



**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND
COMMUNICATIONS REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

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**Submission To The Senate Biosecurity Inquiry Into Preventing The Entry
And Establishment Of Invasive Species Harmful To The Natural
Environment**

Dear reader

Firstly let me commend this inquiry for investigating this very serious issue.

This submission contends that the current biosecurity regulations are not adequate to protect Australia from new invasive species and diseases, if existing regulations were adequate the history of recent breaches would not have occurred.

As the world becomes a smaller place the risk is ever increasing, biosecurity must keep ahead of the level of risk and be ready to counter the numerous new ways invasive species and diseases can enter the country.

I am not sufficiently aware of the existing regulations, so I can't comment specifically on how the system could be improved, I can merely state that the introductions I have observed and read about in recent years caused me great concern for the future of Australia's endemic flora and fauna, and agriculture.

I have been a farmer at Tamworth all my life, and I work as an ecologist in the North West, Central West and Northern Tablelands of New South Wales.

Having lived in the one location virtually all of my life, puts me in a unique position to observe a lot of changes within my lifetime of 59 years.

I have always been a keen observer of the world around me, and I am quick to notice the impacts of new weeds, animals and diseases. I have witnessed Carp take over the river system, the extinction of a frog from Chytrid disease, and I have witnessed the arrival of countless weeds, insect pests, and diseases that have become naturalised in our region.

That is just the beginning, as there are many more species that are already in Australia that will eventually make their way to our region. I fear for how farmers and authorities are to prevent the spread and introduction of new invasive pests. They don't have the resources to manage the existing problem.

I can only think of two weeds that you could say have been seriously eradicated in our region, those were Parthenium and Alligator weed. All others have spread to invade vast areas of high conservation value woodlands, riparian corridors and Travelling Stock Routes.

The **Failure Of The Biosecurity System** has been demonstrated by the following serious incursions since 2000.

Myrtle rust was first found in 2010 in a NSW plant nursery, it is infecting hundreds of Myrtaceae species which is the largest family of native plants and includes threatened species.

Most recently the Asian black-spined Toad was found in Melbourne, it has a similar impact as the Cane toad on wildlife, and could be even worse as it can inhabit cooler climates.

The Smooth Newt was another species found in Melbourne this year, its skin is toxic to predators, and it preys on and competes with native frogs and fish.

The Red Fire ant is one of the worlds worst invasive species, capable of killing small mammals birds and reptiles, \$400 million has been spent on trying to eradicate it. Other ants that are having a serious impact are Yellow Crazy ant and Electric ant.

The disease Pigeon paramyxovirus arrived in Victoria three years ago, it could potentially infect native birds resulting in death.

Numerous grasses have become serious environmental weeds, Mexican Feather grass is another that is capable of invading and dominating woodlands and grasslands. It is a classic example of how illegal species are traded online.

In our region Coolatai grass and Green Panic have invaded and eliminated many 1,000's of hectares of the critically endangered White box ecological community, all in the last 20 years. I am aware of at least four National Parks that have been invaded. Those managers say they don't have the resources to deal with the problems they have without new pests. Ground feeding threatened birds are suffering more declines due to loss of foraging habitat.

These species totally dominate the ground cover with tall and thick grass that completely modifies the natural habitat for all native fauna. Like Gamba grass in NT they are also a severe fire threat that burn with heat and intensity that depletes habitats and kills trees and shrubs.

Those problems have gone beyond control, the impacts are permanent. The cost to the natural environment would be staggering; we cannot allow more pests to be introduced into Australia. As they say a stitch in time saves nine, investing in a world class biosecurity regulation now will protect the environment and save millions of \$ in the future.

Right now farmers are being encouraged to plant tropical grasses for pastures, using species that have now been proven to be serious environmental weeds. If proper risk assessments were done for those species they would not have been approved for sale. In those cases risk assessments were accepted that were done in other regions with different climates and soils. Risk assessments must be very strict and potential environmental impacts given a higher priority than economic benefit to agriculture.

Of particular concern is the number of times that history repeats itself with new introductions, there seems to be complete failure to learn from past mistakes. When such introductions take place there appears to be no one responsible, or those that are responsible are not exposed.

I support the concept of a specialised dept. to tackle biosecurity, I am aware that Environment Health Australia has been proposed to oversee all aspects of investigation, planning, responses, surveillance and enforcement. If we are to protect our unique endemic flora and fauna we need to be doing a lot more.

Regards

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