

## **County Councils or other co-ordination for efficient weed control**

*NCWAC-SEQPAF Weed Forum, Tweed Heads*

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### ***Acknowledgements***

This paper has sourced directly from a paper of the same topic written by Phil Blackmore, NSW Agriculture and Kim Parker, NEWA on 'Whither the Weeds County Council' from the 12<sup>th</sup> NSW Biennial Noxious Weeds Conference - my thanks to Phil and Kim for the use of their material.

*(Blackmore, P. and Parker, K. 2003. Whither the Weeds County Council? From Proceedings - 12<sup>th</sup> NSW Biennial Noxious Weeds Conference, Taree.)*

### **Abstract**

Noxious weed control and management in New South Wales has benefited from the utilisation of co-operative arrangements between Local Government Authorities. The most common structure used is the County Council system, however there are other structures working effectively in particular areas. A summary of each is given with a case study on the Clarence Valley Weeds Authority.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Define – efficient weed control.....**

With the theme for this forum being 'solving common weed problems', it's appropriate to have a look at what structures are out there to deal with these weeds problems in an efficient manner.

So what is efficient weed control? Is it a matter of quantity or quality? Do you measure your efficiency by the number of Groundsel bush eliminated through death by Quikspray?? I know my Spray Operators will think so. Or is it a measure of the amount of stakeholders you were able to get involved in a regionally significant project? Of course, the definitions vary according to whom you speak to in the field of weed management.

What I hope to look at in this paper is more so the structures of weed management which exist on the south side of the border which can demonstrate efficient weed control. The main spheres of government with involvement in weed management are those of Local Government structures, so I will look at those.

Which of these provide the efficient weed management that the managers and 'beancounters' look for?

Ultimately, each Council has its own specifications for weed management to determine the systems in place. I will give a brief background for each

### **1.2. New South Wales - South of the border**

*Legislation* – Noxious Weed Act 1993 + regulations

*Summary* – Declared Noxious Weeds from W1 to W2 to W3 to W4

*Funding* – NWAC provide funding for Weed Control Co-ordination and Extension (inspectorial) and Regional Group Projects (operational) – usually

1:1 matched with local government (\$ 7.2 millions of grant funding assistance provided in NSW, for noxious weed management)

*Administration* – NSW Agriculture through the Noxious Weed Advisory Committee

*Enforcement* – Local Government through Local Control Authorities

## **2. Discussion**

### **2.1. What co-operative structures are in place?**

Here I will demonstrate the various structures in New South Wales, commonly known as Local Control Authorities (LCA's). LCA's can be a single or general-purpose council, and county council or a weed authority. These co-operative systems are given below.

#### **2.1.1. General Purpose Council**

These are where the councils have no formal arrangement with other councils and run their own Noxious Weeds Officer and operational staff.

Administration and funding arrangements are internally managed.

**Example –Coffs Harbour City Council.**

#### **2.1.2. County Council**

This is a fully constituted county council, with councillor representative from each of their constituent councils. They normally have a General Manager, support staff provided and a dedicated noxious weeds structure, ie a Chief Weeds Officer, Weeds Officers and & operational staff. Administration costs are high, due to the fixed costs of running the county as well as supporting inspectorial and operational programs.

**Example – Far North Coast Weeds**

#### **2.1.3. Weed Authorities**

These are where Councils form a partnership through a deed of agreement or contract. A number of councils have an independent co-operative arrangement created by contract.

Costs for administering a Weeds Authority are less than the more formal arrangement of a County Council.

**Example - Clarence Valley Weed Authority**

## **2.2. Other Structures**

Less formalised arrangements also exist in NSW. Fifteen (15) regional weed advisory committees exist across the state. They perform duties such as, stakeholder committee meetings, information exchange, regional coordination, planning, extension activities, weed forums, apply for funds, undertake project work.

For example, the North Coast Weeds Advisory Committee (NCWAC) meets on a quarterly basis and consists of the various councils in the region, as well as stakeholders such as NSW NPWS, NSW State Forests, Department of Lands and others. Taskforces and subcommittees drive actions such as the Bitou Bush Taskforce, the Camphor laurel Taskforce and the Environmental Weeds Taskforce.

Networking has improved and funding opportunities are maximised between members of the committee. A regional strategy and agreed regional management plans are key outcomes from the committee.

Under a review of weeds management in NSW conducted recently, there is also the option of transferring noxious weed management to Rural Lands Protection Boards or NSW Agriculture itself, however these options are not viewed favourably.

### **2.3. Benefits?**

Compared to single purpose councils, county councils and other formal co-operative arrangements between councils provide a number of advantages for noxious weed management, such as:

- Engendering long term commitment by councils to noxious weed management
  - Enabling a team of skilled staff to be assembled.
  - Specialist skills can be built into a team
  - Staff can be concentrated to deal with new weed problems in a part of the county when necessary.
  - Ensuring specialist vehicles are fully utilised
  - Larger herbicide orders increasing purchasing power
- (Blackmore and Parker 2003)

### **2.4. Negatives?**

Currently only fifty five councils or 32% of all general purpose councils in NSW are constituents of a weeds county council (Blackmore and Parker 2003).

It should be noted however that despite the support of the NSW Weeds Strategy and financial assistance from the noxious weed grant, in recent years local government has been reluctant to enter into such arrangements. During the six years the NSW Weeds Strategy has been in effect, only one new weeds authority has been created – CVWA (Blackmore and Parker 2003).

Why? Perhaps it is because there is no clear commitment as to what approach the NSW Agriculture prefers and is willing to fund at appropriate levels.

## **3. Clarence Valley Weed Authority (CVWA) – a Case Study**

The CVWA is a joint initiative of four councils (now three with amalgamation of Ulmarra and Nymboida) since 1999. Councillors in the area saw a need for co-operative arrangements and utilised an opportunity when it existed, based on circumstances of staff resigning etc.

In the past there were varying levels of commitment to noxious weeds across the four councils – now with the CVWA there is a consistent approach across the lower catchment.

Maclean Shire Council is the constituent council responsible for the overall management and administrative support of the authority.

Staffing consists of a Chief Weeds Officer, three Weed Inspectors and two Spray Operators to fulfill the requirements of the constituent councils for our Inspectorial and Operational programs. A balance in team structure is provided through these roles, as is a balance required between enforcement by our staff and provision of education and awareness.

Funding for running the CVWA is provided through various sources, with about half of its income coming from contributions from its constituent Councils. Matched grants from the NWAC account for about 30% of income. The remaining 20% comes from contract weed control for private landholders and Government agencies, provision of information to prospective land purchasers, fines, etc

The area consists of some diverse countryside, from coastal ecosystems to floodplain agriculture and highland grazing areas. The extremely varied topography lends itself to a broad range of weed issues.

Standard collection of information is crucial and this has been assisted through the adoption of handheld computers or PDAs to collect accurate data on the location of weeds species. It has been demonstrated that cost efficiencies are given through increased inspection numbers and reduced administration time in the six months of their operations.

Education is an important focus for our work, and activities such as Weedbuster Week serve well to spread the word on weeds. The CVWA is well placed to communicate effectively with stakeholders at the local level to provide the information they need.

It is important for our organisation to break down the need for full on enforcement, and promote education and awareness. Enforcement will always be a cornerstone for our core activities, however it needs to be complimentary with education approaches.

#### **4. Summary**

At the end of day, there are horses for courses (*cliched or what?*). This paper looked to demonstrate the benefits of co-operative systems of weeds management for administrative bodies in Local Government.

The Clarence Valley Weeds Authority and other co-operative structures provide a unique example of balanced inspectorial and operational programs with input from all levels of management. It is demonstrated that decision making from the ground up with skilled staff promotes an opportunity for efficient weed management across a number of local government areas. As a business unit, it can fulfill requirements of the stakeholders for not only enforcement but also the broader need for the co-ordinated and co-operative approach for weed management at the local level.