

THE FARMER-DRIVEN SKELETON WEED ERADICATION
PROGRAMME IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract. Skeleton weed, *Chondrilla juncea*, was first found in the wheatbelt of WA in 1963 and has since been found on 269 farms as well as small areas of public and residential land. Since the second area was located in 1974, the APB has administered and implemented a farmer-driven eradication programme that has limited the infested area to less than 300ha. The programme has two important features, its funding and the involvement of the farming community.

Funding. All grain growers in WA fund the skeleton weed eradication programme by a production levy currently set to raise \$430,000 annually. This, with previously accumulated reserves, allows about \$700,000 to be spent on full time APB staff on field operations, research and extension, and all the associated operating expenses.

Community involvement. Local farmer action committees provide direction and generate community support. These groups recruit about 1500 volunteers each summer to search for skeleton weed using specially designed search machines. About 23,000 ha of farm paddocks are searched in this way each summer. Many volunteers travel considerable distances to participate. Maintaining the supply of volunteers after 15 years of searching is a major problem as the search period coincides with harvest in most areas and many teams do not have the "reward" of finding skeleton weed.

The APB supports the community effort by maintaining awareness of skeleton weed in the media, through publications and promotions at public events. Emphasis is placed on identification of skeleton weed and reporting of suspect plants.

Header drivers, particularly, are targetted by coloured identification stickers in vehicles and radio advertising during harvest. About two thirds of new finds are reported by header drivers.