

A risk-based approach for prioritising the threat of exotic weeds to Australia

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Summary Globalisation and increasing trade increase the risk of new weed species entering Australia and impacting negatively on agricultural production and the environment. At the same time ongoing limited resources and budgets require decision makers to carefully determine where to invest for maximum return.

The development of the Australian Weeds Threat Prioritisation Process aims to assist decision making by informing governments, industries and other stakeholders of exotic weeds (not known to be present in Australia) that have the greatest potential to threaten Australian agriculture, environment and social amenity.

The process targets the ‘worst of the worst’ species that are exotic to Australia. A set of questions based on previous, well-established risk-assessment criteria and the scientific literature are applied to highlight species with the highest threat level from a pool of exotic weeds species. A number of ‘stop/go’ questions limit

the number of exotic weed species to which a more detailed evidence-based assessment of invasiveness, potential distribution and impacts is required.

The prioritisation process is not designed to identify unknown species that are potentially serious weeds. The pragmatic process focuses on prioritising known invasive weed species that exist outside of Australia and might meet the national significance test and therefore pose a threat if they were to enter the country.

The identification of priority exotic species that show a high potential to meet Australia’s national significance criteria enables governments and industries, individually or collectively, to develop a strategic approach to minimise the threat the species poses to Australia.

Keywords Weeds, exotic, prioritisation, national significance.