



Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc.'s Submission On The Draft Threat Abatement Plan To Reduce The Impacts On Northern Australia's Biodiversity By The Five Listed Grasses

21 November 2011

Submission to:

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Environmental Biosecurity Section
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This submission is presented by the Chief Executive Officer, Geoff Penton, on behalf of the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee Inc. (QMDC). QMDC is a regional natural resource management (NRM) group that supports communities in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin (QMDB) to sustainably manage their natural resources.

1.0 Background

The Queensland Murray-Darling Basin (QMDB) is home to a wide diversity of plants and animals including over 3,300 plant species, 97 mammals, 340 birds, 156 reptiles, 50 frogs, 18 fish and 120 butterflies. The region is also made up of over 170 identified regional ecosystems or vegetation communities.

QMDC urges the Australian Government to conserve biodiversity and ecosystems based on both regional as well as national aspirations and priorities.

The QMDB regional Natural Resource Management Plan (NRM Plan) is accredited by the State and Australian Governments. It documents both the key natural resource assets and values of the region and targets for their management.



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It is QMDC's experience that national biodiversity strategies and policies lack specific regional information, expertise or a process of regional management which could better inform ecosystem vulnerability and innovative management options for conservation. QMDC therefore offers the following specific comments in relation to the QMDB region and the biodiversity aspirations and targets described in this region's NRM Plan to help fill the knowledge gap.

This region's NRM Plan identifies the baseline of natural resource assets and the target intentions for vegetation and biodiversity, and managing weed and pests. These are summarised below.

1.1 Vegetation and Biodiversity Target Intentions

Priority landscape scale ecosystems are maintained or improved.

Natural assets including native vegetation are managed or conserved to maintain ecological processes and ecosystem linkages, and increased in extent and abundance at priority catchment scales.

Increase in area of sustainably managed native vegetation for landscape and biodiversity outcomes through traditional and innovative economic uses.

Areas of identified high nature conservation significance are maintained in current condition and improved against the Common Nature Conservation Classification System.

Decline in populations of 'at risk' flora and fauna species are halted.

The biodiversity condition and ecological health of native vegetation in priority catchments are maintained or improved.

1.2 Managing Weed and Pest Animal Threats Target Intentions

The extent and impact of priority terrestrial and aquatic weeds and pests are stabilised and decreasing.

Reduce the incidence of recorded infestations of new weed and pest outbreaks.

Phase one of weed and pest management studies undertaken by QMDC have modelled the distribution of weeds and pests under different climate and land system scenarios. QMDC would like to progress Phase two of these studies to ascertain the impacts on biodiversity in relation to a number of weeds and pests of concern in the region.



Section/subsection	Line number(s)	Comments
Introduction		<p>Many community members would like to see other grasses also included on the list .The spread of some of these are possibly too great to achieve control and it may weaken the argument for control of the other grasses however many of them are having an effect on productivity e.g African love grass poses a greater threat in the QMDB particularly in the poorer grazing areas where it is taking over native pastures. Very little is being done in this region to reduce the impacts of this weed. QMDC recommends the TAP to be extended to include the following grasses Chilean needle grass, Giant Rat’s Tail grass, African love grass, the Sporobolus family e.g. Paramatta grass.</p>
Section 1.1		
Section 1.2		<p>QMDC asserts the TAP should address accountability issues related to the introduction of the weeds (grasses) at the first point of introduction. QMDC sees the need for realistic penalties for the introduction of new weeds. There are fines for littering – which is pretty easily reversed. A lot of people have no idea how serious a problem weeds are. Higher financial penalties would give an indication of the costs weed invasions pose for landholders who have to deal with them.</p>
Section 1.3		<p>Implementation: QMDC suggests the successful implementation of the TAP will rely on legislation that provides:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a clear definition on the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders; and 2. a commitment by those key stakeholders to implement legislation and policy in a coordinated manner. <p>QMDC is concerned that involvement by community, local, State and the Australian Governments requires better coordination at all levels to deliver on regional and local priorities and actions.</p>

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		QMDC recognizes that the 5 identified grasses are not having as great impact on the QMDB as the abovenamed grasses in the <i>Introduction</i> section of this submission. However QMDC Sees The need for education of stakeholders in the region on the 5 grasses in order to ensure the region remains on alert to any potential spread or infestation. QMDC recommends this education could consist of a photo tool kit and other relevant literature to which stakeholders and biosecurity, weed managers, landholders etc can refer to for identification and eradication purposes.
Section 1.4		Identifying priority areas for action: Risk areas in QMDB are the Great Dividing Range, National Parks, Reserves, floodplains (Condamine, Lower Balonne, Culgoa)
Section 2		
Objective 1		
Action 1.1		
Action 1.2		
Action 1.3		
Action 1.4		
Objective 2		
Action 2.1		
Action 2.2		
Action 2.3		Hygiene protocols need to include well-resourced and administered wash down facilities designed to meet a range of needs.
Action 2.4		
Action 2.5		QMDC recommends the establishment of containment lines to be included in management plans. Support for the neighbouring properties to these containment lines should take priority, for example, education and training opportunities, eradication control resources etc
Action 2.6		
Objective 3		
Action 3.1		
Action 3.2		
Objective 4		
Action 4.1		
Action 4.2		
Action 4.3		
Action 4.4		
Action 4.5		
Objective 5		
Action 5.1		

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Action 5.2		
Action 5.3		
Action 5.4		
Action 5.5		
Objective 6		
Action 6.1		
Action 6.2		
Section 3.1		
Section 3.2		
Table A		
Glossary		
References		
General Comments		<p>QMDC generally supports the TAP's intention to manage weed threats and asserts that preventing the introduction or spread of invasive plants in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin from pasture by:</p> <p>a. Adoption and implementation of an industry Code of Conduct that meets current legislative requirements within the EPBC Act, Land Protection Act (Stock Routes and Pest Management) 1994, (soon to be the Biosecurity Act) and other relevant legislation best management practice for weed seed spread prevention, and has adequate compliance for all stages of farming and grazing operations (and operators).</p> <p>b. Identification of risk of weed seed introduction or spread at all stages of farming and grazing and other associated activities. Two of the major forms of spread of weed seeds are in hay or seed. Until the mid-1990's the Queensland DPI Standards Branch was responsible for overseeing seed quality standards in the State, including the purity of seed samples and freedom from weed seeds. At that stage this process was replaced by a "Truth in labelling" scheme that is self-regulated by industry. The DPI Standards Branch at Indooroopilly in Brisbane was then disbanded.</p> <p>QMDC believes that this has been shown to be inadequate in that seed samples have been sold that have been found to contain weed seeds. This has involved both crop and pasture seed.</p>

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		<p>Such breaches have been more prevalent in “over the fence trading” where seed has been harvested and sold as a “catch crop” (not by professional seed growers) through advertising in local newspapers.</p> <p>QMDC has witnessed a sample of wheat seed contaminated by weeds, yet the seed lot was accompanied by a seed certificate that claimed the sample was weed free.</p> <p>QMDC is concerned that they are one way that security quarantines can be breached to allow weed seeds to spread. Much of the Giant Rat’s Tail grass has also been spreading between properties along coastal areas through contaminated pasture seed.</p> <p>QMDC understands that DPI developed a scheme that would have allowed pasture seed to be “guaranteed free” of Giant Rat’s Tail at a cost of about 40-50 cents per kg. This however was rejected by local farmers on the coast in favour of “cheaper seed”.</p> <p>c. Preparation and delivery of weed management plans in line with the Code of Conduct, and property, district, local government, regional and state pest management plans to mitigate risk.</p> <p>d. Increasing the knowledge and skills of people working in the agriculture and pastoral industry, to identify weeds and potential risks and respond appropriately.</p> <p>Where industry activities or persons are responsible for the introduction or spread of invasive plants or animals, they must prevent further spread of the infestation and actively manage with the aim of eradication.</p> <p>Where industry activities are conducted within existing invasive plant infestation areas, they must prevent further spread, and work cooperatively with affected stakeholders to actively manage or eradicate the infestation.</p>
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