

Department of Environment and Heritage

Consultancy Services for National Weeds Management Facilitator

Report for Period 4 June to 3 September 2003

John Thorp Australia
16 Flowers Court
LAUNCESTON TAS
7250
Phone (03)6344-9657
Mobile 0419 323 400
Fax (03)6343-1877
Email: jthorp@jta.com.au

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This consultancy commenced on 4th March 2003 and the work has been undertaken by John Thorp with the assistance of Pat Richardson, Tamara Percey and Mike Wilson (Computer Support Tasmania).

A work program was developed in conjunction with staff of the Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) at a joint meeting on 11th March 2003. This programme was further refined and presented to the Australian Weeds Committee (AWC) on 9th April 2003. A further discussion was held between DEH and DAFF during July to consider issues arising from this consultancy service and monitor the performance of this consultancy.

Visits were made to ACT, Tasmania, SA, NSW and Victoria, which included attendance at the first Weeds Society of Victoria Conference in Bendigo and the 12th Biennial Noxious Weeds Conference in Taree.

The following activities have been undertaken according to the work program and terms of reference for the position.

1 Network of weed management activity

1.1 Develop network of weed management activities throughout Australia.

The National Weed Management Facilitator (NWMF) visited the following locations in order to update on weed management activities – Launceston, Hobart, Devonport, Adelaide, Canberra (twice), Melbourne, Frankston, Taree and Bendigo. This involved visiting with key officials of relevant government agencies, community representatives and local government, totalling 29 formal appointments. Numerous contacts were made at the Weeds Society Victoria first conference in Bendigo and at the launch of the code of practice for the Tasmanian Agricultural Contractors Association Code of Practice held in Devonport.

Attendance at the 12th Biennial Noxious Weeds Conference in Taree proved to be an excellent opportunity to contact many people working on weeds in NSW.

A significant amount of time has been spent maintaining the national network, contacting key members and providing information, answering general enquiries and checking on weeds initiatives and their progress around the nation.

1.2 Assist with Weed awareness activities through organisation of national events.

The Facilitator continued his work with the National Weed Awareness Project by maintaining a list server to communicate with participants and by drafting sections of the final report for consideration by the Steering Committee. This was followed up by a three day visit to the CRCAWM to attend a workshop of the steering group to formulate a Weed Awareness Strategy and set the outline for the final document. The workshop notes were refined and other matters addressed arising from the April meeting. By the end of this period a final draft for circulation to participants in the workshop was nearing completion and on schedule for presentation to the AWC at their October meeting.

The Facilitator attended the first weeds workshop conducted by the Weeds Society of Victoria at Bendigo where he presented a short after dinner speech on the future directions of weed management and also presented a poster display which describes his role, work, terms of reference and assistance available.

The Facilitator made a presentation to the Liberal Party Bass Electorate Committee on his role and the "War on Weeds". A poster display was also presented at the 12th Biennial Noxious Weeds Conference at Taree.

1.3 Act as a first point of contact for national weed enquiries and email requests.

The Facilitator handled an average of 12 enquiries per week, with the majority of them addressing specific weed problems and the remainder being more general in nature. Some requested information on funding opportunities or to contact people with specialist expertise. Other requests were for materials published by the past NWSEC and AWC. A number of email requests were received from www.weeds.org.au and these were answered in a timely manner. They came from various parts of the world and often were requests from school students wanting information for projects etc. A few requests have even been received from parents on behalf of their children. In these instances the students are provided with appropriate web links and directions to material in the weeds Australia web site or they are provided with an appropriate reference which they can follow up.

1.4 *Visit each State and Territory, eg stakeholders WONS annual meeting (or priority regional visits to WONS officers).*

The States and Territories visited are listed above, with the primary aim of communicating the need to include weeds in the NRM planning process. The Canberra visit included meeting with the Commonwealth weeds portfolio group as well as visiting officers individually in both the Dept of Environment and Heritage (DEH) and the Dept of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Contact was also made with staff of the BRS, PIHC, CSIRO, RTCA and NFF. Also at this time a visit was made to Senator Ian Macdonald's office to discuss the role of the Facilitator.

Whilst visiting Adelaide for the purpose of being involved with the workshop on weed awareness, the opportunity was taken to meet with staff of the Animal and Plant Control Commission and various members at the CRCAWM who were not involved in the weed awareness activities, particularly those working on the DEH extension project.

The Facilitator attended the launch of the Tasmanian Agricultural Contractors' Association, Code of Practice for Machinery, in Devonport and was able to gain first hand experience of the training being provided to machinery operators, and it is worth noting that this organisation had fifty two accredited members by the end of this contract period. This provided an excellent opportunity to communicate the role of the Facilitator and gain an understanding of the problems that these contractors face. One of the most significant was the ongoing need to convince the farmers that what they were doing was worthwhile, rather than the reverse where you normally expect the customer to request additional services. Here is a code of practice that will change the attitude of farmers across Tasmania and this was identified as a very worthwhile program. The Facilitator holds electronic copies of the Code of Practice which are available upon request.

The Facilitator also met with weeds management staff in Launceston and discussed various national issues with them, which included Weedbuster, aspects of legislation and the role of the National Information Managers Technical Group.

Whilst visiting Victoria the Facilitator spent one day at the Keith Turnbull Research Institute, which is now known as the Department of Primary Industries Frankston Research Centre as a result of the restructuring of the NRE in Victoria. Whilst visiting this facility a number of opportunities were identified to further work with staff and an update was gained on their current work program.

Meetings were also held with Chris McRae and Leigh Dennis at the Dept of Sustainability & Environment. Leigh also took the Facilitator on a tour of the Rowesley Valley to demonstrate the success of the serrated tussock program.

In all these visits details were gained on their programs and ways in which the Facilitator might be of assistance were discussed. All clients were questioned as to whether the visit was of value and a satisfactory response was received from all.

1.5 *Maintain a watching brief on changes to State and Territory legislation and identify legal, institutional and other impediments/barriers to effective weed management. Participation on Commonwealth cross portfolio weeds group meeting.*

The State and Territory legislation was monitored and the web site updated with new weed classifications for Victoria and Western Australia. These were placed on the web and were supported by pdf formatted documents. The Queensland legislative description is in the process of being updated and the revised noxious weeds list prepared as a number of new measures take effect in November.

The Facilitator chaired the Cross Portfolio Weeds Group meeting on 17 June 2003, which was attended by staff from AQIS, AFFA, BRS and DEH. It was a useful exchange and some thought was given to the degree to which these meetings should be formalised. No definitive conclusion was reached. The Facilitator finds these particularly useful because they are a mechanism for assisting communication across a wide group of people, and a way of gaining feedback and insights into the work that the Facilitator may undertake or assist with.

The Facilitator attended the two day workshop conducted by BRS in order to develop a core data set for the mapping of Weeds of National Significance. At the time of writing this report the BRS Paper was in the final stages of drafting and will be presented to the next AWC meeting in October.

1.6 *Maintain a watching brief for early warning of new weed occurrences.*

No new weed incursions occurred during the period, but encouragement was given to the Office of the CPPO to conduct the weed incursion management meeting. At the time of writing the draft weed risk assessment paper on *hypericum* had been circulated Out-of-Session.

The Facilitator assembled a revised list of weed botanists and ecologists as nominated by the states and territories and circulated them with details on reporting new weed incursions on the Weeds Australia web site. This generally included two people from each state or territory, and also facilitated links into the weed alert networks that are currently in operation in Tasmania, Victoria, NSW and Q'ld.

2 Cooperative Efforts Amongst Stakeholders

2.1 Encourage State, Territory and Local Governments to develop contingency plans for action against new weed infestations.

During June the Facilitator was contacted by a member of the National Information Managers Technical Group (NIMTG) and was invited to join in order to present the weeds perspective on the emergency management of new incursions.

NIMTG is a group of information technical managers from all states and territories who are developing a national computer based information management system for the conduct of incursion management incidents which spans animals and plants, with the plants including pests, diseases and weeds. This is a very technical area and largely builds upon the animal health incursion program ANEMIS.

This should be an extremely useful product for managing incursions, keeping track of property records, allocating resources, ensuring that appropriate legislative instruments are used etc.

At the time of writing a national emergency plan was being prepared by PHA called "Plant Plan", which roughly equates to "Ausnet Plan" for animal disease incursion management. The development of "Plant Plan", which only includes pests and diseases, will be a useful model from which to consider weed emergency management. Because this work is national in nature it is expected that each state and territory will adopt it when it is finalised and adequately user tested. This will save each jurisdiction significant expense, compared with developing this on their own. Three teleconferences have been attended on this matter and a significant amount of work done to understand existing systems that could link to this, such as the virtual herbaria, NLWA and the BRS WONS mapping project.

- 2.2 *New weed contingencies: scope what is already covered by State weed strategies. Promote inclusion in new State / Territory / jurisdictional strategies. Circulate models and list on web site.*

Work is continuing in order to summarise what is contained in the State weed strategies, however, the purpose of this seems unclear as the NIMTG program would probably supersede the current and existing mechanisms.

- 2.3 *Educate different jurisdictions and other stakeholders on responsibilities for weed management. Develop key messages and develop and implement an annual communication plan.*

The Facilitator continued to liaise with the Australian Landcare Council, the Nursery Association and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) on the stakeholders' responsibility for weed management. Nine NRM Plans have been examined with a view to determining how weeds are treated within them, and whilst it must be recognised that these plans are at a high level they seem to cover weed issues adequately. The exception is for areas of national involvement in programs, such as biocontrol, weed awareness, etc. and incursion management at a regional and national level. The plans usually incorporate existing regional plans or state weed strategies which are adopted directly into the NRM plans. It was noted that several of them seem to have an unreasonably high expectation of the services that may be provided by their local/state government weed managers. This particularly relates to the resources that may be available.

- 2.4 *Integrate and coordinate weed research, education and training programmes throughout Australia.*

The Facilitator visited members of the CRCAWM in Adelaide and also discussed aspects of various projects with members at the Department of Primary Industries Frankston Research Centre and communicated with other members by telephone. The Facilitator has viewed twenty best practice guides and provided comments to the project leader, as well as spending some hours going through these with the appropriate staff in Adelaide.

Another CRCAWM project is a scoping study being conducted for Horticulture Australia which is designed to identify all the people involved in weed management throughout Australia and the Facilitator has provided significant advice for this project.

3 Motivate Stakeholders

3.1 Promote the development of consistent extension products across Australia.

The Facilitator has continued to encourage the development of WEEDeck, which is now becoming recognised as a key identification tool with the intellectual property developed for approximately 160 species, with 90 individual weed cards published and available to community groups for their use. It is interesting to note that a number of community groups and local government based projects have factored in the purchase of WEEDeck for identification and monitoring purposes into their project applications and have received funding for their production.

3.2 Promote development of consistent training.

Discussions have been held with staff at TOCAL College on the extent to which additional packages need to be developed for the Conservation Land Management Training Package and it has been identified that ACF levels 4 and 5, ie Associate Diploma level, currently have insufficient packages providing training, but the lower levels are now reasonably serviced, particularly from a NSW perspective. It should also be noted that recognition of prior learning is proceeding and officers in NSW and 23 in Queensland have gained accreditation. This training is now being offered by three Queensland TAFE Colleges and it is expected that other states will follow suit in the near future.

The Facilitator identified a tender to develop training tool boxes for ANTA and contacted a number of training providers and institutions in the hope of encouraging them to tender. Despite these efforts it was not possible to assemble a tender in the required timeframe, however, some weed aspects have been picked up in Western Australia. The Conservation Land Management Training Package was not nominated in the tender criteria as a two year priority for ANTA and efforts are being made to have this package included for the next round. The significance of this is that when a specific training package is listed there is a greater likelihood that funding would be available. Tenderers are reluctant to participate where the area of expertise is not a listed priority.

3.3 *Maintain a watching brief on cultural awareness training to officers who support Aboriginal and TSI land managers.*

One enquiry was addressed over this period relating to aboriginal cultural awareness and this was to advise the NRNT on work that was being undertaken in Cape York.

4 Systematic Analysis of National Weed Control Efforts

4.1 *Analysis of strengths / weaknesses / opportunities / threats to more integrated and cost effective weed management.*

Work has continued to collect information on weed management activities around Australia and it is considered that the information gained from the NRM planning process has been covered in a previous section where some strengths and weaknesses have been identified. One opportunity that exists involves training for NRM facilitators in weed issues as part of their orientation program. There is also an opportunity to promote more integrated weed management, which includes vegetation management following weed control/management campaigns. They should always include a component for re-vegetation, otherwise the weeds simply grow back and a great deal of effort can be wasted. The Facilitator has promoted this message wherever possible, but this clearly needs to be followed through in the "Enviro fund" and NHT project management processes.

4.2 *Monitor, evaluate and publicise progress being made in implementing the WONS and make recommendations on areas for improvement including delivery through NAP and NHT.*

The Facilitator has maintained extensive contact with the WONS coordinators, providing advice and assistance upon request, providing detailed templates for annual reporting and conducted one teleconference to consider common issues. The WONS coordinators also attended the BRS WONS mapping project workshop in Canberra in August. Where possible the Facilitator will be attending WONS management group meetings in September, the lantana and parthenium meetings.

A problem that has arisen is that due to the short funding timeframe (six months) currently in operation, coordinators are seeking a more stable employment environment and vacancies exist for hymenachne, pond apple, parthenium and rubber vine. It is to be hoped that these positions can be filled quickly and that more certainty can be provided to these positions in the future.

Whenever possible the Facilitator has promoted the achievements of WONS and the value of having national programs, having made ten radio interviews on aspects of WONS over the reporting period. The majority of these were ABC stations, with two commercial country stations also included. These broadcasts covered most of the listening area of Australia, including the Northern Territory, central Queensland and Western Australia.

4.3 Promote and monitor the implementation and adoption of the EA alert and AFFA agricultural sleeper weed lists.

Wherever practical the DEH alert list has been promoted, but the AFFA agricultural sleeper weed list has not reached final sign-off by AWC at the time of writing this report. Thought needs to be given on how these weeds and the WONS might be promoted collectively as the existence of multiple national lists could well lead to confusion about the purpose and function of each.

A monthly update is provided to interested parties on the status of the WONS process.

5 Report regularly to the Commonwealth Government and AWC

This is the second report, which covers the operation of the NWMF position, including progress on a number of national issues.

5.1 Provide recommendations to the Commonwealth Government and the AWC for action to address most prospective areas for investment and weaknesses in national efforts.

The Facilitator provided advice to DAFF on a number of projects which could receive Commonwealth funding, these included the BRS WONS mapping project, distribution of WEEDeck to rural Landcare groups for the purpose of identifying weed invasions. Re-development of the Weeds Australia web site and weed identification initiative that could be included, based on WEEDeck, the development of a toolbox describing how to collect mapping data for WONS and the development of the MEWG indicators which are to be circulated to AWC for their final ratification. These indicators were developed in conjunction with the DEH, CSIRO and DAFF at the request of MEWG. They have been distributed in draft form to states and territories for their comment and possible use at a local level. Final sign-off should be gained for these at the AWC October meeting.

The Facilitator has prepared a number of Papers for AWC consideration which included the re-drafting of the Strategic Plan and Communications Strategy, development of content of the AWC Newsletter and providing advice on the Biocontrol Act Paper.

5.2 Prepare draft Work Plan for consideration by Commonwealth and AWC.

The draft Work Plan was considered by AWC on 9th April 2003 and performance against it considered by the steering group in July.

Financial Reports

Full financial reports have been provided to the Department in accordance with the terms of the contract, which show that the expenditure is within budget.

Discussion

This is the second quarter report on the Facilitator's work program and a significant amount of time has been spent following up and progressing national weeds issues. The National weeds network is now fully operational and contact has been established with personnel around Australia. At this stage only one state has not been visited and that is Western Australia, because it is proposed to time this to coincide with the CRCAMM Weeds Training Programs that are being offered under their DEH project which is developing best practice manuals and training procedures.

There is some uncertainty about how the NRM Plans are to be implemented, particularly as their development is staggered across the nation and different approaches are being taken, depending on the availability of pre-existing strategies, reports and prior public consultation. It has also been noted that the appointment of the NRM Facilitators and their training has been delayed and it is to be hoped that this will take place in the near future.

A number of issues have been progressed which impinge on the work of the AWC, the most significant of these is the involvement in the NIMTG for incursion management, and the development of the monitoring and evaluation working group indicators and guidelines.