

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Inquiry into the Impact of Defence Training Activities and Facilities on Rural and Regional Communities – 14 July 2017

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Spread of Weeds in Training Areas

Question reference number: 5

Senator: Gallacher

Type of question: asked on Friday, 14 July 2017, Hansard page 29

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 August 2017

Question:

CHAIR: Would someone like to address the issue that's been raised in submissions and in evidence here today about the spread and treatment of Siam weed? The statement was very clear that you've brought it here and let it go, and it's someone else's responsibility now.

Mr Grzeskowiak: I heard about that today. I wasn't aware. We'll take that away and have a look at it. We try pretty hard to manage weeds, feral animals and bushfire risk on our land. We spend a lot of money on that work. We'll take that away and have a look at that.

CHAIR: I know, Brigadier Beutel, that we've talked about the medium works in Rockhampton, where basically it was mitigation of vehicles that had operated through country and the spread of weeds and the like. Is there anything in Townsville of the same infrastructure?

Brig. Beutel: Mr Luke may know that. It's been a long time since I've actually been out to the range or to Townsville.

CHAIR: Is there someone up here where vehicles are decontaminated, for want of a better word, once they've been in the field?

Mr Luke: The policy for a range is that, before a vehicle exits the range, it's washed down, and generally that way it's coming back into the range clean at the start of all activities. It is something we now put into all our range works: there is always a wash point as one of the first priorities that we put on the range. For instance, in Cultana, the vehicles must be washed before they actually cross the highway into the northern area from the southern area, because of the weed. So we're very conscious of the requirement to manage the environment in this respect. I was speaking to the lady who raised that issue about the Siam weed during the break, and even she acknowledged it may not have been Defence; it could have come from seeds imported from South-East Asia in areas where it is rampant. But we'll certainly, as noted, take it on notice to have a look at this. We are very conscious of the requirements and the controls we've put in place on ranges.

CHAIR: I accept, Mr Grzeskowiak, that you may well have only heard that today, but it has been in the submission. It was contained in the submission that was available prior to today, so we'd appreciate it if you'd take that on notice and give us a considered response in respect of that.

Senator MOORE: Could you also go back and check whether that is the first time that the defence department was made aware of it.

Mr Grzeskowiak: I'm sure the defence department is aware of it, but I wasn't aware of it.

Senator MOORE: That's fine. I understand that differentiation, but it was just for people who are concerned about this, just so that they would just get some absolute clarification about the fact that those concerns have been formally raised and acknowledged.

Mr Grzeskowiak: Yes.

Senator MOORE: Good.

Mr Grzeskowiak: What we will take it on notice is to try to provide you with what we're doing about it.

Answer:

Three new infestations were discovered in 2003 in Townsville, Mossman and Innot Hot Springs. This saw an increase in infestation area of 2,270 hectares. Siam weed was discovered on Townsville Field Training Area (TFTA) in 2004. There is no evidence that Defence was responsible for the spread to the Townsville region, and Defence has not been implicated in the spread to the other locations discovered in 2003.

Siam weed is noted as a major issue in East Timor where it has come to dominate many landscapes. The high risk of transporting Siam weed seeds into Australia on vehicles returning from East Timor was identified by Defence and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. In response to that risk, vehicles returning to Townsville and Darwin from East Timor were subject to an intensive decontamination and inspection regime in East Timor prior to departure.

A small infestation of Siam weed was discovered at Shoalwater Bay Training Area (SWBTA) in 2014.

Defence management of Siam weed

Townsville Field Training Area (TFTA)

Siam weed is abundant on lands to the east of TFTA and has been detected and treated in 12 of the 22 TFTA sectors. Most of these are minor, isolated infestations with large infestation in Impact East and Wildhorse A&B sectors.

Siam weed at TFTA is subject to comprehensive management.

The main Quarantine Area in application since discovery in 2004 in Wild Horse Sector.

- Integration and coordination with other management efforts run by Biosecurity Queensland and the Siam Weed Management Group, and neighbours including Queensland National Parks and local government.
- A strong focus on vehicle hygiene as the most effective biosecurity preventive action. This is reflected in TFTA Range Standing Orders, which prescribe 'All vehicles are required to pass through the deseeder both on entry and exit to the range. Any variant of this procedure is to have the approval of the Regional Environmental Officer'.
- Specific consideration in conduct of military exercises as part of exercise planning, issuing of Environmental Clearance Certificates for activities

presenting a risk of weed spread (e.g. entering a weed quarantine area) and Environment briefings provided to units.

- Ongoing communication with non-Australian Defence Force (ADF) TFTA users such as the electrical companies, cattle agisters etc.
- Aerial surveys have been conducted in most years since 2006.
- Ground control of Siam weed has been conducted annually since initial detection in 2004.
- Aerial control of Siam weed has been conducted annually since 2011.
- Fire has been applied as a risk mitigation tool in the higher risk areas of TFTA annually since 2006.

Aerial surveys conducted in June 2016 and June 2017 indicate that Siam weed is being contained successfully at TFTA.

Shoalwater Bay Training Area

Eradication measures were implemented two days after the infestation was located on site in June 2013. Reproductive plant material was collected from dead bushes and off the ground, securely stored and transported to a secure facility for incineration as per Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Biosecurity Queensland guidance.

A further aerial survey of the surrounding area was conducted on 4 July 2013 with no further plants located.

Fortnightly visits to the site were undertaken for inspections and treatment from July to December 2013.

Monthly visits to the site were undertaken from January to June 2014 for inspection and treatment. During this period two small plots (approx. 0.5 m²) were established to monitor plant growth and timing of budding to determine if this was different to North Queensland.

An intensive ground survey (under the guidance of Biosecurity Queensland) consisting of a 200m radial delimitation survey extending from the existing site, and an extensive track network survey (targeting SWBTA tracks) was conducted on 19 and 20 May 2014, with no plants found outside of the known site.

An aerial survey (during the flowering period for the plant) of the surrounding area was conducted on 26 May 2014 with no further plants located during this survey.

No Siam weed was located during surveys by the Queensland Government Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation in 2016.