Coordinating and prioritising weed management in the Riverina

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Summary  The lack of a coordinated approach in the past has seriously undermined the regional effectiveness of noxious weed management in the Riverina region. This issue is currently being addressed by Eastern and Western Riverina Noxious Weeds Advisory Groups (ERNWAG and WRNWAG). These two organisations operate in an area that extends from Tumut in the east, Wentworth in the west, Carrathool in the north with the Murray River being the southern boundary, a total of 27 shires. Members include representatives from various government agencies and other land managers.

Over the last three years the ERNWAG and WRNWAG have developed a region-wide process for prioritising noxious weed management activities. Members agreed on criteria they feel are important when determining how to best allocate resources for weed management in the region. Due to similarities in approach and the use of similar criteria, Rod Randall’s System (Priority System – PS) was adapted to prioritise the region’s weeds. This process objectively takes into account weed biological and ecological characteristics, distribution, possibility of control, affordability and benefit-cost ratio to efficiently target resources on a regional basis. Simply stated it is an objective method to best allocate resources to prevent the spread of weeds. The need for this process has been long overdue and addresses the current inconsistency in the approach, priorities, and regional effectiveness of noxious weed management in the Riverina.

All 27 Riverina Council Weed Officers have put every weed declared in the Region, as well as a few new and emerging weeds not yet declared, through the PS. Due to the size and diversity of the region, four sub-regions were created, based on climatic conditions and land use. A priority list of weeds was then collated for each sub-region based on the scores provided by the Weed Officers. It is the intention to use the PS as the basis of a Regional Weed Strategy (RWS) for the Riverina. The next phase of this process, community consultation, is important to ensure ownership of the strategy.

Over the last six months the PS has been used to form the basis of the Lower Murray-Darling (LMD) RWS, in the western part of the region. The PS was taken to the community and agency staff in the LMD for endorsement. Goals, objectives and actions were also determined from the consultation; these and the PS providing the basis of the five year Weed Strategy. Feedback was very positive with all attendees agreeing on the process to objectively allocate resources based on the weed priority list.

The Strategy, now in draft form, provides a comprehensive perspective for weed management in the Lower Murray-Darling Catchment (LMDC), giving clear directions for community and government investment in weed management. It recognises the diversity of the region and endeavours to meet the needs of all stakeholders by addressing particular weed issues for the following areas – horticultural, rangelands, cropping and riparian areas. It considers weed species that affect the natural environment, agricultural production and social and cultural values. It complements other local, regional and state management plans, legislation and programs and is intended to be used by any individual, group or agency involved in weed management in the LMDC.

The next step for WRNWAG and ERNWAG is to extend the community consultation and further foster partnerships with other land managers in the rest of the region. The LMDC workshops will form the basis of the community consultation process across the remainder of the Riverina.

The major outcome of this whole process will be all 27 Shires, and other stakeholders in weed management, working together to protect the Riverina region.

Keywords  Prioritisation, regional weed strategy, weed management, coordination, WRNWAG, RMAP, Lower Murray-Darling Catchment, Riverina, blueprint, weed officers, community consultation.

REFERENCES