Overview of the AQIS Weed Risk Assessment (WRA) System

AQIS implemented the WRA system in 1997. The implementation of the WRA system has improved AQIS's ability to identify and prevent the entry to Australia of environmental and agricultural weeds.

The AQIS WRA system is a three tiered system. The first tier determines whether a plant is already naturalised in Australia (and not officially controlled) or on a list of previously assessed and permitted plants. Plants that are not already established or permitted proceed to the second tier.

The second tier consists of a questionnaire that evaluates the weed risk of plants using 49 questions about the plant's biology, climatic preferences, reproductive and dispersal methods, and known weed history. Most questions are answered as 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'. At the end of the questionnaire a numerical score is generated. Depending on the score, importation of the plant is permitted, rejected or prohibited pending 'further evaluation'.

This part of the system has been calibrated using 370 species already introduced to Australia. The threshold scores for the categories are:

- less than 1   permit import

- more than 6   reject import

- from 1 to 6   further evaluate (- the score did not predict whether a plant would behave as a weed or not. Plants for which an insufficient number of questions were answered also fall into the further evaluate category)

Using this calibration, of the 370 plants scored, the AQIS WRA:

- accepted no serious weeds

- accepted only 16% of the minor weeds

- rejected only 7% of the non-weeds

- required further evaluation for 29% of species.

Plants that require further evaluation proceed to the third tier of assessment. An assessment process for the third tier is currently being developed.