1. Name

NSW Farmers' Association

2. Email

3. Local Government Area

4. Address

5. Phone number

6. Stakeholder group

Aboriginal
Community
Industry
Academic
Individual
Environment
Local Government
Government (other)
Recreational

7. Make a submission

Please see attached submission from NSW Farmers' Association (PDF format). Please be in touch if there is an issue downloading the submission. Thanks Adair Moar Policy Advisor NSW Farmers (02) 9478 1073

8. Upload a document


9. Submissions will be made publicly available on the NRC's website unless marked confidential. If you wish to keep your submission confidential please check the box. Claims for access to confidential information will be determined according to the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act).
Submission to the NSW Government
Natural Resources Commission

Issues Paper
Review of weed management in NSW

December 2013

NSW Farmers’ Association
Level 6, 35 Chandos Street
St Leonards NSW 2000

Ph: (02) 9478 1000
Fax: (02) 8282 4500
Email: emailus@nswfarmers.org.au

**NSW Farmers' Association Background**
The NSW Farmers’ Association is Australia’s largest State farmer organisation representing the interests of its farmer members – ranging from broad acre, livestock, wool and grain producers, to more specialised producers in the horticulture, dairy, egg, poultry, pork, oyster and goat industries.
Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 3
1. Community Ownership .................................................................................................................. 4
   1.1 Community awareness programs ....................................................................................... 4
   1.2 Incentives and disincentives ............................................................................................. 5
   1.3 Community ownership and stakeholders .......................................................................... 5
2. Policy and regulatory framework .................................................................................................... 6
   2.1 NSW Policy context ........................................................................................................... 6
   2.2 Emerging and wide-spread weeds ..................................................................................... 7
   2.3 Alignment of regulation and policy ................................................................................... 7
   2.4 Compliance and enforcement ............................................................................................ 7
   2.5 Public versus private land management .......................................................................... 8
   2.6 Weed listing approach ...................................................................................................... 8
3. Institutional arrangements ............................................................................................................... 8
   3.1 Current institutional arrangements .................................................................................... 8
   3.2 Scale of key weed management activities and improvement ........................................... 9
4. Evidence-based decision making ................................................................................................ 9
   4.1 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes ............................................................... 9
5. Research and development ......................................................................................................... 10
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 10
Introduction

NSW Farmers welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Natural Resources Commission (NRC)'s issues paper on the review of weed management in NSW (the ‘Issues Paper’).

The NRC were requested to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the current weed management arrangements in NSW, with the view of informing the further development of the NSW Biosecurity Act and other relevant strategies under the NSW Biosecurity Strategy. NSW Farmers is supportive of this outcome and we advocate for harmonisation of practices across jurisdictions.

With the Catchment Management Authorities (CMA), Livestock Health and Pest Authorities (LHPA) and elements of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) rolling into the one Local Land Services (LLS) in the coming months, NSW Farmers argue that a key outcome for the review should be to evaluate the most effective utilisation of the new LLS.

As the Issues Paper and the Terms of Reference for the review highlight, primary responsibility of administering the Noxious Weeds Act 1993 (the Act) is with local weed control authorities who are local shires and councils. The Minister will declare noxious weeds and allocation of grants for the control of noxious weeds, advised by the noxious weeds advisory committee (NWAC). In guiding the development of the review, the Minister for Primary Industries has raised issues in the Terms of Reference which relate to the assessment and evaluation of current circumstances and arrangements. NSW Farmers believe that the weed management system involving the regional advisory committees and the NWAC has a potential to affect positive outcomes. However, NSW Farmers believes that there is significant room for improvement in awareness and coordination of weed management.

The Minister has included the functions and services of Local Land Services in the Terms of Reference as one of the aspects that the NRC should have regard to. NSW Farmers sees this as a critical aspect of the review. Without properly addressing the allocation of roles and responsibilities prior to commencement of the LLS, there is a chance that the critical aspect of coordination is precluded. Limiting the review to compartmentalised components of weed management will negate the opportunity for the review to inform the progression of the issue within the NSW Biosecurity Strategy and proposed Biosecurity Act.

NSW Farmers recommends that the review capture a holistic approach which could be considered in light of the new integrated land management services within the LLS, and the relationship with the Minister for Primary Industries, the noxious weeds advisory committee, regional weed advisory committees and local council authorities, the latter being the current primary driver of weed management responsibility under the Act. With the impending instigation of the LLS it is now pertinent and opportune to review this.

NSW Farmers calls for urgent action to deliver an appropriately resourced, state-wide, strategic approach to weed control across all tenures. NSW Farmers recommends that the NRC explore outcomes which are consistent with a holistic and forward thinking approach in light of the new LLS. NSW Farmers is optimistic that the review of management activities has begun at this time and we welcome this review.

Despite NSW Farmers’ concerns with the breadth of the Terms of Reference, it is believed that the Issues Paper is comprehensive in covering off on the relevant issues in relation to distribution and abundance of weeds, evaluation of current regulatory and
institutional arrangements, and it clarifies priority issues. The Issues Paper is successful to this extent and NSW Farmers commends it. NSW Farmers recommends reviewing the current auditing and compliance roles, and propose a model whereby the LLS is included in this.

One of the key outcomes within the NSW Biosecurity Strategy in terms of making biosecurity a shared responsibility is ensuring biosecurity is a key feature of Local Land Services. While NSW Farmers believes that it would be premature and perhaps irresponsible to roll weeds responsibilities entirely into the LLS, especially in its early phases, we believe that the LLS could take on an administrative role in the current weeds system in NSW. This is in line with both consistency and coordination that is desperately required in NSW, as well as the recommendations contained in the Biosecurity Strategy.

The current scheme for weeds management in NSW is not working and it contains many weak spots geographically as well as strategically. The LLS may present the opportunity to identify those weak spots in order to apply consistency across the board. There are areas in the state which are effectively implementing weeds responsibilities. The weeds review is the time to identify how we may duplicate and progress successful strategies.

The following submission follows the sequencing of stakeholder questions as presented in the Issues Paper for discussion and consideration. We have included numbering for ease of reference, and within each section have raised the issue of LLS, and roles and responsibilities concerns as relevant.

### 1. Community Ownership

Questions (from Issues Paper page 6)

- What do you consider good practice for encouraging community-based weed management and changing landholder practices?
- Do you feel that the current education/awareness programs are working? Why? Why not?
- What are possible means for improving incentives for collaborative actions or penalising non-involvement/requiring involvement?
- How can we improve community ownership of weed management?
- At what scale (local, regional, state) are awareness-raising programs most effective?

#### 1.1 Community awareness programs

Wide consultation through local authorities, as well as incentives for good practice, would go a long way towards community ownership. Generally, the NSW Farmers’ Association believes that current education and awareness programs do not appear to be working. In most districts landholders report a lack of presence of these sorts of programs in the community. From a NSW Farmers’ perspective, the visibility of programs is low and the programs are seen as haphazard and inconsistent, and not a priority or pressing.

NSW Farmers supports the community ownership proposals as put forward in the issues paper and in particular a positive relationship between public and private landholders and

---

that acknowledgement of a mutual problem will go a long way to achieving ownership and action on weeds.

NSW Farmers advocates for an ongoing awareness campaign on the importance of weed control. As part of ongoing and long-term awareness campaigns, it could be highlighted the cost to community as a whole if weed control is not managed effectively. It is noted that often attendance at community workshops is low, indicating that weeds is currently not perceived as a shared responsibility.

As NSW Farmers highlighted in a submission on the NSW Biosecurity Strategy in 2012, currently there is little or no information and communication technology integration across CMAs, LHPAs and biosecurity, weed and pest programs and no reliable management information available. This significantly hampers strategic and cost effective approaches to management.

NSW Farmers supports the notion that one of the major barriers to successful management is the lack of clear objectives leading to frustration and ultimately a reduction in interest in collective action. If the objectives and directives are not clear and well communicated, a solution will be left to chance.

1.2 Incentives and disincentives

In terms of a means for improving incentives for collaborative actions or penalising non-involvement, a financial incentive could be considered for those that undertake effective weed control, and awareness programs could include awareness of real increased property value which acts as both an incentive and disincentive.

These incentives would need to be complemented with awareness programs which outline estimated costs of weeds on the entire community, or the potential for a real increase/decrease in property value if weed management is undertaken effectively. In terms of scale for awareness raising programs, it is imperative that the programs are localised but led from a state and regional level to give consistency.

As an example of a financial incentive, NSW Farmers’ strongly suggest that a tax write-off of 150% be applied as part of a stewardship inventive for those chemicals that are ‘fit for purpose’ i.e. exclusively used for the target noxious weed of significance.

1.3 Community ownership and stakeholders

Community ownership could be improved by facilitating a close working relationship with landholder representatives like the NSW Farmers’ Association. There is a vast potential for the Association to reach out to landholders, disseminate information, and to in turn drive community and advocate ownership. As representatives of the majority of commercial farm businesses in this State, NSW Farmers feels a significant responsibility in seeking and providing information to members, and maintaining communication on important issues which have direct consequences for members’ livelihoods and communities.

Communication channels between the NSW Farmers’ Association and the wider government and community network have a vast potential. The instigation of the new LLS model with integrated land management opportunities, a new Biosecurity strategy and
proposed Biosecurity Act presents not only an opportune but a critical time to begin a coordinated effort ourselves.

With the establishment of the opportunity for improved integrated land and resources management, NSW Farmers also advocate for a shift towards a focus on positive outcomes on-farm and within communities and the natural environment, as well as significantly improved decision making and participation opportunities in terms of process and transparency. NSW Farmers would like to see a demonstration of outcomes-focused decision making so that public and private landholders can realise the potential of effective weed management, and communities are confident in the system.

2. Policy and regulatory framework

Questions (page 10 of Issues Paper)

- What works well with the current policy and regulatory arrangements?
- Are current regulations appropriate and effective for managing emerging and widespread weeds?
- What are the opportunities for greater alignment of regulation and policy?
- What are your views on the appropriateness of current compliance and enforcement arrangements? How can compliance and enforcement be more effective?
- Should public land managers be held accountable to the same extent as private landholders? If so, how?
- What would be a more appropriate and effective weed listing approach?

2.1 NSW Policy context

On page 7 of the Issues Paper, key legislation, strategies, plans and lists, institutions, funding and R&D programs are listed at both a federal and state level. However there is no clear indication on areas of intersection or where the federal legislation and policy feeds down into the state level. The level of federal involvement in weeds management is unclear.

NSW Farmers supports the sentiment raised in the Issues Paper on the identified barriers to more effective and efficient weed management outcomes. The many and varied areas of policy and plans which affect, or do not appropriately affect, weed management at different scales has led to very poor alignment.

In reviewing the system and implementing change it is important to remember the enormous value in local knowledge and history base held within local weeds officers and regional collaboration. This should not be lost or disregarded moving forward.

The local council authorities, LCAs, managing the support, road side weed control and regulatory responsibilities has resulted in a much better understanding of the need for long term approaches and what is achievable. The weak spot in the current context, however, is utilising this knowledge and data to its maximum potential.
**2.2 Emerging and wide-spread weeds**

NSW Farmers recommends a review of the process of emerging and wide spread weed listings, and taking a proactive approach to emerging weeds. This could involve localised consultation processes and landholder participation incentives as well as the use of modern communication technologies.

NSW Farmers feels that current regulations could be considered appropriate in cases where they are being applied and administered, but given the variances across LGA areas, current regulations could also be significantly improved. LCAs apply the Act with varying degrees of interpretation and enthusiasm and in some cases are known to ignore the regulatory side of their responsibility. NSW Farmers would suggest that the current arrangements have created vast opportunity for wide interpretation and reactive rather than proactive enforcement. As a result there is a gross inconsistency in resourcing and effectiveness of weed control outcomes across the state.

**2.3 Alignment of regulation and policy**

Roles and responsibilities, from identification to surveillance to reporting to tracing to enforcement and compliance are not currently clear. Roles and responsibilities could be improved with a strengthening of resources; this includes a sufficient amount of people with appropriate training. With the introduction of LLS’s and the new biosecurity strategy in NSW, there is the opportunity to have state wide strengthening of policy where roles and responsibilities are clear and implemented and regulated consistently at a regional level and delivered locally.

As mentioned above, an outcomes based audit of the system is preferable to output based audits. Currently, the Weeds Advisory Committees have the administration and compliance role. Many of these committees are made up of representatives (usually weeds officers) from the local control authorities. Their reports to the committees are based on levels of activity, number of inspections and amounts of money spent. However, the process is fundamentally flawed in that the advisory committees are effectively auditing their own output. NSW Farmers is advocating for a focus to outcomes based performance checking, as well as an oversight mechanism as to the efficiency of practices.

**2.4 Compliance and enforcement**

Current compliance and enforcement efforts on the whole are perceived as lacklustre at best. It must be noted that there are some exceptionally well run operations by some LCAs but they are in the minority.

Compliance and enforcement would be extensively more effective if there was consistency across all land tenures and from one LCA to the next demonstrated currently by the existing effective Regional Weeds Advisory Committees. The scheme would be particularly effective if there was a financial incentive, i.e. rate rebate, for responsible land managers that carry out effective weed control as against those that don’t. This would encourage greater participation, greater community ownership, and more proactive weed control.
2.5 Public versus private land management

NSW Farmers firmly believes that public land managers should be held accountable to the same extent as private landholders. There is ample research that suggests that the current arrangement has led to the proliferation of weeds on public lands purely because those responsible are not obliged to undertake weed control to the extent that private landholders are. Private landholders that join public lands should not have to put up with non compliant land management on their boundary, compounding their weed and biosecurity work load and cost.

Future weed control strategies as a direction of the NSW Biosecurity Strategy will only succeed by the full implementation of a nil-tenure approach to weed control.

2.6 Weed listing approach

NSW Farmers recommends dynamic and interactive weed listing, complemented by strengthened information dissemination networks. As mentioned above, weed listing also needs to be tied into awareness and education programs, communication in the initial stages is essential. Also mentioned above, communication channels between the Department, local councils, extension services, and public and private landowners and managers is not in line with modern communication technologies, integrated management techniques, nor consumer/ratepayer expectations.

As mentioned on page 8 of the Issues Paper, there could be greater clarity and transparency surrounding the weeds listing approach under the *Noxious Weeds Act 1993* and landholder obligations and penalties under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003*. For example, in the management of invasive native species, it would appear that these Acts are at cross purposes.

NSW Farmers believe that prevention and awareness are two key areas that need strengthening in the current approach. Enhancing the prevention element in the current context will have vast biosecurity and economic benefits.

3. Institutional arrangements

Questions (from Issues Paper page 12)

- What works well with the current institutional arrangements?
- What do you believe is the appropriate scale (state, regional, local) for delivery of key weed management activities, including strategic planning, enforcement, education and extension services?
- What changes to current institutional arrangements would you propose?
- How can strategic and coordinated planning for weed management be improved?
- How can accountability and performance within the management system be improved?

3.1 Current institutional arrangements

As mentioned above, local weeds officers with local knowledge are important and should be provided with an environment where they are able to fully utilise and share their knowledge and experience. The scheme also needs appropriate checks and balances.
Submission to the Natural Resources Commission

NSW Farmers supports resourcing and compliance with current legislated responsibility from a local government ratepayer base.

3.2 Scale of key weed management activities and improvement

NSW Farmers would recommend that the state level set the policy framework and principles for strategic direction. The regional level would be responsible for strategic planning and enforcement and the local level administers service delivery, inspection education and extension.

Firstly, the NSW Farmers’ Association recommends realigning the Regional Weeds Advisory Committee (RWAC) boundaries with that of the LLS’s (reduction from 14 to 11). The LLS’s could be responsible for administering the Weeds Action Plan Strategy and funding, and given the role of administration, management overview and authority to withdraw and withhold funding from LCA’s that don’t perform. Additionally, to give confidence and security to the community, there should be an identifiable funding allocation for weeds within the LLS. Regulatory enforcement with the current on ground delivery could be left to Local Government with the current Weeds Action Plan Strategy left in place.

State policies and strategies, regional strategies and management plans must be adhered to with committed funding and resourcing from a state, regional and local control authority level. With LLS oversight, accountability of local councils to effectively manage weed control and management could be significantly improved. As mentioned above, key to this would be performance audits on outcomes and not on outputs.

4. Evidence-based decision making

Questions (page 13 of Issues Paper)

- What are examples of effective weed management information and mapping systems?
- Are you aware of any examples of standardised monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes that may also be effective for weed management?
- What tools are you aware of that should be considered for state-wise weed monitoring?
- Do you feel that management decisions (i.e. which actions to take and where) are currently evidence-based?
- Who is best placed to make evidence-based decisions regarding the management approach for weeds (i.e. eradicate, contain, do nothing)?

4.1 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes

NSW Farmers does not believe that management decisions are currently evidence based in all cases. NSW Farmers concurs with the identified barriers to better evidence-based decision as outlined in the Issues Paper and in particular the lack of standardised data collection and reporting systems and the lack of performance data to drive accountability. In terms of standardised monitoring, improvements in spatial data software could be
considered- for example, there are two programs being developed on the ground by the North Coast RWAC and the Northern Inland RWAC to identify and monitor weed incursions and extent. Both will have the capabilities of state wide mapping application and simplified monitoring, evaluation and reporting via a visual process. The level of awareness and ownership is heightened because it is developed by the RWAC. These sorts of programs could be driven from the RWACs across the state. Regionalised ownership can be driven whilst administering a consistent, state-wide nil tenure approach.

NSW Farmers are aware that there are several different platforms for collecting spatial data related to weeds and that each LCA has developed its own rationale and approach to data gathering. For simplicity and usefulness it would be best if all LCAs used the same system which then would contribute to State-wide data being readily available without costly processing to align datasets.

NSW Farmers believe that the LCA's in consultation with regional LLS boards are best placed to make evidence-based decisions regarding the management approach for weeds.

5. Research and development

Questions (page 14 of Issues Paper)

- Is the current investment in research sufficient (e.g. amount of funding, time scale of funding)?
- How can available research dollars be used more effectively, better prioritised and coordinated and/or better leverage additional investment?
- Are you aware of any additional barriers to effective implementation of weed research outcomes?
- How can the dissemination of research results and the adoption of new controls and technologies be improved?
- What roles and responsibilities should research and development corporations have with respect to weeds?

NSW Farmers support the statements contained in the Issues Paper on research and development and in particular that research findings are often not disseminated effectively, reducing uptake of new approaches and technology.

NSW Farmers do not believe that the current investment in research is sufficient. Research projects in a lot of cases are too short-term, usually running over two to three years. Five to seven years, for example, may be more appropriate given the variability of seasonable conditions.

Conclusion

NSW Farmers suggest a more cooperative, transparent, and accountable approach and as suggested above, collaboration with the NSW Farmers Association could improve information dissemination and information/technology sharing. The application of weeds management across LCAs is extremely varied and so evaluation of the future role of the LLS is crucial.
Submission to the Natural Resources Commission

NSW Farmers congratulates the NRC on a comprehensive Issues Paper and is pleased to be part of the consultation process. We look forward to seeing the draft recommendations and providing further input.