

## Time to get serious: a review of weed management in New South Wales

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**Summary** The New South Wales Natural Resources Commission is an independent body established by the *New South Wales Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* to help government find evidence-based solutions to complex natural resource problems. The Natural Resources Commission undertook a comprehensive, independent evaluation of weed management arrangements in New South Wales from September 2013 through May 2014. The review included extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders including regional tours, public meetings, and release of an Issues Paper and Draft Report with over 300 submissions received in total.

Weeds have a significant impact on environmental, economic and social well-being in New South Wales, with current estimates indicating that they cost the New South Wales economy almost \$2 billion annually, not including social and environmental impacts (Kalisch-Gordon 2014). Agricultural businesses incur an estimated \$1.3 – \$1.6 billion of these costs (Kalisch-Gordon 2014), which represents approximately 10 per cent of the value of farm gate agricultural production in New South Wales (Wales 2012). Public expenditure on targeted weed management, including from local government, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Catchment Action New South Wales and Australian Government grants totals approximately \$60 million annually (Kalisch-Gordon 2014). This figure does not capture broader land management funding, which has a weed management component.

The Natural Resources Commission identified strengths within the current New South Wales weed management programs including delivery of educational, capacity building and inspection services by local control authorities<sup>1</sup>, mandatory inspections of private land, and promising examples of regional and local responses to weed infestations based on shared responsibility. These provide a strong foundation upon which to build. Maintaining connections between landholders and local control authorities is particularly important for facilitating effective widespread weed management.

Despite the many dedicated people committed to managing weeds, there is still considerable room for improvement. The Natural Resources Commission found that the effectiveness of weed management is variable across New South Wales and that data currently collected is insufficient to fully understand the extent and density of weed infestations or inform planning. The different requirements imposed on public and private land managers have created angst in the community and led to fragmented approaches where consistency of efforts across landscapes is critical for effective management. The review identified examples of duplicated effort, limited control of high-risk weed pathways, ineffective enforcement procedures, and a lack of accountability at all scales.

To address the findings, the Natural Resources Commission developed recommendations aimed at reducing future costs by improving prevention, early detection and rapid response, ensuring consistent compliance across tenures, strengthening control of high-risk pathways, and rebuilding research and development capacity.

The draft report is publicly available on the Natural Resources Commission website at <http://nrc.nsw.gov.au>. The final report has been submitted to the New South Wales Government and will be made available on the Natural Resources Commission website when it is released by Government.

**Keywords** Weed management, shared responsibility, economic cost of weeds, Natural Resources Commission, weed review.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Control Authorities have a responsibility under the *Noxious Weeds Act 1993* (NSW) for inspections and enforcement on private lands as well as control of noxious weeds on their own lands. Local Control Authorities are in most cases local councils, but a local council may designate another authority to carry out its duties. Local Control Authorities currently include single councils, county councils, weed authorities, the Western Lands Commission and the Lord Howe Island Board.

REFERENCES

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