Abstract  The Noxious Weeds Advisory Committee makes recommendations to the NSW Minister for Agriculture, on weed management policy. The committee largely includes managers of public and private lands. In 1998-99 the committee allocated $6.4 million to assist local control authorities to control noxious weeds.

To ensure programs are cooperative, the committee now gives priority to funding weed control, as part of regional plans. The committee also funds short term projects to demonstrate success in weed control. Projects funded have increased training, extension, coordination and demonstration of innovative weed control techniques.

INTRODUCTION

In New South Wales weed control is coordinated by local government under the general oversight of NSW Agriculture. The State government provides grants to councils.

A regional planning approach to weed management is often advocated. It was supported by the recent review of weeds by the Victorian Parliament (ENRC, 1998). Under the Noxious Weeds Act 1993, the Minister of Agriculture established the Noxious Weeds Advisory Committee to make recommendations on the declaration of weeds and grants to local control authorities and public authorities. The committee membership include nominees from the key stakeholders including the NSW Farmers Association, Local Government Association, Shires Association, NSW Conservation Council, Nursery Industry Association of NSW, State Rail, State Forests, National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Agriculture, Environmental Protection Authority, Rural Lands Protection Boards, the Department of Land and Water Conservation and a community nominee.

The Committee developed the NSW Weeds Strategy, which was adopted by the Minister for Agriculture in 1997. In this paper we report on how the Committee is ensuring we get the maximum value for the money provided to councils by encouraging local authorities to take a regional approach.

COORDINATING WEED CONTROL

The New South Wales Government provides councils with funding for noxious weed control. More than $6.4 million per annum is targeted to assist local control authorities such as shires, municipalities and weed county councils to fulfil their statutory role in coordinating noxious weed control programs within their areas and on councils land such as roads.

The Government provides this assistance to:-

• Provide a network of competent weed control coordinators.
• Assist in providing quarantine protection by systematically surveying and inspecting land.
• Provide the infrastructure for identification and rapid control of new weeds.
• Maintain and improve the competency of weed control staff through continuing training and educational programs.
• Minimise the spread of weeds from a local control area or region to other regions of the State.
• Ensure best practice weed management is adopted.

Inspectorial assistance Under the funding arrangements, we provide grants to assist councils coordinate weed control; conduct surveys; and inspect land within the control area.

This assistance goes to local control authorities to employ a weed control coordinators and weed officers. The role of these officers is to:

• Plan strategic weed management programs for the control area.
• Integrate control programs with other activities within the region.
• Conduct systematic surveys and inspections of land within the control area.
• Maintain records and report on the distribution and abundance of noxious weeds.
• coordinate the implementation of weed management plans, including control programs of private landowners, the council and government agencies.

• implement the Noxious Weeds Act 1993.

Funding levels are based on the needs of the control area, based on the area, value of agricultural production, number of rural holdings and number of properties.

**Treating high-priority weeds** In many cases the reality of what is achievable is quite different to the action specified under noxious weed declarations (see Menz and Auld 1977).

Regional approaches to weed management are advocated to assist in coordination of the large number of participants involved in weed management, and assist in development and implementation of regional weed control programs (Minister for Agriculture, 1997, ENRC, 1998). In NSW enforced control or other provisions of the Noxious Weeds Act 1993 are only recommended where the actions fits with a local, regional or state plans.

Similarly the funding of weed control on roads is linked to regional plans. Noxious weed control on roads is an important component of most weed control plans. Under the arrangements, councils can apply for **Operational Grants** to assist in the treatment of specific weeds on council roads and other land.

Priority is given to implementing agreed State and Regional Weed Management Plans. The plans run for three to five years.

Assistance of up to a dollar for each dollar contributed by councils may be provided for communication, education, training, publicity and treatment of specific weeds on local council land, waterways and roads as part of an approved State or Regional Plan. Assistance may also be provided to help implement local weed control plans.

In allocating assistance for each State, regional and local weed management plan, priority goes to plans where the assistance reduces over time rather than to plans requiring long-term assistance. We also look for plans where the current range and impact of the weed is small compared to the potential range and impact. Plans must be technically feasible, comprehensive, include a substantial contribution from local control authorities and use the most efficient long term weed control strategies. Plans must also be developed in close liaison with adjoining control authorities and public authorities.

Over time the aim is to have comprehensive management plans for all weed control assisted by State funds.

**Cooperative arrangements** To encourage cooperative arrangements the Minister established the Regional Weed Action Program. Under the program funds of between $20,000 to $200,000 are available to groups of control authorities for short-term, innovative projects. All projects funded under the program must produce clearly measurable outcomes and have substantial contributions from participant control authorities.

Preference is given to projects that have regional or State benefits and that: address issues raised in the New South Wales Weed Strategy or the National Weeds Strategy. Projects that develop regional weed management plans, address emerging weed problems of potential major significance, demonstrate new approaches to coordinated weed control and improve the skills base of local control authorities are funded.

Projects funded under this program have developed weed management training for local government, employed regional coordinators to work with councils to develop regional plans, and investigate improved mapping and recording systems.

**Regional Advisory Committees** Regional advisory committees and groups are designed to help coordinate control of weeds, assist in training of weed officers, and develop regional weed management plans. The New South Wales Government provides small, specific-purpose grants to assist in the establishment and running of regional advisory committees.

**Cooperative Arrangements** Many small councils are unable to employ a weed control coordinator. The New South Wales Government provides assistance to establish cooperative arrangements between councils and control authorities. This assistance can include the establishment or setting up of grants.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The changes already evident as a result of the new funding arrangements include an increase in the number of full-time equivalent weed officer employed by local control authorities from 87 in 1996-97 to 105 in 1998-99. The majority of the State is now served by one or more regional advisory committee as a result of the program. The funding arrangements has also resulted in groups of councils, public land managers and
community groups developing 42 regional weed management plans to target weed control actions.

REFERENCES


