

Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage

**Consultancy Services for National
Weeds Management Facilitator**

Report for Period 4 September 2004 – 3 March 2005

**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 reporting period commenced on 4th September 2004 and the work has been undertaken by John Thorp with the assistance of Karen Dwyer, Tara Russell, Patricia Hepburn 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. Further discussions were held between DEH and DAFF during July, October 2003, February, October 2004 and February 2005, with follow up liaison on a fortnightly basis to consider issues arising from this consultancy and monitor its performance. A report on the activities of the Facilitator is presented to every meeting of the AWC, the last meeting being, Meeting 9 in Melbourne on 20-21 October 2004.

Visits were made to ACT, Tasmania, NSW, and VIC, which included attendance at the 14th Australian weeds conference, Wagga Wagga, North Coast committee forum, Sawtell, National WONS Coordinators Meeting, Canberra and four WONS co-ordinators meetings.

A significant amount of work has been done on reviewing many papers, which included the NLWRA weeds work program, WONS Manuals, Weedeck cards, papers relating to the National Information Managers Technical Group (NIMTG) and Weed mapping initiatives in conjunction with VIC, development of the National Land and Water Resources Audit (NLWRA) weeds work programme and advice to DEH and DAFF on funding options under the "Fighting the weed menace".

The Facilitator took one week annual leave during January 2005, but the office remained open and wherever possible clients were serviced by Karen Dwyer and Tara Russell with remote direction from the Facilitator. All requests were checked and followed up by the facilitator on his return to work. The office closed over the Christmas/New Year period.

The work programme was reviewed in Canberra on the 28th February 2005 and a work programme drafted for the last year of this contract in conjunction with DEH and DAFF.

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, Canberra (two), Sydney (two), Wagga Wagga, Melbourne (Four), Windsor, and Sawtell. This involved visiting with key officials of relevant government agencies, community representatives, WONS Coordinators and local government, totalling 52 formal appointments.

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.

This has been backed by the weeds database of national contacts which has been fully updated, with people being contacted to ensure that they still wish to be included and are working in the weeds discipline.

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

The Facilitator made four radio broadcasts, all of which were on ABC rural programmes.

The Facilitator addressed the 14th Australian Weed Conference, Wagga Wagga on the topic “Are we doing enough to reduce the spread of new weed incursions in Australia?” He also attended the Blackberry research summit and contributed by addressing the meeting on research project management.

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

The Facilitator handled an average of 31 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, AWC and DAFF. Three quarters 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 were often requests from school/university students wanting information for projects, weed identification and control recommendations. The office does not provide control recommendations, but refers enquiries to information on the World Wide Web via the search facility or to

their respective jurisdictions which have standardised enquiry procedures.

Sixteen significant draft papers or requests for input into related enquiries/consultancies were received by the Facilitator for action. Most of these were strategies, plans and reviews, the most significant of which was Plantplan, the Review of Progress on Invasive Species and participation in the development of the SQCR Requirements and related documents.

Following the upgrade of the Weeds Australia web site approximately eight requests per week have been received for the use of images and text in other publications. These are forwarded to Sainty and Associates for final approval after clearing through this office.

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

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 visits included meetings with officers individually in both the Dept of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) and the Dept of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Contact was also made with staff of the BRS, CSIRO, NLWRA and OCPPO

The Facilitator has attended a number of workshops and teleconferences with the NIMTG working group on emergency management.

The Facilitator attended the National Blackberry research summit and National Aquatic Weeds Management group meeting in Windsor in person. He also participated in teleconferences for Chilean needle grass and Parthenium weed.

In all the above visits details were gained on work programs and ways by 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 once with new weed classifications for Western Australia. These were placed on the web and were supported by pdf formatted documents.

There were not meetings of the Commonwealth cross portfolio weeds group.

The Facilitator attended a weeds policy forum in Melbourne, "Policies for WEED management – who has responsibility?", run by the Weeds Society of Victoria and raised issues, such as consistency of legislation, uniform declaration of species and the non declaration of several WONS species.

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

One new weed incursion occurred during the period, and one weed incursion teleconference was conducted by the OCPPO.

A national weed reporting facility was maintained on the Weeds Australia web page and this received 14 reports which were forwarded to states and territories for on ground action.

The Facilitator updated the weed botanists reporting web page to reflect staff movements and changed departmental names and email addresses.

2 Cooperative Efforts Amongst Stakeholders

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

The Facilitator attended 3 teleconference meetings of the NIMTG in order to ensure that weeds were included as a component of national emergency response.

The Facilitator has kept AWC fully informed on progress in order to encourage them to develop a weed incursion management plan. "Plantplan" has reached a stage where AWC can use it as a model for developing "Weedplan". Plantplan has been tested and updated. Some further modifications have been identified as a consequence of the Citrus Canker outbreak in Queensland.

2.2 New weed contingencies: Act as AWC representative on NIMTG for consultation, review and reporting to AWC for the purpose of ensuring that weeds are appropriately incorporated into SQCR. Participate in the development of "Weedplan"

The Facilitator actively participated in development of the SQCR functional design and technical documents and commented on the framework for the resource management package. This is an extensive activity as these documents are comprised of

several 100 pages of extremely detailed, cross linked information.

2.3 Educate different jurisdictions and other stakeholders on responsibilities for weed management including key targets.

The Facilitator visited NRM regional bodies in the Rangelands, Kangaroo Island, Murray Darling Basin, Hawkesbury/Nepean catchment and Corangamite to emphasis the need for integrated weed management and to encourage them to adopt cost affective methods for preventing weed spread.

The Facilitator assisted DEH in preparing NRM region specific sets of WEEDeck cards for distribution to regions, in order to encourage them to identify invading species.

The Facilitator obtained a customised set of WEEDeck cards for Aquatic species and included them in the conference satchel for people attending the National Waterwatch conference. This was backed by two workshop presentations at the conference by the Facilitator, Andrew Petroschevsky and Geoff Sainty. The Waterwatch conference decided to commit to monitoring for water weeds as a part of their routine activities. The Facilitator will liaise with DEH on how to progress this matter at a National level.

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. Three NRM Plans have been examined with a view to determining how weeds are treated within them. (see 1.5).

2.4 Liaise with the weed CRC on the weed communication project and provide key input on National issues.

The Facilitator has reviewed the weed management sheets progressively during the period and encouraged reprinting of the "Introductory Weed management manual" and arranged for national distribution to Landcare groups when copies become available.

3 Motivate Stakeholders

3.1 Promote the development of consistent extension products across Australia.

The Facilitator has promoted the Spot the Threat postcards and WEEDeck over the period.

3.2 *Promote the incorporation of weeds issues into regional NRM planning*

See comments under item 2.3 above.

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 the information gained from the NRM planning process has been covered in a previous section, where some strengths and weaknesses have been identified.

The Facilitator provided background information and suggested directions for fighting the weed menace to DAFF and have assisted by identifying specific projects that could be undertaken in the near future.

Information and advice have been provided to several consultants undertaking the views for the Australian Government as mentioned previously.

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 editing the annual reports for consistency of content and presentation.

All WONS reports and manuals are added to the Weeds Australia web site as they become available. Manuals currently on the web are lantana, rubber vine, parthenium, mesquite, chilean needle grass and prickly acacia.

Whenever possible the Facilitator has promoted the achievements of WONS and the value of having national programs, having made four radio interviews on aspects of WONS over the reporting period. These broadcasts covered Tasmania, Central Australia and South Western WA.

Visits were made to ACT, Tasmania, NSW, and VIC, which included attendance at the 14th Australian weeds conference, Wagga Wagga, North Coast committee forum, Sawtell, National WONS Coordinators Meeting, Canberra and four WONS coordinators meetings.

4.3 *Promote and monitor the implementation and adoption of the DEH alert and DAFF agricultural sleeper weed lists.*

Wherever practical the DEH alert list has been promoted. Thought needs to be given to 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. However it must be recognised that the WONS and incursions lists are the only nationally agreed weed list supported by states and territories.

WONS progress is posted on the Weeds Australia Web Site regularly.

5 Report regularly to the Commonwealth Government and AWC

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

The Facilitator routinely holds discussions (fortnightly) with the project officers in DEH and DAFF in order to keep them informed on work being undertaken.

The Facilitator reports to all AWC meetings on all projects and work undertaken by him, including circulation of this report to the committee.

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 DEH and DAFF on a range of policy issues, which range from ad hoc enquiries to suggestions and comments on funding opportunities, for example BRS WONS mapping project, distribution of WEEDeck, agricultural sleeper weeds, "Fighting the weed ménage" and selected funded projects.

The Facilitator assisted DAFF in prioritising funding options for weeds programme expenditure and advised on WONS coordinator funding.

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

The work plan is in place and modified as tasks are completed. However most of the activities are of an ongoing nature as they relate to policy support, awareness, communications and routine support.

Discussion

This is the final report for the second year of this project and a significant amount of time has been spent following up and progressing national weeds issues. Visits have been made to NRM bodies in order to gauge first hand how weeds are incorporated into their planning process and on ground action. Not all states and territories were visited in this period as much work was done on this aspect in the first half of this project year.

WONS coordination has continued with promotion of Aquatic weeds to the Waterwatch network. One national WONS coordinators meeting was held in Canberra during February/March.

Generally weeds appear to be addressed on an ad hoc basis in NRM plans as these plans address the issues on an asset basis. Therefore the Facilitator recommends that NRM plans be underpinned by regional weed strategies. Approximately 15 percent of NRM regions have regional weed management strategies. It is also evident that NRM regions have not adequately recognised or addressed weed threats coming from outside their regions and are unable to consider the merit of contributing in the national interest as they are purely self interested in their respective regions.

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, the development of PHA Plantplan and the work plan for weeds under the NLWRA.

Attachment 1

Work Program