

WHITSUNDAY AG SERVICES PTY LTD
Specialists in all facets of spraying and crop protection

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Research Director
Agricultural and Environmental Committee.

To whom it may concern,

The Member for Burdekin, Dale Last's office has asked me to submit my thoughts on declared vegetation.

As a contractor that contract controls many types of vegetation in the Whitsunday area, I have a fair idea now of what works and what does not and the issues after 12 years experience.

One of the biggest issues is consistency by government departments regarding control on government controlled land and the uniform treatment of land holders with declared vegetation.

In our shire the council make a poor effort, Queensland Rail have clean and highly unmaintained land. The Department of Natural resources make no effort while Main Roads have an annual treatment program that works well when properly implemented.

I note that the inquiry specifies three main plants. Prickly accacia, Giants Rats Tail and Fireweed. The only one of these really effecting our region is Prickly accacia which has some dense areas but is not as common as chinee Apple or Rubber vine.

Also a problem is Parthenium, parkinsonia and Lantana.

In other shires, lantana has taken over whole farms and is out of control, especially on hobbie farms and those that use an acreage block for residential reasons only.

Rubber vine has taken over huge areas and is particularly brutal on natives trees sometimes taking out 80% of natives including fully grown large gum trees via strangulation.

Accacia, parkinsonia, lantana, Chinee apple and rubber vine are also a favorite place for wild pigs to call home and avoid dingo's, pig hunters and human control via helicopter. Pigs eat the seeds from vegetation and when they go out to feed, they plant the next crop plant and fertilize it at the same time. Land owners that try to keep their land clean find it an impossible task when they have uncontrolled land on their boundary with a pig infestation.

Seeds from untreated land is also sent down stream via floods with seeds usually getting trapped in highly organic silt traps where the moist seed soon germinates and flourishes.

Treatment in horticultural areas must also take into consideration drift and residue run off so crops are not affected. Some volatile chemicals have the potential to walk (fumes from the chemical drift in the air) and cause damage in many directions and these issues must also be taken into consideration.

Rubber vine has a rust that can be used as a biological control. It does not kill the plant but in hot and humid conditions it can bring it to its knees and slow or even nearly kill the plant. This can stop a plant seeding and spreading further.

I have a background in aerial agricultural aviation and still have contacts in the industry.

Aerial application would be idea for large, undulating and hilly areas of infestation.

I have mentioned this to various controllers of government land and government organizations who have liked the idea but never followed though or sought other opinions to clarify my opinion.

This would have been complimentary to areas I have been contracted to treat which have had terrain that were not humanly possible to treat and are still thriving and sending out seeds into areas we have treated.

Unless what methods area available to use are used, more public money will always need to be used to try and hold the problem where methods like this would have a fair chance or reducing the problem to the minimum as it will not be environmentally possible to eliminate it completely.

Road construction and maintenance is also a major problem. Many times I have seen on a brand new job, the likes of parthenium coming up when there are no plants for a hundred kilometers. This means that machinery or material brought in for the job is contaminated. This is a simple fix by having the machines properly washed down before shifting.

Slashing is a major problem and requires tractor drivers to have training in plant identification so the plant can be removed or treated before slashing.

Consistency with treatment programs needs to be implemented. It is no use spending money on a parcel of ground and then not following up to and finishing the job off.

The general rule is one year's weeds, 7 years seeds which means when you start a program to control an area, you must be committed to the next 7 years and this does not include outside factors like animals such as wild pigs bringing in a new seed bank.

Pig and vegetation control go hand in hand

The Bowen Shire and later the Whitsunday Regional Council have a program where those on a 3-year plan can access a limited amounts of certain herbicides at a 50% subsidy to control declared vegetation.

I am available at any time to comment on my views and experiences I have had and where I feel I am able to.

Regards
Mick Boyce
Managing Director/ operator