

16 January 2017

Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House QLD 4000
aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

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

Dear Research Director

As the regional natural resources management body for the Fitzroy Basin and its catchments, Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) and its partner organisations; Capricornia Catchments, Central Highlands Regional Resources Use Planning (CHRRUP) and Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association (DCCA), regularly collaborates with and consults local governments, landowners, landcare groups and industry in regards to a diversity of environmental matters.

FBA refers to the inquiry regarding the *impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland* and provides the following response in relation to each theme being investigated. This response has considered and includes feedback from our partners and their stakeholders.

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* are reasonable, and local governments are meeting those obligations.

FBA provides the following comments:

- FBA works with Local governments across our region including; Banana Shire, Isaac Shire, Livingstone Shire, Gladstone Region, Rockhampton Region and Central Highlands Regional councils. Established pest management programs are in place within these individual councils; although each council budget, their resources and their pest plant activities can be notably different. Minimum requirements for Councils may be worth investigating to provide consistent expectations (for landholders) across council boundaries in regards to support and enforcement.
- Restricted budgets make it difficult for local governments to address the significant and increasing number of pest plant species on an ongoing basis. With limited resources the ability to manage the increase in the number of species is a concern for councils who seem to be balancing control, enforcement and community awareness activities. Competition between these three activity types is not a desirable scenario and is likely to be effecting outcomes. Additional funding for on-ground control activities (to extend the frequency or longevity of activities, rather than applying one-off treatments) and additional community education would be welcomed. A longer-term approach to policy would provide stability and enable better planning.
- It is pleasing to see that four out of our six local governments continue their regional partnership through membership of and participation in the Capricorn Pest Management Group (CPMG). This group which includes industry and other stakeholders such as FBA, seeks to provide access to training/ research, share information, prioritise pests from a regional perspective and are actively seeking to plan broader scale pest control projects.

These councils show a keen interest in working together across their boundaries to address pests.

- FBA's delivery partners collaborate with various councils and examples of these stakeholders working effectively with Biosecurity Queensland have included pest projects for: wild dog and pig control; eradication of belly-ache bush from Springsure Creek catchment; sword pear and mother-of-millions survey and control in Central Highlands; and Willows cactus control. These operate generally with council funding or co-funding the projects, undertaking regulatory aspects and taking responsibility for follow-up on the project. Biosecurity Queensland undertakes trails, provides data and expert technical assistance, while CHRRUP conducts survey work, engagement of landholders and public relations, contracting and scheduling of on-ground works, post treatment survey and evaluation and reporting. This model has achieved good results, including identification of a second outbreak of Willows cactus, unknown to Biosecurity Queensland and other stakeholders previously. Similar projects are sought out by other Sub Regional groups, with Capricornia Catchments currently liaising with Rockhampton Regional Council, with FBA's support, to establish an aquatic weeds project. Dawson Catchment Coordinating Association works closely with adjacent local government areas: Western Downs Regional Council and Maranoa Regional Council.

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

FBA provides the following comments:

- There are instances across our region (and the various local government areas) that control of weeds on Crown land has not been effective to date. Ineffective or a lack of control on any public land (owned by any tier of government) undermines the success of neighbouring pest control activities and increases the difficulty of any enforcement or education undertaken with private landholders. Examples include, however are in no way limited to: Fitzroy River (aquatic weeds), River Road (Rockhampton), Canal Creek (Livingstone), Yarwun Corridor from Mt Larcom to Gladstone and State controlled road and rail corridors (includes Harissia cactus to the west, mother-of-millions), Capricorn Highway around Gogango and Fernlees (swordpear) and on State land around the Willows (Willows cactus).
- Consistency in pest control and cooperation between adjacent landowners in addressing weeds across properties is imperative for effective control or prevention. Councils are very willing to work on Crown Land; managers however we believe they are currently not funded to do so and this remains the responsibility of State Government agencies. Cost can also still be prohibitive for any landowner, particularly if a weed infestation is well established, and deter private landowners from action which would otherwise complement weed control activities on neighbouring private and public land. Some landholders refuse to address their weeds if neighbouring land owners are seen to be inactive in their pest management.

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

FBA provides the following comments:

- Pilot projects led by Biosecurity Queensland and other related agencies are appreciated and are seen as vitally important by FBA, councils and other landowners. A current Giant Rats Tail (GRT) project is underway in Livingstone and Gladstone Shire, however these examples of investment are infrequent and there are doubts in regards to how the results of these trials/ project actually affect other control works. No seed funding is provided to support the implementation of new technologies and control measures, to replace equipment, upgrade technology, or to ready an organisation to change its methods (includes training, changes to workplace health and safety, risk assessments etc.). Private landowners would face the same challenges as equipment can be expensive outlays and must be used to their full life cycle to ensure return on investment. The impact of Biosecurity Queensland's work therefore may take a lengthy time to advance weed control, and at times (perhaps due to necessity or resources) do 'react' and place the focus and resources on outbreaks of individual pest species which for local governments is not a sustainable approach that they could adopt long-term. Proactive weed control is insufficient across many local government areas. NRM groups are essential to achieve broad scale control, particularly for the pest species that are not on the priority list for Biosecurity Queensland in any one year.
- Councils have reported via the Capricorn Pest Management Group (CPMG) that Biosecurity Queensland are unfortunately not in a position to attend their meetings and maintain regular contact with Pest Officers. This scenario likely means that State Government may be unaware of pest priorities regionally and also lessens the potential for local and state government to integrate their programs and share information for best effect.
- To support the changes recently adopted as part of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* further education and promotion to landowners is encouraged as a large number of these are still unaware of both the impact of weeds, may be (especially in an urban context) unable to correctly identify weeds and uninformed to their obligations to manage pests on their land. It is noted that all stakeholders could increase their community engagement and education however resources remains a common barrier as mass communications through traditional media are limited in their reach and effect in engaging landowners.

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

FBA provides the following comments:

- Pleasingly, it has been observed that the Queensland Government departments have worked together recently to oversee and implement the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative funding.
Further and deliberate integration of plans between departments and levels of government may be worthwhile considering; as would any additional, regular consultation with each other and industry stakeholders.

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

- The Capricorn Pest Management Group (CPMG) is a great example of a regional body which is seeking to work together to integrate activities and maximise outcomes across borders. Working collaboratively with industry, other regional bodies such as FBA and its partners has significant potential to extend the reach and outcomes of any program. CPMG invites and has done so in the past, State Government staff from Biosecurity Queensland, Natural Resources and Mines and Environment and Heritage Protection to become active participants in this group.
- Increased communication between all levels of government for the management of invasive weeds needs to be improved to maximise achievements, to pool and share resources and to avoid duplication. For example, an Invasive Species Prioritisation Workshop is to be facilitated early this year (2017) by Biosecurity, however, much of this prioritisation work has already been done at a local level (via council planning) and at a regional level (via CPMG in conjunction with FBA and other partners).
- Recent funding available through the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative Funding Round 2 – for Theme 3 - was only able to be applied for by a local government. While the Funding Round was commendable in that it required a collaborative approach between stakeholders such as FBA, industry, local councils and state government agencies, unfortunately only local councils could act as the applicant. Programs that go across local government boundaries would be better placed to allow a regional body to apply, reducing the potential for competition between local governments and to ensure project outcomes and impacts have a broader application relevant to the multiple stakeholders involved in such projects.

As case studies for the inquiry, the committee will examine the impacts and control of three key weeds in Queensland:

- **Prickly Acacia**
- **Giant Rat's Tail grass, and**
- **Fireweed.**

In FBA's region Prickly Acacia and Giant Rats' Tail (GRT) grass, *Harrisia Cactus* and *Parkinsonia* are all pests of high concern to the majority of our six local governments. In early 2015 FBA workshopped pest priorities regionally with our local governments and relevant industry. The resultant list showed GRT on the top five list for Banana Shire, Isaac Region, Gladstone Region (including for industry stakeholders) and Livingstone Shire. Prickly Acacia was selected in the top five pests for Rockhampton Region, Isaac Region and Banana Shire. Another species of prickly weed; *Parkinsonia*, was significant for Central Highlands, Isaac Region, Banana Shire and Central Highlands region.

FBA has pest management projects, working alongside Capricornia Catchments and landowners on the Fitzroy floodplains which would provide a great case study in regards to Prickly Acacia. This program is nearing the end, however delivery has extended over a number of years. Learnings from this project have recognised the important of a long-term approach to weed control supported by property management planning. Personal circumstances, weather impacts and costs of control have limited the ability of landholder contribution and participation at times throughout their projects.

In the Three Rivers areas of Central Queensland, FBA and Capricornia Catchments are undertaking bio control with the UU moth and chemical control to control Prickly Acacia and Parkinsonia. Projects on GRT are limited and as such case studies are not available, however various sites across the region would suit analysis or be foci for trials. These sites include the upper and lower Dawson areas of Wandoan (in particular the headwaters of Juandah Creek), Bauhinia and Theodore, Canal Creek (Livingstone), Yarwun corridor (Gladstone) and River Road (Rockhampton). Further investment to support trials or further research would be welcomed and FBA in conjunction with CPMG and local governments has applied for funding under the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative (Round 2) for funding to conduct a GRT trail at sites across our region.

For any enquiries relating to this submission please contact Rebecca French at Fitzroy Basin Association on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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