



1st February 2008

The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To The Secretary,

Re: The future of weeds in Australian agriculture in a drying climate

The Council of Australasian Weed Societies and the Weed Management Society of South Australia support any Federal Government measures that aid the research and management of Australia's more than \$4b/yr weed problems, including those related to drought and climate change. Research has shown that changing climatic conditions will alter the distribution of many weeds in Australia. In most cases this means that the agricultural sector will incur significant additional costs associated with managing weeds.

The WMSSA and CAWS support a national strategy to deal with weeds, drought and changing climatic conditions in Australia. This is an urgent issue given the imminent end of the CRC for Australian Weed Management (weed research) and the national Defeating the Weeds Menace (on-ground weed control) programs in June this year.

CAWS is the trans-national, umbrella organisation for Weed Societies from every Australian State and New Zealand, including the WMSSA. CAWS members are at the front line in the battle against weeds – as farmers, noxious weeds officers, volunteer groups (e.g. "Friends of" parks, Landcare, Bushcare, Coastcare), researchers, advisers and rangers. The primary function of CAWS is to raise awareness of the impacts of weeds and to provide opportunities to promote policy and technical advances in their management. Our next major event is the 16th Australian Weeds Conference in Cairns in May 2008, with over 500 delegates expected to attend.

Weeds are widely recognised as one of Australia's most pressing natural resource management (NRM) issues; indeed farmers have recently ranked weeds as their greatest national NRM problem. Internationally, invasive species are one of the top threats to biodiversity (along with land clearing and climate change) and weeds represent the bulk of such species. Aside from extensive economic and environmental costs, weeds also pose substantial social costs in Australia. These include health risks through toxins in livestock products and allergenic pollens, loss of access and amenity in national parks and waterways, and increased fire risks in peri-urban areas from dense thickets of invasive grasses and shrubs. The major social impact of weeds is the time-demanding nature of weed control – a loss of productive and recreational time borne by many Australians.

COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN WEED SOCIETIES INC.

Secretary - Mr Dennis Gannaway

C/- Weed Management Society of South Australia Inc.
PO Box 517 Torrens Park SA 5062

Unless governments co-invest with landholders in strategic control programs and the development of new and improved control techniques, the economic, environmental and social impacts of weeds in Australia will continue to expand. CAWS and the WMSSA would like to ensure that new strategies and programs for dealing with Australia's weed problems retain the features of the current Weeds CRC model that made it so successful. These include:

- truly national research collaboration of all State Departments, Universities and CSIRO, providing in-kind FTE investment;
- cash investment from various research and development corporations (e.g. GRDC);
- an independent, representative board determining research directions and delivery mechanisms;
- weed species targeted for both northern and southern Australia;
- a substantial budget proportion focused on delivery of management information to landholders;
- quality factsheets, technical publications and website;
- training of post-graduate students in weed management;
- post-doctoral research positions supervised by Australia's leading weed scientists; and
- research coverage across the weed management spectrum (prevention, detection, eradication, containment and integrated management).

As well as the Weeds CRC, the Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) and other related initiatives under the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and Defeating the Weeds Menace (DWM) have allowed significant national advances in reducing current and future impacts of a wide range of weed species. The WoNS program has been highly beneficial not only in funding research, extension and coordination against 20 of Australia's worst weeds, but also in demonstrating the benefits of a strategic approach to managing weeds at national, regional and local levels. CAWS and the WMSSA are concerned that DWM finishes in June 2008 and would like to see a similar funding program continue, with national, regional and research components.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Melland
President, Weed Management Society of South Australia

Dr John Virtue
President, Council of Australasian Weed Societies Inc.

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