

17th Australasian Weeds Conference 26th – 30th Sept 2010 Christchurch

It was such a privilege to be able to attend the 17th Australasian Weeds conference in Christchurch. Firstly I would like to thank the South Australian Weeds Society and CAWS for providing sponsorship money for me attend. Without some additional funding I wouldn't have even thought of going due to lost work time and also the cost of travelling over to New Zealand.

The conference experience started immediately for me when I landed because I shared a shuttle bus for the airport with Paul Downey from the University of Canberra. It was great to be able to talk with him about the work he has been doing and I found the conversations with him and his presentations to be very relevant to weed control in the field.

Networking

I think that the best part of the conference for me was meeting new people and talking about the many different aspects of weed control, spread, identification, funding sources and many other topics. The conference definitely gave me a much better understating of the weed issues that we face nationally and how hard it can be to successfully control or eradicate specific weeds.

It was good for an on ground worker to be at a conference like this in lots of ways because it provided me with the opportunity to educate some of the people that I met in the type of work that I do. I was able to chat with a few project officers or NRM mangers that were very interested in how Bushcare work is undertaken and will alter some of their practices as a result of our conversations.

I also felt a bit out place in some instances because there were so many PHD students displaying posters and doing presentations; also a lot of national coordinators and university staff. I learnt a lot of that "language" at uni but it was a bit of a stretch to fully understand what they were communicating in some instances. In some ways I think on grounds workers could be out of place at a national conference and maybe sponsorship money would be better spent sending contractors or volunteers to the state weeds conference instead. It is good for a contractor to get a national view but more helpful networks would potentially be formed at a state level where more SA representatives are able to attend.

Poster

The poster that I was able to display at the conference was a great (but stressful) experience to design and print. I tried to have a very practical message in the information presented to help those who would actually be working in the field using Bushcare techniques. fantastic. It was a time consuming task to get it completed and unfortunately my final print did have a few text errors still on it but it was a very worth while experience. I have sent through a pdf copy of the poster to Shauna Potter and give you full permission to use its content to educate others and promote the conference etc.

Changes I will make to my business

There were a few key things that I learnt at the conference that I will be applying directly to my weed control everyday. The biggest of these is always to be improving my weed hygiene practices. We have recently come in contact with Spiny Rush up at Lake Alexandrina and the conference reminded me that as a contractor we need to be very vigilant about spreading weeds because we travel from one native area to another and could be the cause of new infestations. We are already good at

practicing hygiene but we can always be better. I have already booked myself into a hygiene workshop run by James Skeer to learn more and apply what I learn. Another key thing I learnt was to be better at my record keeping particularly with my spray jobs. We don't do much spraying but when we do I usually use the weather forecast as a guide for wind speed and then estimate conditions once we are on site about wind speed etc. Andrew from the Mt Gambier NRM board suggested I get some better monitoring equipment to regularly check my wind speed, temp and RH throughout the day.

Presentations that I found most interesting/relevant

Paul Downey – Do the aims of weed management programs align with the objectives of weed policy

One of the main things that I liked about both presentations that Paul made was that he appeared to be challenging the way some weed managers think, to get them to re-look at the way they do weed management and control. Sometimes I think that the end of financial year gets in the way of targeting the exact weed priorities because money needs to be spent. At the same time there are generally reasons for that end of year spending rush with landowners not coming through on projects and also budgets are often not finalised early enough for project officers to spend their allocation. It must be a hard job being a project officer, ranger etc. I like being a contractor I think; avoid all the politics.

Hillary Cherry – Boneseed in Australia: research, management and coordinated action

From what Hillary presented I learned a lot about how national weed strategies work and how I fit into that strategy as a contractor. In some areas the aim is eradication because the goal is achievable and in other areas containment is currently the best option because Boneseed is currently too widespread to remove completely at the moment. It was a well presented national strategy.

Shauna Potter – Beating Bridal Creeper and other Asparagus weeds

I enjoyed learning a bit more about the Asparagus weed family and how big a threat they are to our native bushland. A fact that I took away from the conference about Bridal Creeper is that it can invade areas of native bushland without the need for disturbance. This is a very uncommon trait in environmental weeds and reinforced the need for being thorough whenever we target any Asparagus weeds.

Mathew Kennewell – The Gorse eradication program in WA

This presentation was fantastic because it showed the commitment of one group to the complete eradication of all Gorse despite the monetary cost. It sounded like it would be a long process but eradication is a victory for environmental weed controllers and from what I see everyday it's not too often we get a chance to completely eradicate a weed from an area.

John Moore – the tolerance of Acacia species to herbicides

I liked this presentation about some research that John has done because it made me start thinking about how we could use alternative chemicals to specifically target environmental weeds in the field without causing off target damage. For example we have been doing Watsonia control in the South Para River, Para Wirra Recreation Park and to control this weed effectively without causing off target damage we have to use "Tongs of Death" 90% of the time. If we did some herbicide trials or a little more research into the different chemical applications for Watsonia, there could be a chemical that if sprayed onto Watsonia would kill only the Watsonia and not cause off

target damage to Correa, Hoppush or any native lilies. That would save lots of contractor dollars in the field.

General Comments

I thought the conference was really good, I enjoyed the experience very much. My biggest comment/thought as I discussed earlier is that was the \$3000 invested in my visit the best use of that money to educate on ground workers. I haven't been to the SA weeds conference so I can't make a comparison on its content, but my example is that if the rego for the state conference is \$150.00, you could send 20 people who couldn't afford that to the state conference for the same dollar value. It would also allow those attending to look at weeds at a more local level and be much more relevant to "on ground workers". A lot of the information presented at the Australasian conference was about weeds or industries that I was unfamiliar with and in many cases they will never be relevant to my work.

I think there is a definite need to educate contractors more about new weeds of significance. We are out in the field all the time and can report new infestations of known weeds if we know what we are looking for. Some of that role is the responsibility of the contractor but more resources available for contractors to continually improve our skills would be very helpful.

Summary

Very briefly I thought that the conference was a great experience and it has helped me;

- become more educated about new weeds
- challenged the way that I run my business and made me think about ways to improve my services and techniques
- better understand what my clients need from me in the way of reporting and gathering weed data etc
- educate others about how I undertake weed control and build new relationships

Thanks for giving me the opportunity.

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