

Developing a national incursion response plan for high priority weeds

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Summary Australia is under constant threat from new and existing non-native invasive plant species. Weeds, along with other invasive species, now arguably pose one of the most significant threats to our biodiversity (Australian Weeds Strategy 2006), they cost Australian agriculture approximately \$4 billion per annum (Australian Weeds Strategy 2006) and they also threaten the sustainability of our natural resources and the quality of life of all Australians.

The formal introduction of plant species with weed potential has been stopped with the introduction of weed risk assessment processes. However, with increases over the last century in the level of international trade, tourism, transport, and travel there are still risks of introduction of new weeds.

Prevention and early intervention are recognised as the most cost-effective techniques for managing invasive plant species since once weeds establish, they pose an ongoing challenge to government, industry and the community as a whole.

A project has been developed through the Australian Government's 'Defeating the Weed Menace Program' for the development of a National Weed Incursion Response Plan (NWIRP). This project aims to develop an operational plan and guidelines for managing national responses to new weed incursions. It will provide a process to better capture, communicate and utilise appropriate principles and techniques that have already been developed, while looking for gaps and improvements.

This would be achieved through:

- a) Identification of key operational activities for weed incursion responses and the appropriate technical tools and procedures that can be used to underpin decision-making processes such as assessment of the feasibility of eradication, support for a national community based surveillance network (weeds-potters), delimitation surveillance using specific surveys and awareness, and use of indicators for monitoring progress of programs.
- b) Production of a NWIRP for initial use by the Australian Weeds Committee (AWC) and the Consultative Committee on Exotic Plant

Incursions (CCEPI) when dealing with incursions.

- c) Identification of future capacity building activities and institutional arrangements to progress under the Australian Weed Strategy and as part of potential future implementation of activities under the Australian Biosecurity System (AusBIOSEC).

The NWIRP framework will be consistent with other national incursion response plans for invasive pests and diseases, as well as AusBIOSEC principles and will incorporate technical work completed by the CRC for Australian Weed Management, Bureau of Rural Sciences, the current and past weed incursion response programs and others. The plan will provide technical and operational guidelines for consideration in a weed incursion response.

The NWIRP will address the management of responses to new incursions of high priority weed threats not currently in Australia. The plan will build on a draft weed incursion response plan developed by the CRC for Australian Weed Management and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries. While some institutional arrangements are in place and have been employed to deal with incursions of serious weeds in Australia, the approach requires improvements to the underlying decision process and the definition of roles and responsibilities of government and industry. A nationally coordinated system of surveillance, inspection and control using pre-border, border and post-border measures is required to prevent the establishment and spread of unwanted pests (Plant Health Australia, 2004).

Keywords Incursion response.

REFERENCES

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