

Working together – Integrated Area Wide Management of weeds in the Condamine catchment

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Summary Integrated Area Wide Management (IAWM) is a management concept first developed in central Queensland in 2002 to improve water quality in the Emerald region. The approach draws on a common commitment by landowners, government and industry to improve land management practices. These parties work together over a defined area of land to achieve common goals using a strategic, not reactive, approach. IAWM enables integration of management issues and integration of information, skills and resources, but its success is dependant upon cooperation.

The Condamine catchment covers an area of 2,445,000 hectares in south-east Queensland and is located at the headwaters of Australia's biggest river system, the Murray-Darling Basin. The catchment is one of the most productive agricultural areas in Australia and consists of farming land, remnant native vegetation (70% endangered) and urban and peri-urban communities. There are a large variety of weed species in the catchment including numerous declared weeds and three Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) (Chilean needle grass, parthenium weed and lantana).

The Condamine catchment is the jurisdiction of 12 local governments each with their own weed management priorities. Local governments within the Condamine catchment set aside approximately \$3 million each year for weed control. Operating as individual councils, the money has been spent each year with little noticeable impact on target weed species. In addition, the catchment consists of a variety of different land managers, the main two being: full-time farmers who recognise weeds as a problem and are willing to spend money on managing them; and the rural/residential owners who have a lack of knowledge, skills and time to dedicate the necessary resources to achieve effective weed management.

To improve weed management and to make noticeable differences on ground, IAWM was identified as a possible viable approach in the Condamine catchment.

A pilot study was conducted in the sub-catchment of Felton Valley to assess the viability of IAWM as an

approach to weed management. The pilot area is the jurisdiction of four neighbouring local governments. The study mapped roadside weeds in the sub-catchment, and recommendations were made including local governments working together to better target declared weeds and WoNS.

Since the pilot study, three of the local governments within the pilot study area (Cambooya, Clifton and Pittsworth) have agreed to pool resources and skills to target African boxthorn, Chilean needle grass and lantana. They are specifically targeting roadsides and landowners. Other local governments have also shown interest and a goal has been set to have all 12 local governments within the catchment involved in the integrated approach on key weeds by June 2007.

Since the pilot study, a number of other initiatives targeting specific weed species have been initiated within the Condamine catchment. The two main initiatives are the management of mother of millions and blackberry.

The local government of Millmerran in collaboration with Millmerran Power Partners, Landcare, DN-RMW and local landholders is targeting better control of mother of millions. Through corporate investment, the local government has been able to address a source infestation with wider impacts.

The local government of Warwick in collaboration with landowners and the Darling Downs Moreton Bay Rabbit Board is targeting eradication of blackberry, a common habitat for rabbits. Eradicating blackberry will enable better access for rabbit control.

IAWM has been a successful approach to weed management in the Condamine catchment, promoting collaboration between government, land managers, industry and NRM issues. While social and economic barriers have to be considered in its application, IAWM is an approach that could be successfully adapted to other land areas and other weed problems. Trust and a common recognition of weed problems and management goals are vital to the success of this approach.

Keywords Integrated Area Wide Management, integration, local government, Condamine, catchment.