

Management of weeds on state lands – a new policy and planning approach

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Summary State government departments are responsible for the management of large areas of land – national parks, native and plantation forests, transport corridors and unallocated land. Non-native weeds (and pest animals) are either established on these lands or are potential pests. They have an impact directly on the area and as a source of reproductive parts for spread to adjacent land. Spread to adjoining farmland, bushland and near urban residential areas is a major issue for rural industries and communities. Policy and planning initiatives have been introduced in Queensland to address the problem.

A State policy has been developed and approved by Cabinet to establish the State level and regional/local level pest planning requirements for land-owning departments. The policy also establishes the State Land Pest Management Committee (SLPMC), an inter-departmental policy committee. The State level planning requirement and the establishment of the SLPMC were later incorporated into new legislation passed by the Queensland Parliament in 2002. Whole of state weed (and pest animal) strategic plans for each major land-owning department have been developed to draft stage.

Keywords State lands, weed policy, weed planning.

INTRODUCTION

In Queensland, State government departments are responsible for the management of large areas of land – including national parks, native and plantation forests, transport corridors and unallocated land. The five largest landholding government agencies manage over 14 million hectares spread over multiple bioregions and with significant conservation, cultural and economic values.

Close to one quarter (2.8 million hectares) of this area is under lease on State Forests and Protected Areas. This places responsibilities for declared weed management with the lessees but the low productivity of the land and variable term of the leases means that it is not economically viable for many lessees to fully implement weed management.

Introduced weeds (and pest animals) are present over large areas of State land and there is significant potential for new and existing weeds to spread.

All government agencies in Queensland are required under the *Rural Lands Protection Act 1985* to control declared plants (and declared animals) on land under their control but enforcement cannot be carried out as it can on private lands.

Weeds impact on the conservation of flora and fauna, recreational activities, aesthetic values, forest production and road safety. Spread of seeds and other reproductive parts of weeds to adjoining farmland, bushland and near urban residential areas is a major issue for rural industries and communities.

Local government, rural industries and community stakeholders have repeatedly raised concerns related to the perceived lack of active management of pests on State land, and equitable attention paid to pest management planning. State agencies do conduct pest management but it is seen as inadequate. There is also a need to make better use of available resources and to attract greater resources for pest management on State land. This paper reports action taken to address these issues.

METHODS

A one-year State Land Pest Management project was established in the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines (NR&M) with a full time project officer (Mr. J. Willmott). The project was supported with a project team of a policy officer from each agency. These policy officers researched issues within their own department, provided feedback on options, and formed part of a reference panel of key stakeholders. Small project teams were also established in regions across Queensland to design case study projects at the regional, local and property scale (these projects are not reported in this paper).

Key actions were developed and implemented using consultation across State agencies and external stakeholders, including with the Rural Lands Protection Board, an advisory council to the Minister. Established procedures were used for obtaining Queensland Cabinet approval of a policy.

A legislation team developing new pest management for Queensland considered the policy developed in the project and incorporated key components in a new Act via legislative development processes.

RESULTS

State land pest management project Three key targets were established in the State Land Pest Management project:

- Development of a Queensland State Policy on the management of pests on State lands.
- Establishment of a State Land Pest Committee.
- Conduct of trial projects in the field for State land pest management (not reported in this paper).

State policy A State Policy titled 'Queensland Government Policy on the Management of Pests on State Land' was approved by the Queensland Cabinet in February 2000. The policy established a framework which will:

- improve coordination and consistency of pest management across tenures;
- reduce the adverse impacts of declared pests on land and water bodies managed by the agencies listed below, and minimise their spread to neighbouring properties;
- target resources and efforts to strategic priorities;
- demonstrate a commitment to developing partnerships between government agencies, local government, community and industry; and
- improve public perceptions of the Queensland Government as a responsible land manager and good neighbour.

The Policy Statement is:

'It is the policy of the Queensland Government that five government agencies will develop, adopt and implement agency strategies and plans to control pests on land and water bodies for which they have direct management responsibility. These agencies are the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Primary Industries Forestry, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Rail and Department of Main Roads.

A high degree of consistency and alignment between agency strategies and pest management plans and Local Government Area Pest Management Plans is essential'.

(Note that Mines has now been added to the Department of Natural Resources and that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is part of the Environmental Protection Agency).

The policy includes the actions necessary to implement the policy.

1. *State agency strategies* Each Government agency is to prepare a State-wide strategy for pest management. These strategies are to provide the strategic framework for the implementation of the policy,

including direction on the process for development of pest management plans.

2. *State agency plans* Each Government agency is to develop three-year spatial pest management plans for their own land and water bodies. These plans should explain how the pest management strategy will be operationalised, and cover issues such as staffing, budget and reporting arrangements.

The geographic scale of these plans can vary from the region, district or local level to the individual property. The choice of appropriate scale will generally be determined by factors such as the area and use of State land, and existing planning processes and institutional arrangements.

The policy recognises that it may be practical for a Government agency to develop a pest management plan to cover several properties within a local government area, catchment or bioregion. Government agencies are to consult with their neighbours with a view to coordinating pest control at the local level.

3. *Coordination* The State Land Pest Management Committee is to oversee the implementation of the policy, and provide an ongoing forum for inter-departmental coordination of strategic pest issues and multi-agency initiatives.

Government agencies are to ensure that their representation on the Committee continues. The policy requires that the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Rural Lands Protection Board are invited to be members of the committee.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is required to initiate the development of a regional coordination network for State and local government officers, to encourage sharing of expertise and collaboration.

4. *Links to other planning* Local Government Area Pest Management Plans (LGAPMP) are being developed and so will assist in providing direction for Government agency planning. Representatives from Government agencies with major landholdings in the local government areas are to participate in the local government area pest management planning process.

Regional and catchment-based strategies and plans (such as Regional Strategies for Natural Resource Management and Biodiversity Conservation, Landcare and Integrated Catchment Management Plans) often incorporate pest management strategies.

Government agencies are to liaise with regional and local natural resource management groups, and provide input to the development and review

of strategies, to ensure that broader policy direction and strategic priorities are considered.

State land pest management committee This committee was established early in the project. It was formed with a minimum of one senior policy officer from each of five agencies. NR&M provided representation for the management of its State land, and provided the Chairmanship and secretarial support from the pest policy unit.

The committee continues to operate and after the approval of the State Policy, the membership was expanded to include the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Chair, Rural Lands Protection Board. The committee adopted the following roles:

1. Monitor the implementation of the *Queensland Government Policy on the Management of Pests on State Land*.
2. Monitor the implementation and review of State Pest Management Strategies developed by Government agencies.
3. Foster inter-departmental coordination on strategic pest management issues and facilitate the development of multi-agency initiatives to address priority issues.
4. Develop multi-agency funding initiatives to improve the management of pests on State land and ensure new and existing resources are effectively utilised.
5. Enhance networks between Government agencies, local governments and industry groups in Queensland to maintain communication between key stakeholders of pest management.
6. Identify and enhance linkages between Government Agency Pest Management Planning and Natural Resource Management Strategies.
7. Promote awareness of State Land Pest Management issues amongst key stakeholders.
8. Provide annual reports on State land pest management to the Director-General of the Department of Natural Resources and provide advice to Chief Executive Officers from participating State agencies.

The committee has developed a model for the State agency strategies and the five agencies have developed draft strategies.

New pest management legislation The Queensland Parliament passed the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act* on 18 April 2002. The Act maintains the requirement for State agencies to control declared pests on lands under their management and does not include enforcement provisions for State agencies. However the Act does impose provisions on

four State agencies that are not imposed on other land managers. This was achieved by including two components of the State Policy in the Act:

- The requirement for State agencies to develop a Statewide plan (called 'strategy' in the State Policy).
- The establishment of the State Land Pest Management Committee.

These requirements of the Act apply to the four agencies responsible for national parks, native forests, plantation forests, main roads and unallocated State land. The land used for rail corridors is now leasehold and thus subject to enforcement applicable to private land managers; Queensland Rail was therefore not included in the legislated requirements.

To support consistency of action for weed management, the State agency plans must be consistent with:

- The principles for pest management in the Act.
- The Queensland Weeds Strategy and the Queensland Pest Animal Strategy.
- Policies established under the Act.

The Act establishes four functions for the Committee although it is likely to adopt by agreement additional functions. The four functions are to:

- Improve the management of pests on state controlled land; and
- Coordinate, and achieve consistency in, pest management activities on State-controlled land; and
- Oversee the implementation of plans for managing declared pests on State-controlled land; and
- Integrate plans for managing declared pests on State-controlled land with the broader natural resource management strategies and planning processes, including, for example, a local Government's pest management plan.

As part of conducting its business the Committee must consider the effectiveness of State agency plans. This will be done with annual performance reports from agencies. The current Minister for Natural Resources and Mines has committed the Committee to provide these reports to the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Council. This is an advisory council to the Minister under the new Act, with wide stakeholder membership who will thus be informed of performance.

DISCUSSION

The development of the State level strategies has not been completed so there is no period of implementation on which to judge the success of this planning approach. The development of the strategies has been more challenging than expected because equivalent plans to use as a guide are not available. These are