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# **Submission**

**to**

**NSW Natural Resources  
Commission.**

**On its**

**Draft Weeds Review**

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**For the Clarence Environment Centre**

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# **Submission to NSW Natural Resources Commission (NRC) on its Draft Weeds Review**

## **Introduction**

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for a quarter of a century, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. The conservation of the Australia's natural environment, both terrestrial and and marine, has always been a priority for our members, and we believe the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity is of paramount importance. Invasive exotic weeds are acknowledged as probably the single greatest threat to native bushland in Australia, and have contributed, to varying degrees, in the decline of the vast majority of our iconic flora species.

## **Background**

While weeds have long been acknowledged as needing urgent control action, the funding required has never been adequate. Past planning for weed eradication has been virtually non-existent, and programs have been fragmented and ad-hoc – i.e. devoid of any long-term strategic direction, and usually in response to applications for funding by various agencies and community groups, which are then assessed in isolation.

Another problem, and one that the NRC has been unable to address, is the fact that weed regulations vary from state to state, with little cross-border cooperation.

Nevertheless it is encouraging to read the NRC's recommendations that focus on trying to coordinate the efforts of all weed eradication networks and agencies; developing a comprehensive weeds data set, introducing rules relating to the species of plants than can be sold through the nursery trade (permitted list), and a register of fodder and plant traders.

Of course all of this will cost money, so we fear that, as usual, the actual weed eradication work will be largely dependent on efforts by volunteer community groups.

## **Issues**

- Currently, plant nurseries, and individuals, can legally propagate and sell a wide range of exotic plant species that will potentially spread into bushland. Therefore, we strongly support the proposed development of a 'permitted list' to regulate plants that can be sold within NSW.

We also urge that, until such time as the Federal Government gets its act together and introduces a coordinated approach to weed management across the whole country, a more diligent approach should be taken on border security to ensure weeds are not brought in, either deliberately, or accidentally on uncleaned machinery.

We would also like to see more advertising, aimed at excavation and harvesting industries, and recreational activities, such as 4 wheel driving, that have the potential to transport seeds in mud and soil trapped on vehicles.

- We also support the proposed registering all plant nurseries and fodder distributors. Again, we believe this move should be supported by policing at state borders.
- In our opinion there needs to be more emphasis on prevention by identifying actions that encourage weed establishment, particularly 'disturbance'. Two examples are:

- **Native Forest logging.** It is a well-known fact that opening up forest canopies, and disturbing soils, is a sure-fire way to introduce weeds. Native forest logging does both. In the NSW coastal regions, excessive logging rates is leading to major problems with the Bell Miner Associated Dieback which is devastating Eucalypt forests.
- **Underscrubbing,** the practice of removing all understorey shrubs and herbs in an attempt to turn native forests into a park-like landscape, is widespread across rural residential areas of the state. Not only does this practice remove up to 90% of the natural biodiversity, it again allows the proliferation of invasive grasses and other weeds.

We believe potential landowners should be advised of their legal responsibilities in relation to native vegetation, and weed control, at the point of sale, and more advertising aimed at owners of rural properties. Therefore, we strongly support the proposal for a property weed certification scheme that discloses information to buyers about a property's weed condition prior to its sale.

- We support the proposed reserve fund for responding to new high-risk incursions.
- We also support the proposal to standardize regulations, and coordinate control action across all tenures.
- We are concerned at reports that research funding, particularly at the Federal level, is declining. This must be corrected, and the importance of research recognised. We simply cannot continue to rely on drenching the landscape with chemicals to control weeds.
- Likewise, we support the proposals to strengthen enforcement and accountability, something that has always been lacking in the past.
- There is an urgent need to develop a sustainable funding model over the long term.
- While the agricultural industry is critically important to Australia's food security and economy, and must receive priority attention when planning weed control strategies, **we believe, there should be a much greater emphasis on environmental weeds than is currently the case.**

The treatment of weeds requires a consistent coordinated effort and long-term follow-up to prevent weeds re-establishing. The principles of bush regeneration recognise this, however there is no promotion of this approach or minimum standards for weed control. The approach of many land managers is to spray and forget and not to assist the return of natural vegetation. In a short period the weeds return, wasting the initial effort, **so there is a major need to incorporate the principles of bush regeneration when planning weed control strategies.**

We thank the NRC for this opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards  
Honorary Secretary.