

A conversation starter: Standardising terminology and definitions for weeds status in Australia – What do you think?

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Summary A ‘weed’ is classified by the State Herbarium of South Australia (State Herbarium) as a plant that has originally been introduced to an area by humans deliberately or accidentally, has spread and established itself by self-propagation where it is not wanted. Scientific verification and ‘official’ recognition of existing and new naturalised or ‘weed’ taxa in South Australia is achieved through the lodgement of voucher specimens and validation by taxonomic botanists in the State Herbarium. For taxa not previously recorded for South Australia, an entry is then made in the Census of South Australian Vascular Plants, Algae and Fungi (<http://flora.sa.gov.au/census.shtml>). Other states in Australia vary in how they recognise new weed taxa ‘officially’.

A major effort in recent years has been made by the State Herbarium and its associates in collecting weeds to document the occurrence and spread of new and existing weed species. Many new weed incursions, such as, *Cardiospermum grandiflorum* (Balloon vine), *Cupressus goveniana* (Californian cypress) and *Eucalyptus* species and relatives have been recorded

through this process. However, some taxa do not fit the criteria for a clearly established weed. In these cases, the State Herbarium assigns them the only other weed status currently available on our census system, ‘questionably naturalised’. This status has been applied where there is insufficient evidence to be confident of establishment status, or where establishment is only in its early stages, or for casual occurrences that do not persist, or when established plants are highly restricted and present in low numbers at only one or a few locations. Having only two categories does not adequately inform on the true ‘weed status’ of these taxa in the landscape.

All states and territories have varying terminology and definitions for the status for introduced plants including those called weeds. These categories in South Australia need reviewing, expanding and updating. There would be clear benefits in having common methodology, terminology and definitions applied uniformly across Australia. Standard terminology and definitions are proposed and discussed using case examples.