

Weed control on the public-private land interface in Victoria – the ‘Good Neighbour Program’

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Summary The issue of pests originating on public land and impacting on adjoining private land has long been a point of contention. Land managers on either side of the fence are often managing the land for different purposes; it is at the interface of these land management tenures that the majority of issues occur. The ‘edge effect’ of disturbance along a public land boundary is often the reason for problem species occurring along these areas.

The ‘Good Neighbour Program’ deals with pest issues occurring on the interface of public with private land. The program’s aim is to protect private land from the impacts of pests coming from public lands. This paper outlines how the community are engaged in the decision making process for allocation of funds within the program.

Keywords Pests, interface, edge effect, boundary, community.

INTRODUCTION

The control of pest plants and animals on public land has long been a contentious issue in Victoria. Landholders have frequently claimed that pests encroaching from neighbouring public land adversely affect them.

The effects of public land management policies and actions should be considered not only for the land, water and environmental resources within the public domain, but also for any impact on neighbouring private land and effects distant from the public land in question.

The Good Neighbour Program (GNP) is a major Victorian State Government program that protects private land from pest plants and animals by improving the management of the interface of adjoining public land. Under the program, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) works in partnership with the community to tackle shared problems along common boundaries.

Activities funded by this program focus on improving pest management on public land boundaries for which NRE is responsible and achieving a strategic, coordinated approach to treating pest problems.

The program is composed of :

1. Good Neighbour projects on public land (i.e. National Parks, Flora and Fauna Reserves, Reserved

Crown Land and State Forests).

2. Co-operative Roadside Projects.

3. Group Facilitators Projects.

Good Neighbour Program projects on public land address pest management issues that could adversely affect adjacent private land. Opportunities for public land pest management that are coordinated with action being undertaken by adjoining private landholders are given priority.

Cooperative roadside projects provide support for landholder groups to undertake coordinated, cooperative approaches to roadside weed control. Existing responsibilities for control are not affected, however projects encourage a greater level of pest management activity and effectiveness. The GNP has been particularly successful in markedly improving co-operative management of roadside pests.

Group facilitation projects involve the employment of facilitators to coordinate pest management along public land frontages between landholders sharing common pest management problems and a common boundary with public land. Facilitators also ensure coordination of pest management works between public and private land managers.

All Good Neighbour projects are formulated to reflect community priorities.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Program context The Victorian Pest Management Framework (VPMF) states that a key strategic action to ensure the effective continuance of the Good Neighbour Program will be that the program will:

- i. be accepted by all public land managers as the principal means of demonstrating the Government’s ‘duty of care’ to the wider community on pest problems that originate on public land and impact on adjacent private land;
- ii. have common objectives consistent with the integrated catchment management and pest management objectives of the relevant Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs); and
- iii. focus on projects to address the economic and social threats to the community from pest problems on public lands that impact on adjoining private land.

Another strategic action of the VPMF is that to ensure effective statewide and regional coordination the GNP will:

- a. use the existing CMA Regional Assessment Panels to consider proposed projects for funding on the private/public land boundary;
- b. ensure that projects are evaluated as part of a statewide process to monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the Program.

Process NRE Regional Services Staff (Catchment and Agricultural Services, Forest Services and Land Victoria) and Parks Victoria staff develop projects that provide solutions to GNP issues based on an agreed priority setting process that addresses priorities of Regional Action Plans, supports community programs and protects previous investment.

A Technical Assessment Panel (TAP) comprising a representative from each of the Regional Services businesses, Parks Victoria and a community representative from the associated CMA reviews all the project proposals and consolidates them. Consideration is given to large consolidated projects that take into account a variety of public land tenures. The TAP also have a role to ensure that the technical content of the bids is sound and resources are being utilised efficiently and effectively.

A third role of the TAP is to develop three year rolling plans that ensure projects have a foreseeable life. These plans must have a rationale for the type of works being implemented if the project is going to be longer than 3 years or ongoing. The TAP provides its consolidated list of projects to the CMA Regional Assessment Panel (RAP) along with its 3-year rolling plan. The role of the RAP is to ensure projects represent the best use of those resources within the GNP and catchment context and are aligned to relevant regional strategies and action plans.

The RAP can seek clarification from the TAP as to any aspect of the projects presented for ratification.

RAPs then provide their consolidated lists to the Good Neighbour Program Coordinating Committee (GNPCC). The GNPCC comprises representatives from the various participating divisions of the Department (Catchment and Water Division, Forest Management, Parks Victoria, Land Victoria, Regional Management and Parks, Flora and Fauna). The Victorian Catchment Management Council is also represented. This committee has responsibility for overseeing the operation of the GNP and coordinating reporting processes to Government and the community. The GNPCC also have a role in policy development and program delivery.

Once projects have been approved for funding, they are loaded onto the Integrated Pest Management System (an NRE database with GIS capability) to enable reporting and assessment processes to take place.

Community links The community have input into the 'GNP' process at a number of levels. Victoria is divided into 10 CMA Regions. These regions are the geographical basis on which the management of Victoria's catchments is based. Each CMA has a Regional Action Plan for weeds and rabbits. Some have plans for foxes, pigs and wild goats. The Regional Action Plan sets out priorities for management of these pests and is based on a multi layer process that takes into consideration:

1. species to be treated;
2. natural resources being protected;
3. other natural resource programs being implemented;
4. likelihood of success.

The community provided input into these plans at every stage of development.

Community input is continued through the capture of community submissions through NRE regional processes and the Department's Customer Service Centre.

The TAP, which has the role of ensuring projects are developed that meet the programs criteria and reflect community priorities, also has community representation in the form of a CMA community representative.

Once projects have been developed the RAP that consists of CMA staff and community representatives assesses them. The RAP represents the community by ensuring that projects meet the community's priorities.

Endorsed Good Neighbour Program projects for the 10 regions are then funded by the Good Neighbour Program Coordinating Committee (GNPCC). As previously mentioned the GNPCC has a community representative from the Victorian Catchment Management Council. Funding is then provided for the implementation of projects. This process is represented in Figure 1.

The development of 3-year rolling plans also enables the community to continue to be involved in the program by providing a strategic understanding of time frames for the delivery of outcomes.

Communication Communication is a key component in the delivery of the program. Good communication is essential at the project development, implementation and reporting stages if projects are to be delivered in a

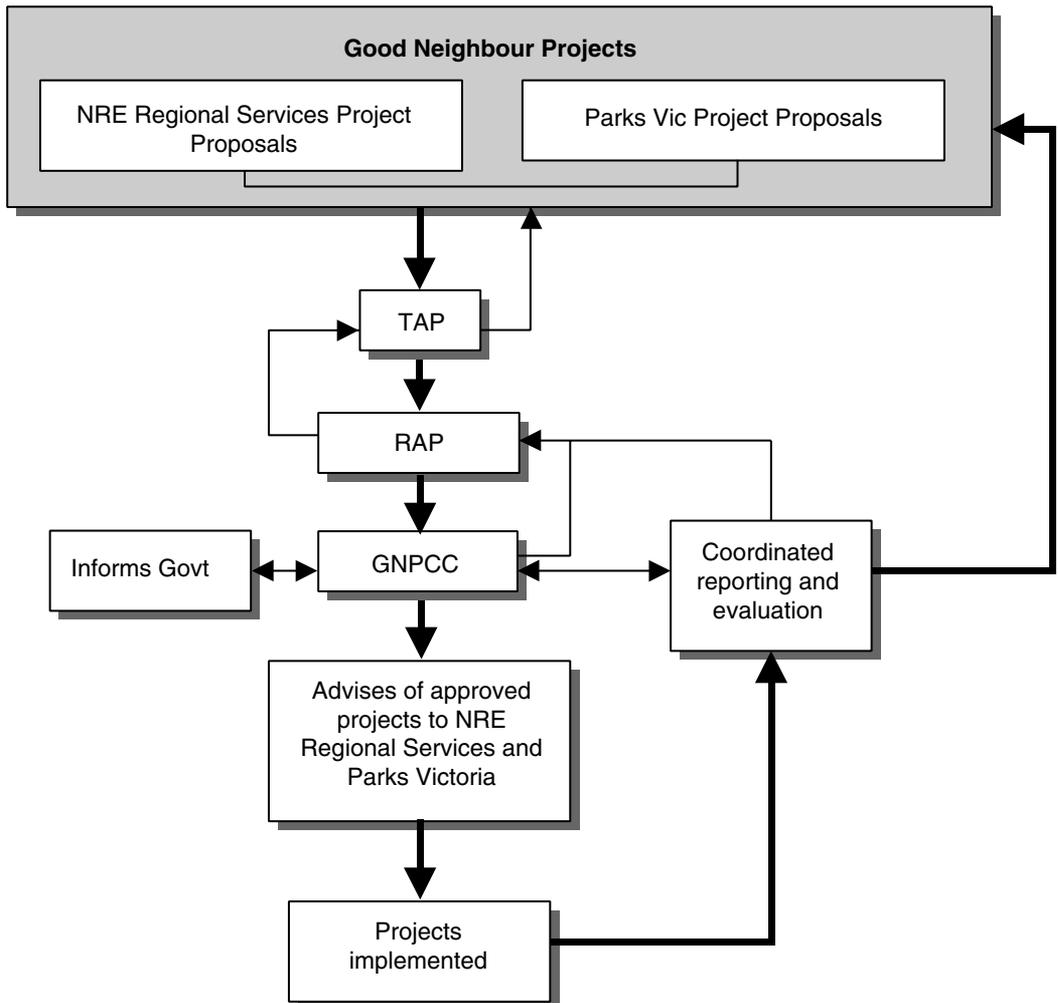


Figure 1. Project development and implementation process.

strategic, cost-effective manner. Projects must be seen as ‘Good Neighbour Projects’ and not as individual public land-manager projects, and must be delivered in the most effective manner.

Communication is also important with the community. Justification for particular works needs to be clearly communicated so that the public understand why some pests are being controlled on the public land boundaries whilst others may not. In a perfect world, with unlimited resources available, all pests on public land would be treated. Unfortunately we do not live in such a world, so it is imperative that available resources are utilised to produce the best outcome.

Communicating the program is conducted in a variety of ways. Within NRE the GNPCC oversees

the program. The Executive Officer of the GNPCC has the role of Statewide Good Neighbour Coordinator. Within each region there is an NRE Good Neighbour Coordinator who coordinates the Technical Assessment Panel and monitors regional programs. NRE Regional Services, Parks Victoria and the community are represented within these committees. Guidelines for the delivery of the Good Neighbour Program are developed annually by the GNPCC and are the basis for how the program is delivered.

All aspects of the program are communicated to the community in a number of ways. The first is by direct contact with NRE and Parks Victoria staff, with designated staff having responsibility for delivery of the program in their area. Non designated staff have

knowledge of GNP processes which they can either deal with directly or refer to the appropriate person. The second is through the NRE customer service centre, which is a phone up service that can provide direct information or refer requests to appropriate staff. The third is via the NRE Web site. Information is also available through CMA Regional Management Strategies and associated Action Plans. Other ways communication can take place with the community is through sign posting sites where Good Neighbour Projects have been implemented, through the various media, bumper stickers, fridge magnets, caps and videos.

EVALUATION

The progress of projects are reported on a six monthly basis. These reports in the past have looked at progress of activities towards achieving on site outcomes, for example dimensions of frontage treated and the success of that treatment. This process has been valuable in providing information of where works have been done and the success of preventing spread from that site. Consolidated reports have been produced and circulated on a six monthly basis.

From 2002/03 onwards the program will not only evaluate the value of the works conducted but also the savings generated on private land by protection from invasion. This will be done by using an evaluation

model that considers bio-climatic data, enterprise, potential for the pest to establish and the cost of control once established. The use of this model will not only enable reporting on the value of the program, but will also be useful as a decision support tool for project development.

SUMMARY

The Good Neighbour Program is unique in the way it deals with pest problems on the public and private land interface as it is in addition to any other works conducted on public land reserves managed by NRE or Parks Victoria. The program has the clear role of protecting private land from public land pest incursions and not vice versa. Public land managers maintain their responsibility to manage pests on land under their tenure as set out in various legislation and policies, the GNP is additional to these and comes from a separate fund source.

Community input is provided at all levels, particularly as this is a program that occurs only on public land managed by NRE. The program utilises a variety of decision support processes that endeavour to ensure strategic programs are developed that deliver whole of catchment natural resource management outcomes in consultation with the community in the regions these take place.