

INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM

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Summary Environmental weeds and feral animals are identified clearly as one of the most significant threats to the conservation of Australia's biodiversity. Accordingly, the management of invasive animals, plants and marine organisms are key components of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. The Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA), through the Invasive Species Program, will coordinate action on these issues.

Priorities for the Invasive Species Program are to:

- develop and implement national Threat Abatement Plans for species listed as key threatening processes under the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992*,
- develop a comprehensive framework for the management of invasive species in the context of maintenance and recovery of the Australian landscape, and
- involve all key interest groups to develop partnerships between governments, the community and individuals to address invasive species impact in a whole landscape context.

At present the three components of the Invasive Species Program, feral pests, environmental weeds and marine invasive species, are at quite different stages of development. The feral animal program within ANCA was established three years ago and is well developed. At present the weed section of the Invasive Species Program is focussed on two areas: development with AQIS of a system to control weed imports and obtaining baseline information on the current state of knowledge of the impact of environmental weeds on biodiversity. Marine pest issues are not well understood at present and ANCA is currently liaising with the Centre for Research in Marine Pests at CSIRO, Hobart to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the current status and issues surrounding the management of marine pests.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEEDS

The environmental weed program within the Invasive Species Program (ISP) will coordinate a national cooperative approach to manage the impact of environmental weeds on Australia's flora and fauna. Aspects of the National Weeds Strategy that cover the environmental impact of weeds will be an important component of the ISP.

As responsibility for environmental weeds is new to the ISP, a process was developed to enhance strategic priority setting for the program. In the first instance, a review of current knowledge was conducted. The ISP defined several areas that warranted investigation. These were:

- the development of standard criteria and methodology to assess the impact of environmental weeds,
- the efficacy of selected biological controls;
- the interaction between environmental weed types and total grazing pressure,
- the regional/bioregional significance of environmental weed types such as introduced grasses and rangeland shrubs,
- the status of selected weed species, and
- the scope for community involvement in off-reserve and on-reserve management of environmental weeds.

The majority of these projects were short-term pilot studies, to assist in the direction of the environmental weed program for 1996/97. The review of current knowledge will lead to either identification of key knowledge gaps or best practice management.

FERAL ANIMALS

Predation by foxes and feral cats and competition and land degradation by rabbits and feral goats are listed as key threatening processes under the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992*. The Act requires the preparation and implementation of Threat Abatement Plans (TAPs) to enable nationally coordinated management of those processes listed. The TAP for foxes is expected to be finalised by the end of 1996, with the remaining TAPs for feral cats, rabbits and feral goats to be completed in 1997.

OVERVIEWS

The Invasive Species Program publishes an overview series which aims to clarify whether introduced species have a significant detrimental effect on nature conservation values. Available in the series to date are overviews on the impacts of feral cats, salmonids, feral and managed honeybees and the northern Pacific seastar, *Asterias amurensis*, on native species.