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

Dear Sir/Madam

INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS OF INVASIVE PLANTS (WEEDS) AND THEIR CONTROL IN QUEENSLAND

Lockyer Valley Regional Council thanks you for the opportunity to contribute to the investigation by the Agriculture and Environment Committee of the Queensland Parliament into the impacts of weeds and their control in Queensland.

We understand that three invasive plants, namely prickly acacia, giant rat's tail grass and fireweed will be considered as case studies and that the committee will report to Parliament under the following terms of reference:

- 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;
- programs for the control of weeds on Crown land administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines are effective;
- Biosecurity Queensland's weeds programs, including biological controls and new technologies, are adequately funded and effective at controlling weeds;
- environmental programs administered by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection impact favorably on weed control programs administered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and local governments; and
- federal, state and local government weeds programs are coordinated to maximise their achievements and to have a whole of government approach.

The submission will address each of these in turn.

Located approximately 60 km west of Brisbane the Lockyer Valley occupies an area of 2,273 square kilometres. It has a population of 36,000 with the largest townships at Gatton and Laidley. It is one of Australia's leading agricultural production areas supplying 95% of the nation's winter vegetables.

Grazing and animal husbandry is also a significant land use in the valley. Of the three weeds included in the case studies of the investigation giant rat's tail grass and fireweed are locally important pasture weeds that reduce carrying capacity and affect the health of livestock.



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

Section 48 of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* essentially devolves responsibility for the implementation of, and the compliance with, the Act to local governments. As a consequence, active involvement of the State is reduced and the local knowledge and expertise of local government is applied.

While the responsibility for compliance with the Act ultimately rests with the occupier of the land significant obligation remains with local governments to ensure compliance is achieved.

Achievement, or striving for achievement, requires considerable input by local governments: surveying, recording, mapping, administration and enforcement. It is also likely to require extension, facilitation and communication.

As a landholder, or trustee, local governments must also ensure compliance on their own road reserves, public open spaces and areas for conservation. Taken together this can place a very significant burden on a local government particularly those that are poorly resourced. Indeed, for 'small' Councils this burden may be so great that any degree of compliance is impossible to achieve.

This reveals the fundamental problem in the intent of s.48; it fails to recognize the diversity of local governments across Queensland, their differing capacity to undertake their responsibilities and the extent and type of pest management required.

Cognizant of the gap between capability and compliance two options are available. First, resourcing remains inadequate and the control of pest weeds reduces. Given that the Act seeks the comprehensive biosecurity of Queensland this should not be considered. It follows, therefore, that resources must be increased as the second option so that uniformity in capability matches the uniformity inherent in the Act.

There are many ways that increases in capability can be achieved in less well-resourced local governments. These may include sharing of knowledge and methods with other Councils, assistance with technology and assets by the State government and provision of human resources during periods of high workloads such as the unexpected local outbreak of fireweed in 2016. Assistance from the State to better align and coordinate the work of local NRM groups together with asset and resource sharing with neighbouring Councils would make a valuable contribution to the management of pest weeds and the implementation of the Act.

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

Much of the State owned or managed land in the Lockyer Valley is managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services (QPWS) within the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing including the Glen Rock State Forest and Lockyer National



Park. To the best of our knowledge there is no direct relationship between QPWS, these properties and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, however, the management of weeds on these properties is noteworthy.

There has been a history of complaints particularly from property owners downstream from the Glen Rock State Forest regarding weeds including parthenium escaping onto their land. Lockyer Valley Regional Council has written to the respective Minister regarding this matter on a number of occasions.

Council officers have met with their counterparts in the QPWS to discuss improved coordination between weed management activities. These meetings have been cordial and the QPWS officers have shown a willingness to address our concerns. It has been explained that there are very limited resources within the Service and that much of their on-ground activity is focused on fire management.

As a consequence of this fire management is often used as the primary tool for weed management. While this can be effective it is necessarily a blunt and indiscriminate tool where often a focused management method could eliminate the claims of weeds escaping onto neighbouring properties but this maybe difficult to achieve without additional resources or enhanced cooperation of the kind outlined above.

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

It is recognized that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries – specifically Biosecurity Queensland – undertakes weed programs including research into weed ecology and management through a partnership with local governments. Annual payments by contributing local governments help to fund this work.

The research is broad in its approach but includes work on the development of biocontrols for weeds. The use of biocontrols is preferable to the traditional use of herbicides or fire by significantly reducing costs and demands on resources. The research undertaken by Biosecurity Queensland is therefore worthy of pursuit.

To date, the real effectiveness of biocontrols is yet to be established. Those that have been released have had limited impact and confidence in future releases is, as a consequence, subdued. While it is acknowledged that research breakthroughs will always require investment, concern remains that the returns on the investments made by local governments may not be paying the expected dividends.

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

Lockyer Valley Regional Council is unaware of any programs administered by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) that impact favorably, or otherwise, on programs administered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. However, it is noted that DEHP have identified that there is a lack of understanding in the cumulative impacts of pest plants particularly in the context of climate change and loss of ecosystem integrity through clearing and development.



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

The coordination of effort and resources between federal, state and local governments has been a theme throughout this submission. There is a perception – which maybe right or wrong – that the effort to manage weeds across the State of Queensland is disjointed and lacks a cohesive strategy to maximise achievements. There is a strong sense that, while the actors involved in the task of weed management are working hard they are not necessarily pulling in the same direction or at the same time.

Coordination between local governments that share similar challenges facilitated and resourced by the State government has the capacity to make an important contribution. It is vital that coordination of this kind is tasked with achieving real and reportable outcomes. While successes and progress should be recognised through the process of accountability so too should shortfalls in resources, knowledge and coordination. These should be addressed appropriately to maintain the momentum of weed management as anticipated by the *Biosecurity Act 2014*.

The system of competitive grants much favoured by the state and federal governments should also be carefully examined. Rather than providing funding to areas with the greatest need there is a likelihood that, with the competitive grant system, the money will go to the Council or NRM group that drafts the most convincing application. Real knowledge aided by applicable technologies of weed occurrence and resource constraints factored against risk to livestock and human health would ensure that grants will be allocated where they are most needed.

Lines of responsibility within and between state government departments are also confusing and encourage, rather than discourage, the formation of silos. The examples of the state departments mentioned above, together with the subordinate organisations of the QPWS and Biosecurity Queensland generate a sense that there are too many actors involved without genuine and coordinated oversight by one controlling body.

We thank you once more for inviting our contribution to this vitally important issue and look forward to reading your final report and recommendations to the Queensland Parliament.

Yours faithfully



Ian Church
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

