of regional NRM groups. The LGAQ supports collaborative regional approaches to achieve efficiencies and to improve the consistency of invasive plant management on a regional scale. Notwithstanding, there are large inconsistencies in the way the NRM groups interact with local government across the state and as a result regional invasive plant management appears poorly coordinated and inefficient. A number of local governments report that NRM groups sometimes deliver invasive plant control programs that are completely incongruent with local government priorities. In addition, the Queensland Biosecurity Capability Review identified an opportunity to coordinate the regional investment process by gaining agreement between NRM groups and local governments to align regional investment priorities. Such an agreement would be a valuable process in order to use resources more efficiently, allow for greater levels of coordination and achieve a broader set of biosecurity outcomes.

**Recommendation 10:**

The LGAQ recommends the State Government ensure NRM groups align and coordinate with the work of local government.

**Recommendation 11:**

The LGAQ recommends Biosecurity Queensland investigate the coordination of a regional investment process between NRM groups and local governments to achieve a broader set of biosecurity outcomes.

**8 Weeds Case Studies**

The three significant weed species chosen as case studies for this inquiry – Prickly acacia, Giant rat's tail grass and Fireweed – are large scale problems requiring significant resources. Currently local governments are undertaking substantial amounts of work in eradication, containment and prevention control methodologies in relation to these weed species. Local government would benefit from State support in undertaking this work through: regular contact with regional biosecurity officers; provision of the latest research/control techniques; and ongoing advice from Biosecurity Queensland.

It is noted the three weed species chosen are all agricultural weeds which are similar in their impacts and control requirements. In urbanised areas, weed impacts to areas of high conservation value, riverine and aquatic areas are environmental and social in nature and are also considered a high priority.

**Recommendation 12:**

The LGAQ recommends weed species that have environmental and social impacts are also considered within the inquiry to ensure a thorough review of the current system for responding to invasive plants.

Please don't hesitate to contact Kristy Gooding, Senior Advisor – Natural Assets and NRM on 3000 2257 or at [kristy\\_gooding@lgaq.asn.au](mailto:kristy_gooding@lgaq.asn.au) should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.



