

The importance of public engagement in weed management

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Summary I started studying horticulture with the intention of becoming a landscape designer. Early on in my studies my class was introduced to the subject of weeds. The teacher was an engaging fellow; nice, funny and extremely passionate about the subject. Despite his best efforts nobody left that class with the intention of becoming a weed management professional, myself included. It wasn't until I shifted into conservation and worked for several years as a bush regenerator that I realised I had entered the weed management profession.

Our industry has a problem. It is not glamorous and it does not conjure beautiful images like rainforests or dolphins. The public does not understand what we do, how we do it or why we do it? We are receiving increased pressure from the public to change practices,

like reducing the use of chemicals; one of our most useful and cost effective tools. Even students of horticulture are disengaged from what we do. All the while the weeds continue to move and evolve to make our jobs harder; chemical residence, sleeper weeds and new incursions.

We are failing to engage with the public. Our industry is constantly at the whim of changing political and economic circumstances. Until we develop a social licence to operate and until we learn how to communicate with the public we will continue to run into hurdles.

My presentation will explore the issue of communication and engagement in weed management and start a conversation on how we can better manage this important issue.