Reflections on weeds and water – another NWI?

Bobbie Brazil
Land and Water Australia, PO Box 2182, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2601, Australia

Summary  Australia is focused on its environmental health as never before. Natural resource management is the business of the 21st century ensuring this continent can in 100, 200 or 2 million years provide a secure base for the lives, livelihoods and landscapes of our descendents. We are exhorted to do so in the research environment by edicts from the Prime Minister’s office seeking a ‘sustainable Australia’. Our response is interesting. Water assumes a value above all else. Certainly it affects us all. As the Dalai Lama observed – ‘water is one truth’. Yet weeds, too, touch us all. They are the third arm of that unholy trinity of certainty in this life – death, taxes and weeds. They overwhelm and dismay us in their fecundity. The $4 billion cost of weeds nationally, annually is quoted constantly. Dr. Rick Roush tells us that weeds are 10 times the problem of salinity yet receive only one twentieth of the funding. The National Water Initiative (NWI) attracted a feeding frenzy of media. Now 500 G litres and $500 million will flow down the Murray River one way or another, and there is more, much more, to come. When will the wilful, wretched weed inspire us to this level of patriotism? A National Weed Initiative! The WONS (Weeds of National Significance) are wan indeed by comparison. The frenzy, orgy even, of journalistic indulgence on the water business simply disappears down the plug hole when it comes to weeds. Perhaps the real question is how do we alter the image of the weed to make its destruction a symbol of our national pride? In the commercial world, conceptualising and branding products to best suit the market is everyday and essential. Some principles emerge that could apply equally to this rebranding of the weed.