



for a living planet

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Supplementary information to Quarantine and Biosecurity Review

This submission is intended to provide additional information to the Quarantine and Biosecurity Review, following discussion with the review panel at the meeting attended by WWF staff member Julie Kirkwood on 2 May, 2008. Additional information and/or points of clarification based on the discussion at the panel meeting is provided for the following issues:

1. Assistance with remote surveillance
2. Monitoring of the impacts of climate change
3. Need for comprehensive early warning surveillance - New Zealand fire ant response
4. Mismatches between State laws and the legal sale of known weeds
5. AusBiosec
6. Support for further National ballast water management discussion

Additional information is also provided in relation to the internet sale of banned weeds.

1. Assistance with remote surveillance

In our original submission, WWF encouraged this review to consider expanding support for Indigenous rangers and communities in northern Australia who assist in remote surveillance.

Discussion with some of the Indigenous ranger groups and representative organisations indicates that the program to date has been an excellent support to developing Ranger groups and allows a good exchange for building up experience in land and sea management work. The AQIS fee for service model provides flexibility, funding, training and an opportunity for developing partnerships. Regarding expansion of this program, some key areas for support mentioned is the need for coordination funds and an organised training program. Greater support for this program from state based agencies was also noted as a way to possibly build greater partnerships.

The continuation of the current program and also the expansion of biosecurity programs in targeted areas is likely to have wide support, given there is adequate consultation resulting in a

good overlap between rural and regional community needs and biosecurity priorities. Whilst current work focuses on coastal surveillance, marine debris, introduced species and disease (pig and duck sampling, mosquito and ant trapping, weed removal), there seems to be many other areas that fee for service contracts could be expanded to, such as fisheries management.

However, a full range of potential activities and priority areas would require in depth consultation directly with community groups in remote and regional Australia.

Hence, WWF believes the most effective and efficient progress can be made on this front by the Commonwealth engaging directly with existing and potential new groups to the program. This includes but is not limited to Native Title representative groups, Native Title Prescribed Body Corporate Organisations, Indigenous Ranger groups (new and existing eg Jarlmadangah Rangers, Bardi Jawi Rangers), training institutions such as Kimberley TAFE, and regional Indigenous land & sea management organisations such as Caring for Country Units, Land & Sea Management Units and the North Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA).

2. Monitoring the impacts of climate change

As noted in the original WWF submission, one of the key impacts of climate change is expected to be an increase in the threat of invasive species to the environment and agriculture. With human induced climate change, there are likely to be a range of changed environmental conditions in and near Australia (ocean temperature, storm patterns, currents, winds, rainfall) that will facilitate new organisms coming into our marine, freshwater and terrestrial environments. Some organisms may be totally new to Australia and some may just arrive here more regularly or in more places – either way some will reproduce and establish here when previously they did not.

Comprehensive monitoring is necessary (monitoring all the possible entry points during a range of different conditions) in order to determine which new organisms are coming into Australia and to develop a framework for determining those organisms that are likely to establish and cause problems.

3. Need for comprehensive early warning surveillance

Further information was requested by the panel regarding the cost of fire ant eradication in Brisbane compared to a similar incursion in New Zealand.

This point is discussed, and referenced, on page 14 of the WWF-Australia published report by the Australian Biosecurity Group (2005) titled *Invasive weeds, pests and diseases. Solutions to secure Australia*¹. In summary, the eradication of fire ants from Brisbane was significantly more expensive than the similar eradication from New Zealand because Brisbane did not have a surveillance system in place. New Zealand, however, has a comprehensive National Invasive Ant Surveillance Program and was able to detect fire ants very quickly, hence significantly reducing the cost of eradication.

This issue highlights the need for Australia to improve its surveillance process for potential new invasions. This should include comprehensive contingency planning for potential outbreaks, which would improve the response to incursions such as the fire ant in Brisbane. The Australian Pest Animal Strategy (APAS) (which is yet to receive Australian government funding for implementation) outlines key actions to deal with this problem. A key goal of the strategy is to prevent the establishment of new pest animals (page 9), which includes improved surveillance, development of a nationally agreed list of high risk animals for surveillance and national response

¹ <http://www.wwf.org.au/publications/ABGInvasiveSolutions/>

and the development of a pest animal incursion response plan. We recommend that the APAS be allocated funding for implementation as a matter of priority.

4. Mismatches between State laws and the legal sale of known weeds.

- a. A definition of a "naturalised" weed was requested by the panel. Groves *et. al.* (2003)² define a naturalised non-native plant as one that has been introduced, become established and that now reproduces naturally in the wild, without human intervention.
- b. WWF recommended the banning of trade in all weeds in WWF List B, which was provided in our original submission (Appendix 3). This lists around 2,000 species that are highly invasive, not yet naturalised and still available for sale in Australia. Further work, including removal of native species from List B as requested by the review panel, is currently underway to refine this and the other lists developed in the project. We request that the Quarantine and Biosecurity Panel note WWF's recommendation to consider removing from sale highly invasive plants that are not yet naturalised, while recognising that the detailed lists will be available in WWF's final report to be released in the near future.
- c. In addition to comments previously made, and to support our recommendation above, WWF would strongly encourage the institutionalisation of the National Weed Categorisation project, funded by *Defeating the Weed Menace* and with funding due to end in June 2008. The aims of this project have been to develop a five point categorisation system for weeds, including a list of plants that should be banned from import, and those weeds present in Australia that should be banned from sale. While the general categories have been developed, the species that should be added to those lists have not yet been identified, which will require an ongoing process and consultation with states and Territories. It is important that this essential work continues, and that the work carried out so far and the momentum gained is not lost. WWF recommends that the Quarantine and Biosecurity review supports the allocation of ongoing resources to allow this work to continue in its current form, so that weed assessment and categorisation can be undertaken and a streamlined system of weed prevention be progressed.

5. Australian Biosecurity System for Primary Production and the Environment (AusBIOSEC).

WWF supports the approach of AusBIOSEC, which is to improve Australia's capacity and capability to respond to increasing pest and disease threats in a more systematic and timely manner. We note however that this system will require the commitment of sufficient and ongoing funding for it to have success, and as yet we are not aware of any committed funding.

6. Support for further discussion on National System for the Prevention and Management of Introduced Marine Pests

In confirming WWF's interest in the development of a robust National system for ballast water management that adequately protects the marine environment, we support the panel's suggestion to hold further discussions with experts to assist with the review. We consider this to be particularly important in the interests of the environment, given that there is currently no environmental representative on the National Introduced Marine Pests Coordination Group (NIMPCG).

² Groves, R.H., J.R. Hosking, G.N. Batiánoff, D.A. Cooke, I.D. Cowie, R.W. Johnson, G.J. Keighery, B.J. Lepschi, A.A. Mitchell, M. Moerkerk, R.P. Randall, A.C. Rosefelds, N.G. Walsh and B.M. Waterhouse (2003): Weed categories for natural and agricultural ecosystem management, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Sale of banned weeds

A number of recent reports have identified the sale of Mexican feathergrass (*Nassella tenuissima*) via international internet sales. *Nassella tenuissima* is banned from entry into Australia and is declared in at least 4 states. At present the sale of such weeds has only been identified through ad hoc monitoring by vigilant individuals with an interest in weeds management. There is no guarantee that this informal monitoring will continue. WWF recommends that the Quarantine and Biosecurity Review considers further investigation into the impact of internet sales of prohibited weeds and whether further action is required.

If you have any queries about the comments in this supplementary submission, please contact WWF-Australia's Invasive Species Policy Officer, Julie Kirkwood, on (03) 9669 1303 or jkirkwood@wwf.org.au

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Raymond C. Nias', written in a cursive style.

Raymond C. Nias PhD
Director of Conservation