

## NRC Pest Animal Management Review Draft Report May 2016 – MVWAC Comments

Macquarie Valley Weeds Advisory Committee (MVWAC) is a regional network of weed managers including local government, Local Land Services (LLS) and DPI - Lands. The committee has had a long history of weeds cooperation in central and western NSW and maintains a strong and active membership of over 30 government agencies. MVWAC is actively working with LLS' in the region to establish the new Regional Weed Committees (Central Tablelands, Central West and Western RWC) and to develop regional strategic documents. MVWAC support the role of the new RWCs in providing 'tenure neutral' strategic planning and coordination of weed management activities.

- **Recommendation 3 (iii):** establish a staged approach to integrate pest plant and animal management: parallel committees and planning to merge over a three-year period to realise opportunities of efficiencies.

MVWAC support the proposed establishment of parallel weed and pest animal committees, providing adequate funding and resourcing are provided.

MVWAC **do not** support the merging of these committees for the following reasons:

1. Membership of Regional Weed Committees in central and western NSW is dominated by weed officers and managers, whose sole interest and responsibility is weeds. The committees are currently working on regional strategic planning documents which will support implementation of the weeds components of the incoming NSW Biosecurity Act 2015. The proposed new pest animal management committees will also be tasked with developing regional plans in line with new biosecurity regulations (Recommendation 3 iv). Guided by these documents, it will be the role of both committees to provide ongoing advice and direction to stakeholders, the community and other agencies including, for RWCs, the NSW State Weed Committee. Integrating the existing RWCs with the proposed pest animal management committees will not increase efficiency but will dilute the role and output of both committees. Although weed and pest animal management are both guided by the principles of the NSW Biosecurity Strategy 2013-2021, the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 and the NSW Invasive Species Plan 2015-2022, on ground work is carried out independently by separate and distinct government authorities. Different control techniques and a separate skill set of personnel are required. Priorities for weeds do not necessarily match priorities for pest animals. Dividing resources between these two core issues will lead to a lack of focus and poor outcomes. The RWC and the proposed pest animal management committees should remain separate.
2. Authorities at the front line of weed control, who are already active members of the new RWCs, do not have the resources to support an integrated committee where half the discussion/advisory role is not relevant to their core function. It would equally be concerning if membership of the proposed merged committees was restructured to reduce the number of weed stakeholders represented.
3. Weeds and pest animals are both a major threat to NSW's agriculture and environment but it is relevant to comment that the current annual cost of weeds in NSW is more than tenfold

that of pest animals. Weeds cost the NSW economy, on average, \$1.8 billion per annum including expenditure by public agencies and losses to producers and consumers (NRC Weed Management Review 2014). This cost is more than doubled when considering the cost of weeds to the environment

(<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/weeds/why/impact.html>).

The average economic impact of pest animals in NSW is estimated at \$170 million (NRC Pest Animal Management Review Draft Report 2016). The RWCs, as key committees advising government and the community on weed issues, need to stay independent to reflect this huge contrast in expenditure.

- **Recommendation 11:** Support and coordinate local on-ground action. The NSW Government should **(ii)** establish a staged approach over three years for *regional pest management* coordinators to have a broader invasive species role.

1. MVWAC **do not** support Recommendation 11 (ii). The role of the proposed regional pest animal coordinator to improve capacity building, knowledge transfer and motivation in each LLS region is a significant one. It involves building capacity and awareness through education and engagement programs, including educating landholders on their pest animal management responsibilities under the incoming Biosecurity Act 2015 and regional plans; coordination of community groups; and coordination of collective on-ground pest animal control action. To broaden this role to also include other invasive species including invertebrates and weeds would overwhelm a single coordinator. Implementation of weed and pest animal programs should be overseen by separate regional coordinators.

- **Recommendation 30 (i):** Provide adequate resources to deliver effective pest animal management. The NSW Government should implement the IPART recommendation to decrease the LKLS minimum rateable area size from 10 ha to 2 ha to increase the rate base.

1. MVWAC **support** Recommendation 30 (i) to increase the LLS funding stream but the committee suggests these additional funds also be used to contribute towards regional weed management programs.

- **Suggestion for improvement in pest animal management:**

The NSW DPI has recently introduced a new reporting system – the Biosecurity Information System (BIS). Weed officers use this system to report weed species distribution – in order that spatial data can be produced. Weeds often represent harbor for pest animals. MVWAC suggest that the ‘Weeds Metadata Standard’ developed by NSW DPI for officers reporting to BIS could be expanded to include question(s) focusing on whether the identified weed acts or has the potential to act as a harbor for feral animals. DPI could then collate the data and provide information to the LLS for action.