



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

16 January 2017

Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Via email: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry in to the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of 15 of Queensland's peak rural industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across the state. QFF engages in a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to the productivity, sustainability and growth of the agricultural sector. QFF's mission is to secure a strong and sustainable future for Queensland primary producers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Committee
- Central Downs Irrigators Limited
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Flower Association of Queensland Inc.
- Pioneer Valley Water Board
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Australian Organic.

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Committee on the 'Inquiry into the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland'. QFF provides this submission without prejudice to any additional submission provided by our members or individual farmers.

The united voice of intensive agriculture



Invasive plants (weeds) have an extensive impact on agriculture. The last time the economic impact was quantified (in 2004), it was estimated that weeds cost Australian farmers around \$1.5 billion a year in weed control activities and a further \$2.5 billion a year in lost agricultural production – double the estimated cost of \$2 billion a year in 1981–82. In Queensland, the economic cost of weeds is also significant; estimated at \$600 million a year.

As well as the substantial economic cost to Queensland farmers, weeds also have material environmental and social impacts. The management of weeds is a big challenge for landholders and governments. Logistically, it is often complicated to have a coordinated response and ongoing management of weeds across federal, state and local government and privately owned land. Successful weed management requires continuous improvement in the science that supports decisions and effective communication and collaboration between all affected stakeholders.

Under section 48 of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the Act), local governments have a responsibility to control prohibited, restricted and invasive plants. It is reasonable to expect that local governments will appropriately manage weeds within their jurisdictions. The efficacy of their management is constantly in the spotlight. While some local governments are effective in managing weeds, some are under resourced and are not appropriately controlling the impacts. QFF considers a number of local councils lack technical knowledge on weed identification, weed management and outbreak management. For example, there have been localised outbreaks of fireweed following the application of mulch in the Atherton tablelands, demonstrating how easily weeds can be spread and highlighting the need for adequate resourcing to manage outbreaks before they become established.

Under the Act (section 53), local governments must have a biosecurity plan for their jurisdiction. These plans must have achievable objectives; strategies, activities and responsibilities for achieving the objectives; strategies to inform the local community about the content of the plan and achievement of its objectives; monitoring implementation of the plan and evaluating its effectiveness. QFF considers it would be appropriate for the State Government to randomly and independently audit the effectiveness of these local plans, to ground-truth the efficacy of weed management and identify whether resourcing is adequate or not.

Controlling weeds on Crown land is integral to governments' role in managing weeds. QFF understands that weed management on Crown land is frequently ineffective, and weed outbreaks have taken hold in certain areas in a short time. This is a major concern in a number of national parks at the headwaters of large river systems. One of the long term effects of the 2010–11 floods was the spread of weeds throughout flood ways and the introduction of species to areas previously unaffected. The spread of weed species has been exacerbated by subsequent flooding events and in turn has caused long term damage to downstream farms and flood ways.

Biosecurity Queensland's (BQ) weeds programs and the research and development that supports them requires further resourcing. While overall the implementation of weed control measures across Queensland has been positive, further investment in BQ's weed programs will enable reductions in weed populations. BQ's weed programs must be continually benchmarked against agreed best practice formulated from latest science. Constant improvements are required to ensure existing weeds are managed and preparedness for new outbreaks that pose a threat to Queensland's weed biosecurity can be adequately resolved.

Queensland's farmers are acutely aware of the impacts weeds can have on their businesses and take weed control and management seriously, investing time and money into managing an ever growing and evolving problem. Governments need to empower the work being done by farm businesses by ensuring they have access to the right information and science to enable best management of weed problems on farm.

Although not one of the three weed species examined as part of this inquiry, QFF was made aware that Navua sedge is a significant invasive plant that needs greater government attention. Sempra herbicide has only recently been listed for use in pastures, so 'mechanical control' has been the only option and this has not been effective for larger outbreaks of the weed. Navua sedge is an example of the speed of the response required when dealing with weed threats in Queensland. Without a quick deployment of control measures, aggressive weeds can quickly become established in certain areas making them difficult and expensive to control/eradicate.

Managing weeds across Queensland will continue to be a challenge. It is important that all levels of government are resourced adequately to ensure expert management and control of invasive weeds can be acted upon quickly and decisively. Weed management and control needs to be firmly based in latest science, and needs to filter down and empower landholders. Investments that aim to secure Queensland's food, fibre and foliage production industries and maintain regional/rural populations are necessary for the long term benefit of the Queensland community and economy.

QFF and its members look forward to continuing to engage with the government on the management of invasive plants and their control in Queensland.

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer