

NATIONAL WEEDBUSTER WEEK: THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Abstract National Weedbuster Week (NWW) has entered its third year and is increasing in momentum. It has evolved from a Queensland statewide project to become a successful national program with support from all levels of Government, the community, the Cooperative Research Centre for Weed Management Systems (CRC) and industry. NWW attempts to increase the profile of weeds in Australia, and improve links between Australian community groups, Government, and industry that are involved in weed management or aspects of it. NWW relies heavily on acceptance from these groups and organisations. The 1998 NWW program was successful in generating media exposure and participation from the Australian community, with thousands of Australians working with 400 different groups in over 600 events. It is estimated that the media exposure generated equated to more than \$ 370 000 in the weeks preceding and during NWW. NWW case studies from community group organisers and proposed future directions are presented.

INTRODUCTION

NWW commenced in Queensland in 1994 with National Landcare Funding and support from rural industry when it was identified that there was a need to educate the community about weeds and their effects on primary industries and the environment. It was trialed in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory in 1996 and complemented their past Weed Awareness weeks. It has now expanded to become a national program in 1997.

A national coordinator was appointed with the support of the National Weeds Strategy Executive Committee through Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) funding for a period of three years. The national coordinator tasks include coordinating NWW, developing and coordinating the development of National Weed Information Products and promoting National Weeds Strategy initiatives. The National Weedbuster Week Committee (NWWC) comprises of a member from each State and Territory and three CRC education officers.

NWW is an effective tool to increase the profile of weeds, and to entice others to join existing community groups involved in aspects of weed management. The concept revolves around fun activities whilst reducing the effects of weeds on the environment, primary industries and society. By jointly producing cost-effective weed information products that are linked to the NWW theme they can be promoted at that time. These products are then available at other times for on-ground programs.

THE PAST

NWW Concept Development General marketing principles outline the need for the four P's: Product, Place, Promotion and People. Every time we buy anything from a hamburger to a soft drink the marketing of particular items (tangible products or objects) may be influencing us. A question then arises: "Can this approach be undertaken for weed awareness?" The answer is, it can by using Social Marketing.

Social Marketing markets a concept for social change that is often referred to as an intangible product. Social Marketing is divided into four components: *social product, target audiences, methods of delivery and evaluation*. Beck (1996a) explains the use of Social Marketing and NWW as a tool in a Queensland Weed Awareness Project.

Kotler and Roberto (1989) have defined social products as the combination of ideas, practices and tangible objects that need to be marketed, branded and packaged for acceptance and adoption by the target audience. Beck (1996a,b) has refined these social product components for weed awareness. The social product idea section is further expanded by Beck (1996a) into beliefs, attitudes and values. The practice section predominantly focuses on action and behaviour and relies on links to existing on-ground government and community programs such as Bushcare, Landcare and green corps. The tangible objects (products) of the social product for NWW can include existing weed awareness material, new weed awareness material, NWW promotional material or Woody Weed the NWW character, and should be linked to the NWW theme where possible. By involving industry and the target audience in weed awareness material development (Figure 1) it is believed two issues may be addressed. The first revolves around the likelihood of funding for the material from alternative sources that mutually benefit. The second is the increased adoption of material by the target audience as a result of their involvement in its production.

NWW target audiences have been identified through market research by Beck (1996b) and include rural and urban landholders, industry, media and personnel.

NWW information delivery methods are broken into:

- direct contact through presentations and attendance at industry fairs and major field days (early adopters or event organisers) to induce flow on
- development and distribution of articles and supporting material that meet target audience needs
- use of mass media through a major event such as NWW to entice others to join.

These methods of delivery are supported by Carter and Batte (1993) who found that farm magazines, books and bulletins, newsletters, personal contact and field

days were the most preferred from a selection of nineteen education delivery methods. Hopkins *et al.* (1993) has also shown that 25 per cent of the farming sector information uptake is through the use of mass media.

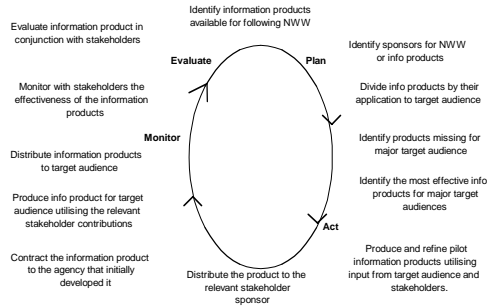


Figure 1. The process being trailed by the NWWC in the development of weed awareness products

Evaluation is undertaken at the event organisers' level and at program level. Results are linked together to ensure that they can be used to improve NWW at all levels.

THE PRESENT

NWW in Action NWW is now recognised as a useful tool to raise weed awareness by those involved in weed management. Some 620 events/activities were undertaken throughout Australia in 1998. This was an increase of over a forty per cent from the 1997 figure (440).

Table 1. A breakdown of group types and numbers.

Organisations	No.
Aboriginal Community Groups	3
Aust. Trust for Con. Vol. (ATCV)	4
Business outlets (SBS IAMA, Mitre 10 [Northern], McDonalds [NSW, ACT])	>400
Bushcare groups	23
Conservation Groups	22
“Friends of” groups	30
High Schools	21
Landcare and Coastcare Groups	68
Local Governments	71
Primary Schools	122
Scouts, Girl Guides and Brownies	27
State/Territory Government Depts	20
Understorey Management Groups	1
Universities	1
Waterwatch	1
Weed Science Societies	4
Total number of groups	> 800

Early contact and information delivery to NWW early adopters resulted in interest from a variety of groups. Groups either conducted their own events or joined other groups to share their resources (Table 1). Thousands of Australians attended, participated or visited a NWW event. The group activities are considered a NWW component where everyday Australians visit and join in local community activities. Activities across Australia included:

- on-ground weeding and replanting activities,
- displays in shopping centres, Local Government Offices, libraries and stores,
- seminars,
- field days and machinery days,
- media promotion,
- weed identification workshops,
- weed fashion parades, and
- competitions.

Information delivery to target audiences through local, State and national mass media resulted in articles

being promoted in over 200 segments leading up to and during NWW. The total known media exposure equated to greater than \$379 000 and it is estimated Australians saw, read or heard something about weeds and NWW over 1.5 million times between mid-September and mid-October. Over 5 hours of television and radio coverage on programs such as the Midday Show, Sale of the Century, Gardening Australia, Landline, ABC Radio National Network, gardening, rural and radio news programs and community service announcements resulted. Over 14 pages of print in magazines and newspapers complemented this across Australia.

Tangible weed awareness objects that were developed included NWW promotional material that focussed on *Identification for a Weed Free Nation*, posters directed towards weed identification aspects, weed bookmarks and competitions that focussed on weed identification.

State/Territory NWW Case Studies

New South Wales

A combination of over seventy school children, scouts, teachers and parents attended the Merriwa NWW event. Merriwa Shire Council, NSW Agriculture and National Parks and Wildlife linked together to host the event. The NWW competitions that were conducted attracted high quality entries from the children. Following the launch, a weed walk took place along the Merriwa River and weed experts were on hand to answer enquiries from participants. The local newspaper was supportive of the event and featured an article about activities that took place.

Northern Territory

The First Berrimah Joey Scout Group was rewarded with the National Event Organisers competition second prize. The group joined forces with their local Parks and Wildlife Commission officer to hold a Weed Awareness Day at Knuckey Downs. As part of their activities a booklet titled “Weedbuster’s Noxious Weeds” was launched. Agnotes of weeds from the area and a questionnaire that assessed local community weed awareness were included. The booklet was distributed to every household in the community. Local businesses were also involved as prize sponsors for the NWW competitions directed at school children.

Queensland

Fitzroy Shire Council joined forces with local businesses to develop a WeedOut information pack for landholders. A Fitzroy Shire Councillor and the Chair

to the local Pest Management Committee launched the pack during NWW. The WeedOut information pack identifies some major noxious weeds, control methods, a property infestation map and a checklist of actions to monitor weed management progress. The pack was posted to each rural landholder in the shire at no cost. With local media promotional assistance the event attracted over 120 people, which was a significant increase from the 1997 NWW event attendance of 30.

South Australia

In South Australia, the Kangaroo Island schooling community and Department of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs were very active. Over 450 students and teachers from three schools participated in weed removal and revegetation activities on a number of sites. These sites will continue to be the focus of subsequent NWW events. Plans are also now in place to develop a herbarium from each site of indigenous plants, noxious plants, and garden escapees. This will be supplemented with the collection and propagation of native seed for the future regeneration of these sites. With assistance from Primary Industries and Resources South Australia a set of weed identification slides were provided to the teachers and used to increase their weed identification skills.

Tasmania

The Miandetta Primary School in Devonport was rewarded with the National Event Organisers prize (sponsored by Roundup) for their NWW efforts. The school worked closely with Mr Phil Murray from the Devonport City Council and school activities included a seminar and weed clean up at a local shire park. The children took their new knowledge home and explained to their parents which invasive plants lurked in their gardens as well as making presentations to other students at assembly. The teacher believes that the children have a greater personal interest and responsibility to the park and aim to visit their local arboretum and spread the message of weeds in the native environment via other student activities. As a result of NWW and the good work of their local Landcare Coordinator the school has now continued their involvement in environmental issues and have also joined the "Adopt a patch" program.

Western Australia

Through collaboration between Agriculture Western Australia, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), Environmental Weeds Action Network and the Friends of Kings Park the National

launch took place at Kings Park in Perth. Over 150 people attended the official launch conducted by the Hon. Dexter Davies. Other activities included a weed information display, weeding activities, weed walks and talks and the performance of a new Weedbuster song. Children involved in the CALM bushrangers program assisted the Friends of Kings Park with weed removal activities. An interview by Mr Scalzo from the Friends of Kings Park on Australia All Over on that morning attracted a number of people to the event.

THE FUTURE

The NWWC investigated the future direction of the program based on the original broad aims and information gathered from event organisers. The top priorities for the future of weed awareness through NWW were to:

- Develop integrated/coordinated products,
- Establish a national communication plan that increases the profile of weeds in the community,
- Increase sponsorship money (on-going sponsorship) using sponsorship packages,
- Establish strong links with industries and international organisations for mutual benefits,
- Increase emphasis in the teaching sector, and
- Develop clear evaluation and monitoring programs (NWWC, 1998).

It is also proposed that a future reference group consisting of government, industry and non-government be established. The reference group will assist the NWWC on overall national direction at an operational and strategic level to ensure the continued success of NWW (Department of Natural Resources, 1998).

The success of the program relies on the reference group and other Government, community and Industry groups to input and share resources needed for the development of weed awareness material, their promotion and NWW activity coordination. The success of NWW also relies on the continued commitment from the community, all levels of Government and industry to link NWW activities and themes for mutual benefit.

CONCLUSION

NWW will continue to grow as more groups at all levels that include government, community and private enterprise see the value in conducting and promoting weed events at one major point in the year. Community, Industry, Government and NWW can mutually benefit by linking programs that target different motivating interests of individuals to result in overall understanding of resource management and sustainability issues whilst incorporating the weeds issue.

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