

To what extent are the NSW environment, industries and communities currently impacted by invasive species?

Significantly.

The environmental impacts of invasive species are clear, well known and continuously increasing. They are one of the greatest threats to native wildlife and ecosystems, agricultural productivity and sustainability, and economic stability in regional and rural NSW.

Current impacts on the residents of the Tweed, Tweed local industries and Tweed Shire Council as a community service provider and leader include:

- Ever increasing number of invasive species requiring on ground management responses with little to no success in eradicating existing established species.
- Natural environmental assets within the Tweed are under increasing pressure from development and other human induced impacts, therefore requiring more protection from the similarly increasing threats from introduced invasive and pest animal species such as feral and domestic cats, wild dogs, deer, foxes and hares.
- Community members seek support from Council in the absence of comprehensive leadership and on ground support from State or Federal governments. Council has limited resources to respond to these community expectations.
- Local beekeepers and small crop growers / orchardists working with minimal support, to develop strategies for when Varroa mite arrives in the region. This is incredibly stressful for flood affected communities, with some apiarists already phasing out hives.
- Local graziers paying additional freight costs to access feed from outside the Red Imported Fire Ant (RIFA) current detected zone in SE Qld. The Northern Rivers is experiencing El Nino weather conditions, low rainfall and low levels of on ground feed.
- Invasive weed management on public land requires a huge financial commitment to perform effectively and is unable to be adequately resourced from Council's general budget. External state government funding opportunities provide some on ground relief in targeted locations, however significantly more resources are needed to deliver a comprehensive and strategic approach to controlling the ever-increasing spread of invasive weeds.
- Invasive weeds in coastal vegetation and dune systems impact on human perceptions of the Tweed's 'natural beauty', affecting tourism and the local economy.
- Feral cats are one, if not the, most significant impact on threatened and endangered wildlife.

To what extent do you think existing programs in NSW are effectively managing invasive species?

'Effective' needs definition to provide useful feedback to this question.

The overall 'effectiveness' of a program is a direct result of the resources committed within the program to its management responses, which vary widely, depending on the species being reported, the region it is being reported from and what the perceived or reported impacts are. For example, mitigating agricultural impacts of pest animals and invasive species has a well-resourced response



Review on Invasive Species

October 2023

from state agencies, while protection of biodiversity generally occurs as a flow on effect rather than being identified as a primary driver in existing programs.

Despite considerable resources being directed to the development of Regional Strategic plans, resources continue to be directed towards human asset and economic based protection taking precedence over wildlife and natural area asset protection.

Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA) are present on the NSW/Qld border, yet the effort to prevent the continued march south of this incredibly damaging species is barely visible to the broader community, despite council staff working with NSW DPI. Illuminated signs on the freeway stating permits required for movement of certain materials, but the practicalities of the permit system are unknown and unworkable for many local cross border businesses.

Significant additional, available and targeted resources must be directed to cross border collaboration between QLD and NSW biosecurity agencies to keep RIFA in a SE Qld containment zone and establish a buffer zone of eradication in northern NSW.

What, if any, are the key barriers to effective management of invasive species?

Without a doubt the key barrier to effective management of invasive species is resourcing. The primary responsibility for invasive species and pest animal management lies with State Government authorities, and in the northern rivers these agencies are severely under resourced.

With the merging of Catchment Management Authorities and Livestock Health and Pest Authority, a critical component of effective and sustainable cross-tenure land management has been lost, and the resulting Local Land Services for Northern Rivers is under-resourced to fulfill the roles that the previous two separate agencies provided.

The Local Lands Services Act and the Biosecurity Act contain sound objectives and implementation pathways suitable for achieving them, however neither have been adequately resourced. No legislation, policy or other strategic programs will ever be fully effective without adequate investment in resourcing their implementation and compliance. We recommend resourcing the existing legislation rather than reviewing or creating new legislation.

A further barrier to effective management in terms of protection of biodiversity and natural assets, is that regional priorities (and therefore funding) are focused primarily on protection of agricultural assets. Programs focussing on biodiversity protection need to be equally prioritised.

Existing state legislation has a significant grey area relating to feral cat management and this presents a major barrier to any effective management taking place. The objectives of the NSW Local Land Services Act extend to pest animal prevention, management, control and eradication, however there is no program response to implementing cat management. The Companion Animals Act has no provisions for feral cats.

Tweed Shire Council staff are dedicated to continual improvement of invasive species management programs, however within its current programs, effectiveness varies. A primary limitation is the range and availability of control technologies, many of which cannot be applied in urban or peri-urban landscapes. Tweed Shire has high value bushland, environmental assets and agricultural assets in close proximity to urban development, so effective pest management is difficult.



Review on Invasive Species

October 2023

Lastly, programs and resources are dedicated to asset protection programs, yet there are species at level of containment or eradication which are not being given the priority they require and are therefore not being addressed. Biosecurity at the federal level is where more effort is needed. Invasive species are no longer being effectively identified and contained at the border. They are still breaching quarantine controls and land management agencies are having to deal with them at end of pipe rather than at the source.

How has invasive species management changed since the introduction of the [NSW Biosecurity Act 2015](#) legislation and associated programs and plans?

Not much has changed on the ground. The enactment of this legislation has never been adequately resourced so critical analyses of its effectiveness is difficult. Standard responses focus on introduction of more legislation and planning processes with comparatively little action or investment in implementation and compliance of the existing legislation.

Having Priority Species identified under the Regional Strategic Pest Management Plan (RSPMP) is a more effective tool than under previous legislation, needing 'Declared Pests' to validate control works. Unfortunately, however, the actions included in the RSPMP are not being adequately resourced. Programs that have an agricultural focus that were the focus prior to the development of the RSPMP continue to be the primary focus of State Government effort.

The General Biosecurity Duty as defined under the BS Act is a sound concept. Unfortunately, most land managers do not have the capacity to respond in a meaningful way at this point in time. This is a key area that needs significant and ongoing resourcing to be in any way meaningful and effective. Should the capacity of NSW land managers be developed to adequately enact their General Biosecurity Duty, this would be a very powerful mechanism.

In the context of private landowners, it is understandable how many landowners who would like to invest in management and protection of their own properties may choose not to, in the absence of co-ordinated and resourced control programs occurring on a landscape scale. Private investment at the single property scale does not achieve results long term. This is particularly so with invasive weed species which continue to advance into any suitable areas and have significant range expansion after events like the multiple major floods the northern rivers has experienced over the past 5 years.

What are the future risks posed by invasive species to the NSW environment, industries and communities?

- See response to question 1 – the future risks are amplifications of existing issues.
- Under-resourced biosecurity at a national and state level means that the Tweed Shire now has more pest species to try to mitigate the impacts of and more on our borders. For example, RIFA, Varroa mite, feral deer and Ehrlichiosis. Current trends indicate that foot and mouth disease and rabies are a genuine biosecurity risk. NSW has free roaming and uncontrollable vectors for both these diseases across the landscape.
- With the imminent spread of Varroa mite, natural evaluation may allow zoonotic spillover to other species of bee including native bees, which are to date unaffected.

Review on Invasive Species

October 2023

- Intensification of urban development within the Tweed in response to state government population projection targets is intensifying risks to biodiversity from invasive species. 'Islands' of habitat are very difficult to protect.
- More regular extreme weather events are creating favourable conditions for dispersal of species such as RIFA. Flood events are a key natural dispersal pathway for this and many other invasive species. Drought events are causing increased management of stock feed which is also a range expansion pathway for many species.
- RIFA can cause injury to humans, pets and animals in the areas they infest. RIFAs will attack and feed on native flora and fauna, infest agricultural and horticultural crops and equipment, prevent lifestyle businesses and restrict everyday activities such as picnics, outdoor play, sporting activities and make parks, playgrounds and sports grounds unusable. The economic impacts on agriculture, tourism and community will be immense. The level of response by NSW seems severely inadequate given the level of impact this species will have once established.

What opportunities do you see to improve the outcomes of invasive species management in the future?

- Commit permanent resourcing and funds to the implementation of existing legislation so that its effectiveness can be properly measured and understood.
- Commit permanent resourcing and funds to building the capacity of land managers to effectively respond to their general biosecurity duty, including championing landscape scale collaboration between land managers.
- Establish and ensure clear, reliable, two-way communication pathways between local, state and federal government agencies.
- Identify priorities for prevention and/or eradication and enact effective management by applying the invasion curve when allocating resources (as provide for, but not utilised, under existing RPAMPs)
- Take note of lessons learnt from failed programs, for example, RIFA, varroa mite, Giant Devil's fig, Tropical Soda Apple). All programs provide many examples that can be learnt from.
- Better clarity and distinction between the areas of responsibility and the interaction between the Biosecurity Act, Local Land Services Act and Companion Animals Acts which all relate to unwanted animals in the environment and all have subtly different objectives and implementation pathways.
- Clarity around legislative inconsistencies about how to respond to feral cats.