

CRC - Weed Awareness and Environmental Weeds

The Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management (Weeds CRC) was originally established in 1995, based in Adelaide and covering temperate Australia only. It was extended for a further 7 year life from 2001 to 2008 as a national CRC, covering tropical as well as temperate weeds and with participant organisations throughout Australia, from Darwin to Tasmania, and Armidale to Perth. There are three Research programs, Weed Incursion and Risk Management, Sustainable Cropping Systems, and Landscape Management, an Education program covering schools, the VET sector and universities, and a Communications program. The head office and two Program leaders are in Adelaide but the CEO and another Program leader are based in Brisbane and the other Program leaders are in Townsville and Wagga. Detailed information about the Weeds CRC and its research programs, publications, etc can be found on the web site at www.weeds.crc.org.au and this is used as a key communication tool.

A recent report commissioned by the Weeds CRC has provided up-to-date information on the cost of weeds to the community, the lack of which was handicapping our awareness publicity. This report demonstrates that the direct cost of weed control to our crop, livestock and horticultural industries is \$1.4-\$1.6 billion per annum. Lost production has now been estimated to inflict a cost of over \$2 billion pa to those industries. If one includes the loss of economic surplus, the total cost of weeds was \$3.4-4.4 billion in 2001-02. The cost of weeds to the environment are incalculable-a loss of "psychic income"? However, the known direct cost of weeds in the environment as borne by National Parks, public authorities and on indigenous lands adds another \$112 m pa to these estimates, giving a total annual bill of between \$3.5 and \$4.5 billion pa. Clearly the problem of weeds exceeds that of salinity in immediate cost terms and is comparable with the cost of land degradation to Australia. The report also identified the lack of economic data on the damage caused by environmental weeds. Invasive plants are a massive threat to our native wildlife and flora, probably the greatest threat now that broadscale clearing is largely under control. Yet the amount currently spent on controlling invasive plants in environmental lands is less than \$0.1 per ha, totally inadequate to prevent further spread, let alone restore invaded landscapes.

In this situation, it is very important that new weeds are destroyed or contained before they become widespread. CRC research clearly identifies that early eradication and containment is the most cost-effective management method. The Weeds CRC has a contract with the Department of the Environment and Heritage to produce weed management bulletins for the weeds on the DEH "Alert List", identified as a threat to the environment but not yet widespread. Yet up to 75% of environmental weeds were originally planted as ornamentals and garden plants, and new potential and actual weeds are still being sold and planted. To reverse this situation, we need to make the public aware of the issue, hence a new weed awareness program has been started, with the 2020 Vision Statement "Killing us softly – Australia's green stalkers". A series of newspaper articles will be followed up with short features and items on TV, for which we are currently taking good quality film footage.

Once the community is aware of the issue, we hope to see controls on the sale of weedy plants, both those that are already weeds now and those with the potential to

become weeds. These may be legislative prohibitions on sales, such as already exist for a few plants in Queensland, or a requirement for use of warning labels, or a recognition of legal liability where seed moves into neighbouring properties. Public awareness of the issues and costs involved is critical to the control of environmental weeds.