

Our Reference: 7246778
Contact Officer: Mark Ready
Telephone: [REDACTED]

16 January 2017

Attn: The Committee Chairperson
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Ms Howard,

Submission Re: Inquiry into the Impacts of Invasive Plants (weeds) and their Control in Queensland

Toowoomba Regional Council (Council) has considered the five terms of reference for the inquiry into the Impacts of Invasive Plants (weeds) and their Control in Queensland and makes this submission based on these terms of reference. Of the three nominated case studies only Giant Rats Tail Grass and Fireweed are known to be present within the Toowoomba Region.

TOR 1: Whether 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.

Council believes that the risk management approach adopted under the Biosecurity Act 2014 represents a positive shift in the management of Invasive Plants. Although it is as yet too early to determine if the responsibilities are reasonable, there is a level of flexibility which should allow Council to meet its obligations. However, the legislated requirement for a Biosecurity order to be issued to an occupier rather than an owner (depending on circumstance) may in time prove to be troublesome for Councils in terms of the ease of recouping costs where action is required.

TOR 2: Whether programs for the control of weeds on Crown land administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines are effective.

Council is not generally aware of all control programs operating on Crown Land or of any reporting on the efficacy of these programs. However, a common complaint by landholders is that *"the weeds are coming from unmanaged Crown Land and/or Council roads"*. For our part Council has invested heavily in improving our commitment to the control of invasive plants on Council roads, and we would expect a similar commitment from State land management agencies.

In this respect Council is of the opinion that lessees of State Land should be subject to conditions requiring the active management of invasive plants on said leases and that such conditions should be monitored and enforced by the relevant State land management agency. Responsibility for ensuring lessees of State Land comply with the General Biosecurity Obligation should rest with the State Government and not be devolved to Local Government under s48 of the Biosecurity Act 2014.

TOR 3: Whether Biosecurity Queensland's weeds programs, including biological controls and new technologies, are adequately funded and effective at controlling weeds.

Council understands that all research into alternative management techniques and biological controls is both expensive and slow.

Recent discussions, regarding prioritisation of research projects for 2017, has identified that research programs, which address the tools available with which to control invasive plants, need to be accompanied by social research and engagement programs aimed at initiating behaviour change in landholders and occupiers if control programs are to become truly effective. In this regard the threat of spread of such species as Giant Rats Tail Grass and Fireweed through the translocation of seed in fodder (e.g. Hay Runners etc.) can be greatly reduced by encouraging certain behaviours in both providers and receivers.

Council is seeking to improve its own engagement with landholders and would suggest that further investment in extension programs be considered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) also.

TOR 4: Whether 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.

Council has limited knowledge of the environmental programs administered and delivered by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection or of how these impact on our own weed control programs and those of DAF. This would of itself indicate that there is at least no negative impact.

Council has established a Biosecurity Advisory Committee which includes representation from several State land management agencies. This Advisory Committee will be responsible for the development of the Toowoomba Regional Biosecurity Plan and it is envisaged that such plan will include specific deliverables and a system of reporting which will enable all stakeholders to gauge how their programs support those of other stakeholders to achieve the desired outcomes of the plan.

TOR 5: Whether federal, state and local government weeds programs are coordinated to maximise their achievements and to have a whole of government approach.

Council has seen little evidence of the coordination of weeds programs between the three levels of government in general, although this coordination does occur in response to new and emergent threats and certain priority species (notably these are more commonly diseases or animal pests). The majority of invasive plant programs are driven by local considerations within or between Local Governments.

Council is pleased with recent changes to the process for prioritisation of research work undertaken, which now see Local Government included in the decision making process for the expenditure of funds provided through precept payments.

This year saw a widespread outbreak of fireweeds within the Toowoomba Region. However, the majority of infestations were of native fireweeds with only a few isolated occurrences of the introduced *Senecio madagascariensis*. The Toowoomba Region is at the invasion front for this

species and its presence may prove difficult to detect as it can be hidden within fields of native look-alikes. Council has worked with its State Government counterparts to ensure the education of the public in regard to the pest status of these native plants as opposed to the introduced species. Should the threat of spread of *Senecio madaqascariensis* increase this would be an area in which Council would expect a level of cooperation and coordination.

Council has seen a reduction in the number of DAF Biosecurity Officers on the Darling Downs over the past decade and believes this has impacted on the ability to collaborate with State Government across a range of pest management matters. Regularly Biosecurity officers from our region are deployed to other Biosecurity outbreaks across the state. It is therefore reasonable to assume that, should our region be impacted in future, Biosecurity Officers from other regions would be redeployed to our region. This process is indicative of a clear shift away from local support to more regional support in response to high risk scenarios.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide submission on this matter on behalf of the Toowoomba Regional Council and its community. Your consideration of our submissions will be appreciated.

Should you require any additional information please contact Council's Principal Conservation and Pest Management, Mr Mark Ready [REDACTED] who will be able to assist you further.

Yours sincerely,



Brian Pidgeon
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER