

Queensland's NRM *Rumble*

WEEDS AND PEST ANIMAL MANAGEMENT IN QUEENSLAND

Queensland's regional natural resource management groups have played a significant role in building partnerships to manage pest plants and animals across the state. And this communiqué provides a snapshot of some of those programs and the people being engaged to wipe out pest species through a variety of means.

From a strategic point of view, Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective is currently participating in a stakeholder engagement process run by Biosecurity Queensland, which aims to review who is best positioned to manage the regulatory environment for pest plants and animals – and which will roll nine pieces of legislation into one. In addition to the stakeholder engagement process, a Memorandum of Understanding is in place, articulating the respective responsibilities of the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (the lead agency for biosecurity), Local Government Association of Queensland, and Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective.

I am pleased to say that this process is one of the most effective we've ever been a part of. Plans to roll these pieces of legislation into one and reduce the multiple layers of administration that currently exist have the RGC's wholehearted support. We believe this will be a very good opportunity to reduce waste, prevent overlaps, and take a far more strategic view of pest plant and animal management than what we have otherwise seen in the past.

Historically, buckets of money have been passed out to Local Governments, NRM Groups, farmers and other community groups to tackle already problematic pest plants and animals. However, given the nature of managing pests, funding often runs out before control programs can be completed. Coupled with a lag-time between funding rounds, this has seen a continuous cycle of pest reestablishment, instead of total eradication or control. Clearly, a review of the system will mean an opportunity to review investments and responsibilities.

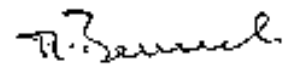
It has always been our belief that a mix of regulation, incentives and education is necessary to achieve long-term practice change and the adoption of new management practices. The trick will always be to strike the right balance, and to do each step properly. Traditionally, many organisations have been involved in practicing all of these steps. Overlaps, and our combined inability to strike that balance, were inevitable, and have been an ongoing challenge. This review process will give all of these organisations – regional NRM Groups included – an opportunity to be very clear about who does what across the state. And this clarity will be a benefit to communities trying to tackle severe pest plant and animal infestations.

Finally, a strategic approach to pest plant and animal management has long been needed in Queensland. Too often, control programs are a knee-jerk response to a severe problem. Often, but not always,

From the Chair

these programs have been in isolation of other natural resource management activities. Yet, where we have seen pest animal and plant management incorporated into broader rehabilitation projects, the NRM benefits have been extraordinary. For example, where we see weed control in conjunction with revegetation, the success rate is increased significantly – for both the new trees and shrubs, and the eradication of weeds.

It is this potential for strategic policy and planning that we are most excited about. It has long been a strength of Queensland's NRM Groups to provide that necessary, yet often elusive, big picture approach to our state's planning processes – and this process will be no different.




Mike Berwick AM,
Chair Queensland Regional NRM
Groups Collective

Targeting key to cost effective rabbit control in the Murray-Darling

Targeting established key breeding areas may just be the secret to significantly boosting the success of rabbit control activities, according to QMDC Pest Animals and Weeds Technical Officer, Renee Stephenson.

Ms Stephenson said initial findings from a project between the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC), Biosecurity Queensland, the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB) and Stanthorpe Landcare had found targeting key breeding sites an effective way to control rabbit numbers across a wider area.

"Landholders in the Eukey and Cottonvale district (east and north of Stanthorpe) have worked closely with the project partners to identify, map and control rabbit source areas to ensure the rabbit control work delivers 'better bang for our buck'," Ms Stephenson said.

"The Granite Belt in southern Queensland is considered one of the state's hotspots for rabbits because the well drained soil and cool climate provides ideal conditions for rabbit reproduction.



Left: Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board Inspector Mark Ridge, "Croyden Park" livestock manager Clint McErvale, QMDC Weed & Pest Animal Technical Officer Shane Cartwright and Biosecurity Queensland Senior Zoologist Dr David Berman inspect the results of warren ripping on the Cottonvale district property in late March 2009.

"Indeed, in specific locations across the Granite Belt, rabbits have long established key breeding areas. By targeting control and funding to source areas, rabbit dispersal can be minimised, thus in effect controlling rabbits across a wide area with minimal expenditure."

Ms Stephenson said at the start of the project, an increasing rabbit population was having an environmental and economic impact upon the Granite Belt, reducing grazing industry profitability, directly impacting upon the horticultural industry by damaging produce and competing with native herbivores for food.

"The project has included coordination of on-ground control, such as ripping of warrens, burning windrows and blackberry control to remove safe harbours, along with the collection of genetic samples to determine both the source of the rabbits and for resistance to Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus," she said.

Ms Stephenson said while the project was originally funded for 12 months, QMDC had been able to secure the project for a further two years to expand the coordinated control across a wider area, given early positive signs of success at the initial control sites.

Bouncing Rubber Vine out of the Burnett Mary!



There is no better rubber vine than dead rubber vine! A small infestation of rubber vine, typical in the mid-Burnett region. (Photo courtesy of Jodie Sippel, BQ)

It's hard to tell which the nastiest weeds are: the ones that burst forth over a short period in all their vigour and potency, or those that can lull everyone into a misguided complacency by their slower, and stealthier, takeover of the land. Parthenium is one of the former, and rubber vine could be judged one of the latter.

Rubber vine (*Cryptostegia grandiflora*) has been present in the Burnett catchment area for several years. Mostly found along the creeks and rivers of the Burnett catchment, it was seen less often than weeds such as parthenium, and when it was noticed it didn't appear to be much of a problem. It still isn't – in most areas. But just give it a chance and a few more years, and the beautiful river flats stand every chance of being swathed in rubber vine.

But the tide is turning for rubber vine. In a joint effort between the Burnett Mary Regional Group, Regional Councils and landholders, most of the rubber vine

within the Burnett and Kolan catchments has been controlled. What's more, the landholders involved in the project have made an ongoing commitment to carry out follow-up control over the next 18 months.

An isolated infestation within one small area of the Mary River is being treated by the Fraser Coast Regional Council, and the most northerly infestations in the region, within the Baffle catchment are currently the focus of activity.

The program has been a distinct illustration of what can be achieved when everyone is working together, plus when the long-term outcome of eradication is underlined by commitment from both the Regional Councils involved and the landholders. And knitting this all together has been the Commonwealth Government's strategic investment through the Caring for our Country program to assist landholders with half the control cash costs.

One weed down – a few more to go!

Stopping the spread of Rubber Vine in the Reef Catchments



Land managers in the Gregory River catchment planning the control of rubber vine.

In 2009, Reef Catchments provided funding to Whitsunday Catchment Landcare who, in partnership with Whitsunday Regional Council, is working to control Rubber Vine infestations within the Gregory River catchment. The project aims to raise awareness of the pest problem and help to control outlier infestations, maintaining the current rubber vine containment line.

The project began in August 2009 with an awareness session held in the Andromache catchment to increase awareness of the problem of rubber vine, as well as assist land managers in weed identification. This catchment was chosen to target first, as it adjoins catchments with known infestations of rubber vine, and were at risk of the weed spreading from seeds washing downstream during floods. The land managers who attended this event collectively manage over 50,000 hectares of land.

It provided an opportunity to teach landholders how to identify the weed and the risks associated with its spread. It was agreed that it was very important to be aware of what it looks like, report the weed and to remove any isolated plants as soon as possible. A Rubber Vine Control Field Day was also held in October where Whitsunday Regional Council educated the community on best practice pest control and showcased the different control techniques available. A good number of land managers attended on the day, including individuals who manage sizable properties with significant rubber vine infestations, as well as the International Timber Cooperation and state government staff who manage significant areas of unallocated state land. A number of expressions of interest for information and assistance were also received from

land managers unable to attend on the day. To date, the project has resulted in the on-ground control of 34 hectares of rubber vine located outside the current containment line, as well as training for land managers in weed identification, control techniques and the use of personal protective equipment. The Whitsunday Weed Partnership, funded by Whitsunday Regional Council, has been able to significantly value-add to the project by providing technical support and facilitating control of another 32 hectares of rubber vine. In 2010, Reef Catchments is looking to continue the program with additional funding for rubber vine control and maintenance of previous control areas. More information is available at www.reefcatchments.com.au, or by contacting Adam Folkers at Reef Catchments on (07) 4968 4208.

Youth attack: weed control in the Condamine catchment

Condamine Alliance recently joined with Cambooya Landcare to deliver our Youth Weed Attack project, aimed at engaging youth in managing weeds in their local community.

Cambooya Landcare worked with 26 youth-based groups within the catchment, engaging almost 370 youth and delivering 2,080 hours of on-ground work.

Groups like the Dalby Pony Club removed weeds, including Tree Pear, Harrisia Cactus and Thistle, from the Dalby showgrounds; Cambooya Church Youth Group removed

assorted grass weeds from the Cambooya Grasslands Reserve; and Glennie Heights Scouts removed Mother of Millions from Everest Road Park in Warwick.

The project allowed participating groups to improve their ability to recognise and treat weeds and also become more aware of weeds, the role they play in habitat degradation and control measures.

At the commencement of each weeding activity, participants were instructed in weed identification, tool use and safety and weeding techniques. Throughout the

activity, participants were encouraged to identify weeds as well as natives and received ongoing instruction and feedback on their weeding technique.

Youth groups that participated enjoyed the experience so much that plans are being considered to look at continuing the arrangement on a longer term basis.

The project was funded by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program.

Prickly Acacia: Turning the Tide in the Southern Gulf

In the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria, part of the Gulf Plains bioregion is under serious threat of invasion by prickly acacia and has been rated "Very High" priority for strategic control. As a result, local stakeholders have all leaped into action.

The southern Gulf is vulnerable to weed spread because of its higher and more reliable rainfall and suitable soils. So, Southern Gulf Catchments, Biosecurity Queensland, the Wild River rangers, Carpentaria and Burke Shire Councils and the majority of pastoralists have set themselves the task of achieving strategic control of outlier infestations in the lower Gulf plains.

Receiving National Heritage Trust funding in 2003-04 and Queensland Government Blueprint for the Bush funding in 2008-09, landholders and councils have already made some headway. Prickly acacia has now been treated to varying degrees on most of the lower southern Gulf properties, roadsides and state land. The Wild River rangers, based in Normanton, have also become involved in weed management operations on a number of properties.

The Australian Government's Caring for our Country Open Grants scheme saw follow-up operations on these properties in 2009, adding more properties and more land to the growing hectares undergoing control activities. More Caring for our Country funding in 2009-

Prickly acacia spreading on Inverleigh Station in 2007; these trees have since been treated.



Inverleigh West – prickly acacia treated in 2009 (right of fence), to be treated in 2010 (left of fence).



Prickly acacia around a water point on Lawn Hill Station – before basal bark treatment in 2008.



Prickly acacia around a water point on Lawn Hill Station – after basal bark treatment in 2008.



2010 and 2010-2011 will ensure these continue as necessary and new projects commence. The desired objectives of control of spread and eventual eradication of prickly acacia in the lower Gulf plains will be nearer to achievement, but consistent follow-up operations and constant vigilance to detect new outbreaks will be essential in the long term.

Surveying and mapping has enabled prioritisation of weed management planning and will continue to be

provided in the future to monitor treatment effectiveness and weed spread, and to identify new outbreaks.

The recent funding rounds and in-kind landholder contributions will reduce the impact of this Weed of National Significance across 100,000 hectares. Funding in excess of \$400,000, matched by at least this amount of landholder in-kind support, will have been spent in the lower Gulf by 2011 to reach this ultimate aim.



To find out more about natural resource management projects or contact details for your regional natural resource management group, visit the

Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective website - www.rgc.org.au or ph 07 4699 5000.

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