

Weed management priorities of lifestyle rural landholders

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Summary In areas where lifestyle-oriented rural landholders constitute a large proportion of landowners, motivations and priorities for weed control are diverse. Not only do such landowners differ from traditional farmers, but they are diverse amongst themselves as well in terms of land use, skill, resources, and land management aspirations. Based upon surveys and interviews with lifestyle rural landholders we examine the weed management priorities of such landowners in south-eastern NSW along several axes. We find that, despite the significance of weeds affecting environmental values associated with their land, lifestyle rural landholders tended to focus their management effort on agricultural weeds. Among other variables, this was best explained by membership of natural resource management groups and action by weeds inspectors. We also draw on interviews to examine more generally how and why

landholders make decisions about which plants to remove and which plants to keep. Such decisions are not necessarily based around whether a plant is native or exotic, although this distinction may drive overall management goals such as forest restoration. Within such overall management, however, landholders will leave or remove plants according to a range of reasons including aesthetics, landscape meaning, perceived lack of harm, plant behaviour, soil stability, food value, restoration interventions, the value of even significant weeds for productive land uses, and their value for fauna. Such prioritisations may mean that landowner weed management does not conform to ideal practice but their alignment with landowner interests and idiosyncrasies may make it more sustainable.

Keywords Invasive plants, lifestyle landowners, agricultural weeds, land use change, priorities.