

16 January 2017

Submission to Agriculture and Environment Committee of the 55<sup>th</sup> Queensland Parliament for the  
**Inquiry into the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland**

Submitted by: *Sheila Charlesworth*  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
*Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management*



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Sheila Charlesworth'.

**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**

The function of local government under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* is to ensure that prohibited and restricted<sup>1</sup> biosecurity matter (*invasive biosecurity matter* for the local government's area) are managed within the local government's area in compliance with the Act. The Act also states<sup>2</sup> that local government's local law may provide for the management of invasive animals and invasive plants, whether or not they are prohibited matter or restricted matter, in its local government area.

<sup>1</sup> *Biosecurity Act 2014 (QLD)*, Schedules 1 & 2, pp. 377 – 406, Viewed on January 15, 2017, <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/CURRENT/B/BiosecurityA14.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65

### Are these responsibilities reasonable?

The Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management (BMRG) works collaboratively with local government when delivering weed control projects in the BMRG region. It may be argued, that it is beyond the scope of BMRG to legitimately comment on whether “the responsibilities of local ... under s.48 of the Biosecurity Act 2014 are reasonable, as this pertains to the management and resourcing of local government, which is a matter between State and Local Government.

However, in terms of whether it is reasonable for local government to be expected to manage prohibited and restricted invasive matter in accordance with the Act, as an example, to ensure that the detection of a prohibited weed, e.g., honey locust (*Gleditsia* spp. other than *G. triacanthos*), is reported immediately, then yes, BMRG would agree that this is a reasonable expectation, given local governments involvement, and knowledge of their region.

Local government, through their role of compliance, mapping and control of infestations of restrictive invasive weeds, ought to be aware of the implications of the pest plants on the economic environment, biodiversity (including threatened and endangered species) and environmentally significant areas. It is reasonable and imperative for local government to be involved in the management of invasive animals and invasive plants, in its area, whether specified as restricted or prohibited matter under the Act. This ensures that the factors pertaining to the area, such as climate, economic activities and the protection of biodiversity can be considered, and an appropriate local law formulated to ensure compliance and enforcement, so that the best outcome for that specific region can be obtained.

Under the *Land Protection Act (Pest and Stock Route Management) 2002*, which preceded the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, many plants which are now classified restricted invasive weeds (Category 3) were classified as Class 3 pest plants e.g. cat’s claw creeper. This category meant that local government had the power to<sup>3</sup> issue a pest control notice for a land owner who was not controlling Class 3 weeds on their land, if it was in or adjacent to an environmentally sensitive areas, for example a national park. It would now appear that the only mechanism for protection of environmentally sensitive areas, under the current Act, is if local government adopt appropriate local laws to ensure that the environmentally significant areas are protected from restricted invasive matter which could impact on the sensitive location.

### Are local governments meeting these obligations?

As with all organisations, it would appear that local government faces the problems of competing demands on limited resources.

All Queenslanders have a ‘general biosecurity obligation’ (GBO) under Queensland’s Biosecurity Act 2014 (PDF, 1.5MB).<sup>4</sup> The biosecurity obligation applies to land managers, such as local government, and other government departments such as Department of Natural Resources and Mines, which manage unallocated State lands, and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services.

Under the previous Act, *Land Protection Act (Pest and Stock Route Management) 2002*, Class 3 declared pest plants were to be controlled on land adjacent to environmentally sensitive areas such as national parks. There has been frustration expressed by community groups working to protect environmentally sensitive areas that, Councils have not always complied with regulation in their own natural areas.

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

DNRM is a significant stakeholder and land manager in the BMRG region. BMRG seeks to collaborate with government land managers such as DNRM, and other stakeholders, to ensure co-ordination when delivering projects which protect biodiversity assets, or invasive species control.

DNRM has requested funding from BMRG in the past, for example, for pine wildling control in the area from Maryborough to Tin Can Bay. It would appear from requests such as this, that they are not adequately funded to manage the unallocated State land (USL) estate. Where there are competing demands for the funding, DNRM will always prioritise risk (fire) over weed control. Some USL parcels within the BMRG region provide biodiversity values on par with the conservation estate and should be a priority for management. This is important as vehicle access is mostly unrestricted on USL, which worsens the risk of increased weed dispersal of aggressive weeds such as giant rat's tail grass.

BMRG feels very strongly that land managers, such as DNRM, Queensland Parks and Wildlife, local government and other key stakeholders, all need to be working closely together with BMRG, to identify the priority areas for control and treatment. The funding for the delivery of programs, no matter where the funds come, from should be directed to these priorities for the public good (environmental protection) rather than stipulations about certain tenures not to be worked on i.e. protected areas and council land. This will ensure the best long term outcome for the funding available.

An example of ineffective weed control on Crown Land could be cited in the Great Sandy Strait region. The Lower Mary Land and Catchment Care Group (LMLCCG) have volunteers which undertake weed control on USL and land managed by other government agencies. The Lands Protection officer from Fraser Coast Regional Council has assisted them with necessary permits. However if it was not for the work which LMLCCG undertakes in these island areas, there would be little to no weeding undertaken.

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

<sup>3</sup> *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002 (QLD)*, No. 12, 2002, s.78, p. 50 Viewed on January 15, 2017, <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/ACTS/2002/02AC012.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Biosecurity Act 2014* information (1 July 2016), Viewed on January 15, 2017, <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/biosecurity/about-biosecurity/biosecurity-act-2014/information-and-resources-about-the-act/overview-and-foundation-principles/general-biosecurity-obligation>

BMRG believes that Biosecurity Queensland's weeds programs, including biological controls and new technologies, are not adequately funded.

Through its work with landholders, community groups and local government, BMRG has seen the importance of biological control agents in weed control. In particular the insects which target the invasive vine weeds cat's claw creeper and madeira vine, and the weeds parthenium, blue heliotrope and lantana. These insect biological control agents are successful in reducing the vigour of the weeds, which in turn reduces the reproductive potential of the weeds, and assists in limiting their growth somewhat. They are an important tool in an integrated control program. Whilst Biosecurity Queensland funds the initial research into sourcing and subsequent release of successful agents, there is still much unknown to ensure the success of the insects in the environment. There is a limited support program for a time after the insect's release to the community groups, by Biosecurity Queensland, but there are still many gaps in the knowledge of the insects and the favourable conditions for their success. These gaps in knowledge often need to be filled by the hard work of volunteers from community groups such as Landcare.

If it were not for the hard work of these volunteers, in groups such as Gympie & District Landcare, to name just one group, in the raising and distribution of the insects to landholder, then there would be little to no success to report for the agents. BMRG has funded a local government, a school, a number of Landcare groups and a catchment groups to build biological control raising facilities. These have been built to raise the leaf tying moth (*Hypocosmia pyrochrom*), tingid bug (*Carvalhotingis visenda*), jewel beetle (*Hylaeogena jureceki*), Madeira vine beetle (*Plectonycha correntina*) and blue heliotrope leaf chewing beetles (*Deuterocampta quadrijuga*).

Whilst Biosecurity Queensland has successfully researched biocontrol agents, based on BMRG's experience with weed control programs including biological control facilities, Biosecurity Queensland requires more funding. This would enable them to take the lead on strategic investment into weed control and continued research and development into biocontrol agents and the ability to provide support for a longer period of time after agent's release, something which would be of great assistance to those involved in raising the insects.

**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.**

BMRG has no comment on this point.

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

In the years which BMRG has been involved in the delivery of federal and state governments programs, there has been little evidence of co-ordination between the two levels of government. Surprise funding announcements, with short time frames before submission of the applications, results in the NRM

groups “scrambling” to co-ordinate with local stakeholders through the existing networks, in order to submit an application which will result in a collaborative project. If there is already some level of discussion and co-ordination between the federal and state government, then it would be beneficial if this was increased for truly effective co-ordinated programs.

When BMRG is planning and co-ordinating the delivery of weed control projects, wherever possible, this is done in conjunction with all stakeholders involved in the region and a co-ordinated approach is taken. This involves local government, community groups, government agencies such as QPWS and DNRM, and industry stakeholders e.g. HQP Plantations.

In general, weed programs focussed on natural areas protecting high value biodiversity assets, are underfunded, unrealistic and provide no real long term outcome. Much time and funding is invested into production landscape, however, an increase in investment into the management of the conservation estate (including high value USL and Council reserve) will result in the delivery of real weed mitigation outcomes and improved condition of natural systems. This can occur through an increase in funding and community involvement and developing the programs around long term, strategic and coordinated implementation, monitoring and review.

The Wide Bay Burnett Regional Organisation of Councils (WBBROC) has recently established an Invasive Species committee. This committee will nurture a greater collaboration between neighbouring Councils and encourage a coordinated approach to pest control. BMRG is pleased to be working with the committee, as appropriate, as a supporting partner in this process.

### General comments

Across the region it is agreed that greater attention and funding should be given to Weeds of National Significance.

More funding, co-ordination, and a focus on long-term, strategic pest management across the region, across all tenures is needed, to achieve lasting success.

Many hours of weed control is undertaken by volunteers across the region. Much of what is known about biological control agents and the most suitable conditions for their breeding and release is a result of research undertaken by volunteers in community groups, such as The Greater Mary Association at Tiaro and the Gympie & District Landcare Group. In the Great Sandy Strait area, as another example, without the work of volunteers from the community group in that area, weeds in many locations of high conservation value would not have been controlled, as the government agencies who are the land managers appear to have a very limited input into weed mitigation in the particular locations. Not only does this impact on the asset, but also impacts on the spread of pest plants.

Weed prevention is foundational to any weed control program. It is felt by some community groups within the BMRG region, that across government departments, including within local government, that there is, at times an inadequate Integrated Weed Management approach. There appears, to be minimal environmental impact planning as different departments, such as state main roads, local government roads, stormwater and plants such as sewerage appear to not have a collaborative approach, undertaking projects with minimum consultation with other departments. Possibly this is the result of the removal of some of the “green/red tape”.

It has been noted by one of the coastal community groups that *Setaria sphacelata* appears to have slipped “under the radar” as a weed of concern, as it has become a significant problem in coastal wetlands.

Weed eradication in a natural area can take up to 10 years. In the case of managed natural reserves in urban areas, it is ongoing, due to their close proximity to continuous impacts such as garden waste dumping, infrequent mowing or over mowing / slashing in wetlands, as well as seed spread via birds, wind, and water. Even weed mitigation programs which are funded for as long as three years will potentially be wasted money if there is no longer term follow up. Staff in local government, involved in weed mitigation, including the parks and gardens department, need to have adequate training, in Conservation and Land Management, so that there would be a proper understanding of the long term impacts of weed infestations.

### Weeds for Case Studies

#### Prickly acacia

Prickly acacia (*Vachellia nilotica*), is monitored by councils and landholders in the region away from the coast. BMRG has partnered with landholders and QPWS staff in the North Burnett and with landholders in the Miriam Vale area for control of prickly acacia. Local Government monitors incursions of this pest plant, as it will infest waterways and competes with grass growth. It has the potential to form impenetrable thickets if left untreated. Experience has shown that the herbicide Access® combined with diesel, applied using the basal bark technique, is an effective control method. However, it has limitations as it is not suitable for use where plants are growing near waterways, due to the risk of the chemical entering the waterway. It can also be difficult to access the trunk of the tree to apply to the chemical due to low growing branches.

#### Giant rat’s tail grass (GRT)

This Weed of National Significance (WONS) weed is well established in the coastal areas of BMRG, and is becoming an emerging issue in the inland areas, such as the North Burnett. BMRG collaborated with Bundaberg Regional Council to undertake a research project regarding the potential biological control agent for GRT, crown rot fungus, *Nigrospora oryzae*. Although GRT’s relation Para grass appears to be susceptible to the fungus, on it’s own, the fungus does not appear to be an effective biocontrol agent to control GRT.

Further investigation is needed regarding its invasion of natural areas, as inappropriate fire regime in these areas results in high disturbance, the result being that the GRT readily infests and invades these areas. This is of particular concern in areas where it is not yet an established pest plant, such as the North Burnett region.

**Fireweed**

Another WONS weed, BMRG has not worked directly with groups in the control of Fireweed. However, it is of concern in the southern part of the BMRG region and it is established in parts of the Gympie Regional Council area. It is an emerging problem and BMRG understands it is being monitored by local government in that area.