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AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr JP Kelly MP (Chair)
Mrs J Gilbert MP
Mr JE Madden MP
Mr PT Weir MP

Staff present:

Mr R Hansen (Committee Secretary)
Mr P Douglas (Assistant Committee Secretary)

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS OF INVASIVE PLANTS (WEEDS) AND THEIR CONTROL IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 4 MAY 2017

Gatton

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Committee met at 1.11 pm

CHAIR: I declare open the Agriculture and Environment Committee's public hearing in relation to its inquiry into invasive weeds and their control. Witnesses are not required to give their evidence under oath, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I remind those present that these proceedings are similar to parliament and are subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing orders and rules. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

Mobile phones or other electronic devices should now be turned off or switched to silent. Hansard is making a transcript of the proceedings. The committee intends to publish the transcript of today's proceedings. Those here today should note that the media might be present so it is possible that you might be filmed or photographed. I ask witnesses to identify themselves when they first speak and to speak clearly into the microphones.

COLLINS, Mr Richard, Coordinator, Environmental Planning, Lockyer Valley Regional Council

MCDONALD, Mr Jim, Councillor, Lockyer Valley Regional Council

MADIGAN, Mr Sean, Chief Operating Officer, Health, Security and Regulatory Services, Ipswich City Council

READY, Mr Mark, Principal, Conservation and Pest Management, Toowoomba Regional Council

TAYLOR, Mr Hayden, Principal Officer, Animal Management, Ipswich City Council

CHAIR: I welcome our first witnesses from the Lockyer Valley Regional Council, the Ipswich City Council and the Toowoomba City Council. I would invite each of you to make a brief opening statement of five minutes or so. We have read your submissions, but if there is something you would like to add or state for the benefit of Hansard we would be most pleased to hear that. We will then move to questions. We will start with Mr Madigan. Is there a general statement you would like to make to kick things off?

Mr Madigan: Certainly. Firstly, I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to you today. On behalf of the council, I wanted to firstly acknowledge that we do accept our responsibility that we have a significant part to play in relation to pest and weed management. We had a particularly bad fireweed season, as did everyone else last year, which really brought it to the fore for our community and our councillors.

You have our submission, but from my point of view the big focus we need is actually in terms of coordination. We are a fairly large council. I have a reasonable amount of resources. We are willing to get out there and do the work. Some of it is lacking the capability, the knowledge and the understanding of the legislation. Some of it is concern that if I am going to deploy resources and revenue to this the question becomes: is it a futile exercise if the property next door, the RAAF base or the TMR highway is infested at the same?

From the council's point of view, what are we achieving? Given the nature of fireweed and the way that it spreads—as has been indicated here, from property to property—are we achieving an ultimate outcome for our community from a compliance perspective by dealing with it in isolated pockets? There is also the issue of coordination between vertical levels. For us obviously there is federal land, state land and council land—our own reserves—as well as private property, and then we have the aspect of the neighbouring councils. If we are going to adopt a regulatory approach to this we need to be consistent as much as possible with our neighbouring councils, because obviously if we have certain initiatives in our area that are not consistent with what is happening in a property which might be straight across the road from one of ours, that is not necessarily going to achieve a good outcome either for our community.

Public Hearing—Inquiry into the Impacts of Invasive Plants (Weeds) and their Control in Queensland

Following on from the fireweed infestation last year we have introduced a number of initiatives, and we followed on from some of the great work we have seen from other councils here. Following on from some of the things we saw at Lockyer we have free disposal of fireweed at our tips. Via council we have also recently introduced a subsidy program for chemical sprays. As long as the landowner or occupier signs up to a pest management plan which is agreed to by my principal officer, who has some expertise in this area, then we will subsidise 50 per cent of the cost for them to purchase and spray. As a larger council we do have the ability to do that. All we would ask from the committee is a coordinated approach so that we are all on the same page and working together—including in relation to enforcement and education—at all vertical and horizontal levels of government.

Mr Ready: I would like to thank the committee for allowing us to present today. Our council is cognisant of our responsibilities under the Biosecurity Act. Following amalgamations in 2008 we did go through a period where our council admittedly did not perform as well as we would have liked in the area of pest management. Since the reorganisation in 2013 council has, however, invested far more heavily in pest management than it did previously. We have employed a number of additional staff and additional appliances to deal with our own roadways as well as undertaking property inspection programs.

The nominated pests for this inquiry are not of huge concern in our area as individual species. We only experience the giant rat's-tail and the fireweed, but I should qualify that a little bit. Giant rat's-tail exists and is being managed in the areas where it is. We are not aware that it is expanding greatly at this stage. There may be a knowledge gap there. In relation to fireweed, certainly we have large areas of fireweed and our constituents report a concern about it. However, the fireweed species that we have are the native species; they are not the declared species. Our concern in that regard is that in a forest of yellow it is very easy for something else that is yellow to hide, and we are on the invasion front of that species as the air currents bring the seed over the range. That is where the majority of our concerns lie with regard to those species.

Mr McDonald: Welcome to the Lockyer Valley. It was a pleasure to accompany you this morning on a tour of some of our beautiful and picturesque areas, and I hope that you take the opportunity to come back again and visit. It is a great opportunity to present to you today, and Mr Collins will shortly outline our issues in more detail. The Morrisons spoke earlier in the round table, and that is a really great case study to have a look at, where private people are doing the right thing on their land which is adjacent to a gazetted road that is council managed and a state forestry that has infestations—in that case GRT—and the lack of coordination and the problems that that presented. It is a great case study of how we can achieve things and work better. It was done very poorly at the start. We look forward to exploring a number of different issues as we continue the hearing.

Mr Collins: Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Referring to some of the comments that have been made by the Morrisons earlier—and I understand that you have been out to do a little bit of a tour around today—that outbreak of fireweed was something that we had not experienced before, and indeed this was brought to the attention of the council by people like the Morrisons. As was mentioned before, part of the response was to do a community working bee. There were three tonnes' worth of fireweed collected on that day. That sounds like a lot, but compared to probably the thousands of tonnes that were growing in the paddocks right across the valley at that time it was a drop in the ocean. What was important, and I think this is an important point to make, is that that really raised the profile of the problem with this weed. We received good media coverage in terms of both print press and television, and I think that certainly brought to the attention of a lot of people that this is not just a nice pretty flower that happens to have bloomed: this is a real problem for us. That was the major benefit of that working bee.

In terms of some of the issues that I have tried to touch on, section 43 of the Biosecurity Act 2014 fails to recognise the diversity of local governments across Queensland. If we look at the people sitting at the table today, the Ipswich City Council is by and large a more urbanised local government area with a pretty large rate base, the Toowoomba Regional Council is a very large council area but still has a relatively large rate base, and we are a bit smaller in terms of our council but we have a very, very small rate base. We have a population of only about 38,000 people, which means that our resources are very much less. It is worth pointing out that up until a couple of weeks ago our only active pest management officer is sitting behind us here. There is one officer to cover everything that we are trying to do here in this valley, and that is the reality of a small local government.

Approaches that might be considered by the committee are twofold. Firstly, I think the state does need to play in that space. It does need to recognise that the blanket approach of the Biosecurity Act, which assumes that all councils have the same access to resources and have the same

problems, fundamentally does not work. There has also been mention of cooperation. Cooperation across boundaries between councils, the states and the Commonwealth is so obviously important, yet we do not seem to take it on. We have heard previously this morning about the fact that fireweed has been extant in New South Wales for probably decades, but what have we learned from that? The border is only just down the road, yet we are suddenly surprised. 'Where has this fireweed come from?' I think there is a tremendous opportunity for us to learn from the previous experience of other local councils and state governments, and a coordinating role between the state government and the Commonwealth to facilitate that process would be really important.

In terms of what the council is trying to do, first of all I will provide a little bit of context. Mark pointed out the issue of amalgamations. That is certainly a difficult hurdle for any local government to deal with in terms of trying to understand how it functions and organising itself. Almost immediately after our amalgamation process commenced we had the pleasure of the floods or the storm events in 2011 and 2013, which meant that staff were taken away from their substantive duties and often posted into recovery mode. That has a twofold effect: firstly, it means that your eye is taken off the ball in terms of weed management. Because of the flow of all that water and the spread of weed seed and so on and so forth, you actually get a far worse problem than you had before. On one hand, you do not have the staff to be able to deal with it; on the other hand, the weed spread is worse than it could have been previously. Council is cognisant of that. It is also very much aware of the fact that we are a small council with limited resources. Even so, we do have spraying equipment which we loan out free of charge, and that is a service which is increasingly becoming more and more popular as people understand and recognise what is available to them. There is also a subsidised herbicide program which very recently has also included the herbicides for treating fireweed.

Finally, the third thing that was also mentioned this morning by the Morrisons is education. We are about to start a fairly intense education program where we will be highlighting weeds throughout the calendar year, and of course fireweed will be one of those. In conclusion, that is really all I wanted to state today.

CHAIR: Mr Madigan, you talk about coordination being the key. Can you outline for me coordination between whom and coordination about what?

Mr Madigan: Certainly. From the council's perspective we have a very good relationship with Biosecurity officers and the RAAF and TMR on different levels in different aspects of our business. I have worked at the state government level as well prior to council. At the moment to our mind there is no framework around how we operate and integrate our actions together; for example, they have used purely an operational perspective. If we are going to target a specific area for a compliance program, we could coordinate with Biosecurity for a lead-in with an education program which ties in with our program. If we have a schedule and progression of works that we are going to do, then we work with Biosecurity on that. If we are going to educate landholders, we tie that in with our subsidy programs. At the same time we also look at what bordering local councils are doing so we can coordinate our activities as a larger local government authority with smaller ones nearby to assist with resources to try and achieve those outcomes.

There are two points: the fiscal aspect is not as much of a concern personally. I know from a political level there are always concerns about where local government fits into the scheme of things, but I think we need to work together at a state level from a biosecurity and education perspective with regard to our responsibilities and, in terms of feet on the ground and doing that work, assisting some of the smaller councils around us. For example, a regional fireweed management plan that everyone agreed with and a commitment to resources with clear roles and responsibilities. At times we find it a little bit confusing and ad hoc. At present it tends to operate on an officer-to-officer level rather than at a strategic level. Probably the biggest thing from our perspective is to have a proper strategic framework and understanding of the annual activity that is going to occur from each level. At a federal level for us that is the RAAF base; TMR in the area of biosecurity; and then there is the local government perspective. If that were all articulated and committed to, I think we could probably achieve greater outcomes.

CHAIR: Mr Ready, you mentioned the fact that you have the native species in your council area. Does the council take any steps to try and control that, or is that something you leave to landholders?

Mr Ready: We do leave it to landholders. Council does not take any specific steps with regard to the eradication or the control of those species. There are a couple of reasons behind that. One is that it is almost fully endemic to private land. It does not actually occur on the roadways to any great

extent. It is one of those few weeds where the spill is the other way—from private land onto public—rather than the other way around. We do tend to notice it being a significant weed in unmaintained cultivation and, as Mr Weir mentioned, in a lot of the horse paddocks around the place.

The approach that we have taken to it is more of an education approach to the point of producing awareness flyers and information to enable landholders to understand what species are there and how that can be confused with the introduced species. It also tells them that both have the potential to impact on stock health and there are options for them to control and manage that on their own properties. The volume of that particular pest within our area is such that, if we were to be inspecting properties and issuing notices for it, there would be hundreds and hundreds of landholders receiving notices. That is something that council does need to be quite cognisant of—that is, the impact on the community of issuing that number of notices. We may ultimately need to follow up with some sort of corrective action if we go down that line.

Mr WEIR: I remember going out to a field day on fireweed in the Umbiram district last year. A vet from Pittsworth was there and was saying that they had had reported cases of poisoning. The native species is still toxic, it is still a problem, but are you saying it is a different management process?

Mr Ready: The management process, as far as actually controlling the weed, is probably very much the same. It is just where it sits under legislation. We had the ability under the Biosecurity Act to issue notices against the declared species, the scheduled species. With the other species being native species, council would need to make a conscious decision to declare those under a local law in order for us to be able to take action.

Mr WEIR: That takes me back to Sean and a comment you made about the understanding and lack of clarity around the legislation. What did you mean by that?

Mr Madigan: I would say it would be a twofold answer to that. One is from the landholders. We have a mixed use there, as has been suggested, with the blocky style who have come in. You will have a farm that has been there for a long time, a pristine property, and then you will have three or four properties nearby with infestation. For us then to try to explain to them what their responsibilities are, that is a lot more onerous to us at the moment under the general biosecurity and the way it is worded. The actual practical application of it is very similar. If you can just say to them, 'The act says you're not allowed to have any of it on your land,' that is very easy for us to explain to someone from a regulatory point of view, versus, 'You have an obligation and you need to minimise it and you need to do this, this and this.' I know we can go in and still enforce it under the same principles, but it is harder to explain to them.

There is also a risk management aspect of it. We are working with biosecurity at present around risk matrix and assessments on when do we take certain actions in relation to a specific property and when do we escalate through to a compliance approach. That is something we are always mindful of. That is what I mean. The clearest way to put it for us is that we are not averse to taking action in relation to it. The compliance is the actual final step. Councils generally I think try to achieve voluntary compliance and that is always best achieved through education. The carrot approach always achieves better outcomes ultimately than having to go through compliance and ending up having to go in and do the work ourselves. We do that on not just pest management but overgrown properties and we just keep going back every year. It is an ongoing process. If you can change the behaviour through education and community movement, I suppose, that is probably the key to achieving what we are trying to do.

Mr WEIR: Do you think the wording in the Biosecurity Act needs to be clarified?

Mr Madigan: I think clarified, but you want it in a practical sense for landowners and even council officers. We have reviewed the legislation that we had, including my principal officer, and we even had a bit of confusion internally about the interpretation of it. It really was not until we sat down with Biosecurity in Brisbane that we got a better understanding of exactly who it applies to and how it might apply to different parties that have an interest in land or acting on the land. It was not until we sat down with a senior officer in there that we got a really good practical understanding of what that means.

Mrs GILBERT: There has been a lot of talk from a group of councillors about needing coordinated approaches, with one council doing one thing and another doing something else and they are not sure what is happening with state or federal land. Is there a reporting mechanism now where you can find out what each layer of government is actually doing towards weed eradication in any area?

Mr Collins: Not that I am aware of.

Mrs GILBERT: Would it be helpful if everybody reported back to a central body so there could be a coordinated approach? We are hearing that there needs to be a coordinated approach, but the weed problem is different in Toowoomba to the weed problem down here and we have been to Gladstone and it is quite different there. Does there need to be a central reporting mechanism so you can clearly see what the state government is doing on national parks, what the federal government is doing and what local councils are doing? We would then know where the weed problems are because whoever is writing the coordinated approach would have all of the information.

Councillor McDonald: We do have a great advantage in the governance arrangements that we have with the Council of Mayors South-East Queensland, and Ipswich, Toowoomba and Lockyer are obviously part of that. You have the coordination approach from a local government perspective as well as the state government officers coming in. I think Mr Madigan said it well before, that we need that strategic planning and being proactive. For us here in Lockyer, the fireweed season last year really put a focus on it. As for the work that has been occurring, as Mr Collins said in terms of the awareness, this is the first year post that really thick outbreak last year that we have got to start to work forward and be proactive. I think that is a really key thing for us to learn and go forward with.

That is only the coordination from a governmental point of view. There is another level in terms of the private ownership. About 80 per cent of our area is in private ownership, so we need to be able to get that education and also, as was mentioned this morning, those pest management groups across our different locations so we can actually empower our local communities to have both the resources and the awareness and be proactive so that next month they are out there targeting fireweed as it is just coming up. That is a really critical and important part of the whole conversation.

When we have a weed species problem, we usually ask our pest management people to go out and help the landholders and spray it, but there is a community engagement process that needs to occur through all of that. We are very fortunate in Lockyer to have Mr Blanco who is a dynamic person who can inspire different community groups to come together, but that is a special skill set that we have got here. It would certainly be very helpful to have some assistance in that regard to get those community groups and awareness out there.

Mr MADDEN: I would like to begin by thanking you gentlemen for coming in today. It is great to have three councils talking about this, with feet on the ground and dealing with the problem. I want to speak about the native species of *Senecio*. I note there are nine yellow flowering native species in the area. Can you outline what steps you are taking to assist people to differentiate between the invasive weed that has to be controlled and the native species that does not have to be controlled, other than if you want to control stock with toxic plants?

Also, do you have any comment to make about the spread of the native species? I was very pleased to hear what you had to say, Mr Ready. That is something that we do not talk about—the spread of the toxic native species *Senecio brignalowensis*—but it is just as important as the spread of the introduced *madagascariensis*. They are my two questions. What steps are you taking to assist people to differentiate with identification? Do you have any comment to make about the spread of the native species *brignalowensis*?

Mr Ready: As far as the differentiation in assisting people with that, yes, council does offer as much as we can in that regard. A lot of the education resources that we are starting to put together—the fact sheets that we use from BQ and the information that we make available on our website—directs people to the resources they need to start looking at that. Indeed, if they are having trouble, we ask them to bring it to us and we will arrange to get it to a herbarium specialist and look at it in that way.

When it comes to the spread of the native species, that is an area where we would have only anecdotal evidence. Last year was as much a surprise with the native species as it was for our neighbouring councils with the introduced species. It was probably a combination of those drier times and a lack of competition that everything in that particular genus could respond to. As to any actual data on the spread of that species, no, we do not collect any because all of our information gathering, all of our mapping, all of the data that we do collect when we are treating pests is around those that we actually are under some sort of legislative regulatory compliance mode with, and we are certainly not in that mode with the native species.

Mr MADDEN: Is there any comment from the other councils?

Mr Madigan: May I seek the leave of the committee to bring up my principal officer who has very much been on the ground and can answer that question?

CHAIR: That is fine.

Mr Taylor: To answer your question, the data on the native species in the Ipswich City Council is still a bit of an unknown quantity. There is certainly a minor gap when it comes to species and we have benefited from some of the assistance we have got from different state departments and the state member himself about how we can identify as officers the difference between the native species and the declared species. We have included some information. Our education documentation is our latest move to inform the public on how they can identify and differentiate between two of the common species compared to the declared species and some of the key traits they can look for to try to distinguish between them and the declared species.

Mr MADDEN: Do you think it is a worrying sign that this native species that does not have to be controlled seems to be spreading at the same rate as the declared species?

Mr Taylor: I think it is, especially if some of the toxicity information leads to being true. Another thing to note is that it is a barrier to biological control. These native species seem to be the things that are actually stopping really effective biological control being used in I assume Australia but certainly in Queensland. If there is an impact there and the native species are potentially causing some of the same problems that the declared species is doing, then that barrier should naturally be overcome automatically but it is not. It seems to be something that is the end point to our biological control rather than something that will also benefit from biological control.

CHAIR: Councillor McDonald, I want to ask you a couple of questions, particularly as you are the gentleman up there who has to face the people every few years. With the growing numbers of tree changers and people who are on smaller blocks, is there more of a democratic demand on someone in an elected role to support the sorts of lifestyle choices those people are making which may involve not as rigorous land management as opposed to, say, somebody who is running a commercial farming operation?

Councillor McDonald: Yes, without a doubt. This is one of the difficult things we have with people moving into our rural community who do not have the generations of awareness of weeds and managing their holding. One of the things that the Lockyer council has done over the last couple of years is actually start to map the pest species and where they are. That opens up an opportunity for people who are purchasing real estate for there to be a search undertaken. When we buy a house or a property, we do a building inspection and maybe a pest inspection—for termites and the like—but we do not talk about weeds or other pests.

Perhaps there is an opportunity for council to provide that as a service to people who might be purchasing. The member for Lockyer said tongue-in-cheek this morning that sometimes real estate agents tell people that GRT is a good fodder crop, which is rubbish but they do not know any better. Perhaps if there is a search that we can offer about some of these pests—GRT, fireweed and others—that may have been located in or around the area or certainly if notice is issued to the holders of that land. It may be a proactive way to be able to educate people up-front and also put in place proactive initiatives to see those weeds sprayed in the next annual event.

CHAIR: Mr Collins, you mentioned that there is not uniformity in councils around the state. Obviously you have a much smaller rate base than some of your neighbours. What are the sorts of things that a smaller council would like to do that you cannot do because of the inequity in the rate base that you have?

Mr Collins: We would like to have many more bodies on the ground. That would be the starting point. This inquiry is focusing today on fireweed but is trying to understand invasive weeds. There is also the issue of vertebrate pests—wild dogs, pigs and so on—which in itself is a major problem for us. Getting more boots on the ground would be a very significant start for us. It is also important to recognise that you need the administrative structures behind those as well. There needs to be all the procedures in place and all of that sort of business that goes with it.

Councillor McDonald has already talked about mapping and using GIS to understand what is going on and to make predictions about where issues might be arising. If you start to look at the ecological niches of particular weeds, that is something that you can apply.

The other issue is having enough vehicles to move people around and to have them adequately equipped. They need twin-reel spray equipment and those sorts of things so that you can go out and spray without any issues. It is really an increase in resourcing, by and large, but, as I say, it is not just about having more officers on the ground. You do need people to administer that process as well. That is important.

I might add something to another point that Councillor McDonald was making. There has been some discussion about new people coming into areas like ours—so-called tree changers or blockies. It may well be the case that they do not understand the fundamental principles of good land management, but coupled with that, if they have come from somewhere like Brisbane or the Gold Coast, their expectation of the type of service that a council can deliver is wildly different. They think they can pick up the phone or go to the website and find this and do that, and it is just not there. That is another issue again. It is the same old story, I am afraid, but it is another highlight that I thought was worth making.

CHAIR: Would it be possible to incentivise good management practices? For example, I think one of your councillors mentioned the introduction of a subsidy and linking that to attendance at weed management training programs and things of that nature. Have there been attempts to incentivise good land management practices?

Mr Collins: I am a big fan of incentives for many different issues, particularly land management. The issue is that in theory and on paper what you can do looks very impressive. There is no doubt that it can work, but it still needs a substantial amount of money. You need enough money there for it to be persuasive and for people to say, 'That makes sense. I'm happy to do that. I will be part of that and I will take the money.' When you have many tens of thousands of properties, the costs can go through the roof. You find that an incentive scheme, unless it is very well funded and well very resourced, is ineffective. In effect, you are throwing good money away because people simply do not take the bait, for want of a better way of putting it.

CHAIR: While the arrival of lifestyle blocks must increase your rate base somewhat, instead of having one landholder managing one large property you might have 100 landholders managing smaller properties. Does that create additional and increased complexity for a smaller council like yours?

Mr Collins: Yes, it absolutely does. It really is a major issue. In the area of pest management one of the problems that we have encountered with our wild dog and pig baiting is that we are having to deal with large numbers of smaller properties rather than the one big property. In terms of that notification and awareness and those sorts of things, it is a multiplier, quite simply.

Councillor McDonald: Mr Chair, could I add something to that?

CHAIR: Absolutely. The other councils represented are welcome to jump in on any question as well.

Councillor McDonald: What went through my mind when Mr Collins was talking was that here in South-East Queensland we are all in this together. Out in the Lockyer we are growing fresh fruit and vegetables and providing a larger population base. Over the last couple of years there seems to be a growing political awareness because people understand that this is where the fruit and vegetables are grown and a lot of things come from here, but the farmers and the local councils cannot afford to do it all. There is a saying that it is hard to be green when you are in the red. If the farmers were making squillions of dollars, they would be able to perhaps treat all of these problems and if councils had a bucketload of money we would be able to do all those things. There is definitely a need to shift funds from the larger population areas to the smaller population areas so we can do this, maintain productivity and be able to continue to supply fresh fruit and vegetables.

The other thing about resourcing is not only bums on seats and having staff here to be able to do it. There is also a necessity for wash-down facilities on main roads and council roads where activities are occurring—either mobile wash-down facilities or areas where people who are doing roadworks can stop the spread of weeds as well. That is another cost that is difficult for small councils to be able to bear.

Mr MADDEN: We are together today talking about this issue. I know that there used to be an annual weed symposium dealing with issues like this. I would like to get feedback from you about an annual invasive weeds symposium for local government where we have state government departments and federal government departments attending over one or two days. Would you see benefit in that?

Mr Madigan: From Ipswich's point of view, absolutely. The sooner the better, to put it bluntly. This is an issue where pointing at other levels of government or other local governments does not achieve anything for our community. The sooner we can all get together and discuss it and learn from each other, the better. I have got some ideas just from sitting here that we might look at doing. The sooner we can all get together, we would be keen to participate or even facilitate.

Mr MADDEN: That is fantastic. That is the right feedback, thank you.

CHAIR: Any of the councillors can answer this question. When a property is changing hands there is the potential for someone to move into the property who does not have (a) an understanding of local weed issues and how to manage them and (b) an understanding of what the history of that property might have been. Is there a capacity for local governments to inform new property owners of the history of weed infestations in those properties and to provide education at that point around how to manage weeds?

Mr Ready: I think the answer to both of those would be yes depending on the level of information that we have available. The education around best practice, how to deal with pests and what you should do is something that we can probably fairly easily facilitate by way of information packs with rates notices and those sorts of things.

When it comes to the history of weed infestations on a property, that will depend on the quality of our records and what we make publicly available. Under the act we are required to keep a register of those properties on which we have issued notices—biosecurity orders—and all of that is discoverable by anyone requesting it. Not everyone requests it; let me put that out. Every year I might get two or three requests, and that is it. On most of those properties my answer will be, 'We have no record because our records simply are not deep enough at this stage.'

Also, we do not issue orders to every property that has pest issues. We deal with a lot of them through information, through advisory notices, asking them to come along on the journey with us and to tell us what they have done and we are starting to get some good responses to that with people who have now been advised and are sending back pieces of paper saying, 'Yes, this is what we have done.' We will follow up on those and any that need an order issued because they are straying off the wrong path or will eventually move down that line. As far as the legislation is set up, that which we tell people is that which we are required to under law.

CHAIR: Are there any other comments?

Councillor McDonald: At Lockyer we provide a new householder package to those who move to the area, but that does not contain weed information and it is isolated at the moment to urban areas so it has planted a seed for us.

CHAIR: In terms of the new Biosecurity Act, are there any parts that you feel should be amended? Is it assisting your councils in their duties? Are there any areas of improvement?

Mr Ready: The one that I think is common across all councils, as I have read through a number of my colleagues' submissions, is the requirement under the current legislation for us to issue it on a person or an occupier as opposed to an owner. That presents cost recoupment issues for council. It also represents issues in identifying who that person was. It was far simpler under the legislative arrangements whereby we issued it to the owner of a property. That way we could push the onus on to them to follow up with their tenant or whoever was in their mind responsible for assisting them in that regard.

CHAIR: Is there anything else?

Mr Madigan: I completely agree with that. The big issue for us is in the event that we do have to go in and do works ourselves to recover those costs. In Ipswich I think it is standard across-the-board. We will put a charge on the rates and that is how we recover the expense that council incurs as a result of that. Hence I think why if it is the property owner it is a charge to the property and the owner pays the rates. That is how we recoup those costs.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance. We will be publishing a transcript of your evidence today.

GALEA, Dr Vic, Associate Professor, Plant Pathology, School of Agriculture and Food Sciences, University of Queensland

CHAIR: Welcome. Would you like to make a five-minute opening statement, or shorter if you would like?

Dr Galea: First of all, I would like to welcome the committee to our wonderful university in the Foundation Building, which is 120 years old later this year. It is the senior part of the University of Queensland.

I would like to talk briefly about the sort of work that we do here in the School of Agriculture and Food Sciences in the area of weeds and weed management. Although we have a very large school and it is regarded as the top research agriculture institution in this country, in the area of weed management we have only a few staff working as we cover many aspects of agriculture and food sciences.

We have Professor Stephen Adkins working here on this campus. Stephen Adkins is a weed scientist who specialises in weed reproduction and some aspects of management. Other than the work he does on parthenium weed, which of course is a major concern to our state, Steve Adkins also has some research on fireweed and that is as a result of contributing to some workshops that Jim Madden ran earlier this year. Steve presented at those and as a result of that took on a PhD student who has now commenced work in this area. That student, who has only recently started, will have four years of research looking at aspects of the distribution and reproduction of the weed and to get some sense of how it spreads and obviously to look at the threat issues. Steve is also working closely with colleagues from the New South Wales government to inform that research. I am sure that he would certainly love to collaborate with local councils as that project kicks off.

We also have a new academic starting with us next year who will be a pasture agronomist and a pasture weed scientist as well. That incumbent will most likely be assisting with some of the research we do in the rangelands base. My own research is based mainly on the management of woody invasive weeds with a focus on parkinsonia, prickly acacia, mesquites, rubber bush and lantana. I also have dabbled in GRT as well. The research that I have been doing has been going for over 14 years. As a result of that, we have developed a biological herbicide for the management of parkinsonia. We have a research company or a start-up company through the University of Queensland called BioHerbicides Australia. That research alone has brought us to the point where we have a product which is almost at registration point, although we are somewhat slowed down by the processes of the APVMA, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority, which has been assisting us in this process but are somewhat hampered by the challenges of registering a biological herbicide which is something they have never done before. We are a bit of a test case and it is making that somewhat challenging, but we are hopeful to have our product ready for the market this year.

As a result of that, the university has been very kind in supporting our work. We have a production facility here on campus that will produce and is producing that product and the start-up company itself is putting all of its money into research and development. So far that process has cost us almost \$2 million which, when you think about the cost of registering a chemical herbicide, is chickenfeed because it would be hundreds of millions of dollars, but then we are not Monsanto. We are just humble researchers. Of that \$2 million spent over the last 14 years, less than one quarter of that has come to us in research money or research grants. We are trying to save the world on a shoestring budget, but that is because we believe in what we are doing for the industry.

That work of course would not have been possible without considerable support from the state government, particularly officers in QDAF and Biosecurity Queensland. We would like to acknowledge the great support that we have had by people such as Nathan March in Cloncurry and Shane Campbell and his team in Charters Towers at the tropical weeds research unit. There are other people who have been involved in our research as well and it has also been with cooperation from various regional bodies across Queensland such as Desert Channels Queensland, Southern Gulf and Fitzroy Basin. We work quite a way around the place, but we also do our research in other states as well such as the Northern Territory and in Western Australia.

I want to point out that a lot of this research has been done for public good. We aim to develop mechanisms by which farmers and graziers can manage these weeds in a more effective way and in many cases with a biological approach, but it is always difficult to fund this sort of work and the success rate in attracting supporting funding tends to be fairly low because particularly at the state level there does not seem to be a lot of emphasis on supporting this type of research. I have applied

for certain grants over the last couple of years, as has our research company, and we have been unsuccessful because there must be other things that seem to be more important than weed management research. That is really my opening statement and I am happy to take any questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Galea.

Mr WEIR: Thank you very much for that and I take your point: funding is short. That was one of my questions, so obviously you would say that any assistance that could be given in that direction would be much welcomed. You talked about prickly acacia and you seem to have developed something there. What about the likes of rat's-tail grass and fireweed? I am not hearing a lot of advancement in biocontrol in those sorts of areas.

Dr Galea: I am aware for giant rat's-tail grass that there is a biological control and there is a company in New South Wales that I have been in contact with and I have actually met the researchers there. They have a product called Para-Trooper. It is a fungal agent which can actually be introduced into the GRT stools. It was originally designed for giant Parramatta grass, which is a close relative of GRT, and the initial trials in Queensland—these are not trials that I have run but the trials that the company has run and it has also done that in conjunction with staff from QDAF in the Central Queensland area—indicates that it works well, so we do actually have a biological solution. I was involved with that company earlier this year. We were putting together a research grant application under a federal scheme. It was the federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources grants round at the beginning of the year and the title was 'Control tools and technology for established pest animals and weeds'. We were putting a submission together but unfortunately, because of time limitations and lack of capacity in that company, they were not able to get that submission completed. They were looking at a project to further develop and trial their product in New South Wales but also in Queensland.

We have an innovative technology. It is not one that I own but am familiar with and I believe that it certainly warrants further investigation. This is a company that is basically a mum and dad operation but they have a research laboratory and they have a research assistant and have been doing wonderful things. They are using fungi which are native to Australia, so there is not a biosecurity risk as such. These are the sorts of innovative solutions that we really need to look at. My own research in parkinsonia biocontrol is based on the use of native fungi which are naturally killing this weed, yet it is meeting some roadblocks along the way. That is really the main thesis behind most of my research—that is, using naturally selected control agents which are already here in the country which are already doing their job. What we do is we augment their effectiveness through novel delivery mechanisms.

Mr WEIR: When we were in Gladstone there was talk of that fungus with giant rat's-tail grass. It also affects native rat-tail grass as well. Is that correct?

Dr Galea: I am not aware of that because I have not had hands-on involvement as to whether it does or does not. I think that is really one of the things that needs to be investigated.

Mr WEIR: With regard to comments I heard earlier on our tour at this facility, fireweed for example obviously has toxins which affect animals, and I know this is outside your area but I was just after your opinion. I would have thought that that would be a nice opportunity for somewhere like this to have a look at any vaccines or anything that can be done to combat the toxicity of fireweed. I have a property at Cecil Plains and I battled pimelea. It was the same thing. It was not over a big enough area that the big companies were interested in it, but I thought for facilities such as this it might be a good opportunity for some investigation. It would need funding.

Dr Galea: Yes, and that may be something that does warrant investigation of course. I am not a toxicologist, but the little I know about animal physiology is that it depends on the nature of the toxins and whether you can protect the animal or there may be a possibility of introducing a gut microbe that neutralises the toxin before it can enter the animal's system. Again, here of course in our School of Agriculture and Food Science and in the School of Veterinary Science, which is also on our campus, there is potential for the researchers to look into that sort of thing. Certainly, it would generate some interest.

Mr WEIR: Thank you.

CHAIR: Dr Galea, with regard to the trial in Queensland that you referred to, has that been published at all? Has there been any data or anything?

Dr Galea: The GRT?

CHAIR: Yes, that one.

Dr Galea: I am not aware because I do not have personal knowledge of that. We would have to contact the company to find out more about that.

CHAIR: With regard to the notion of using a native fungus, is there any foreseeable concern given that Australia is a big country so that something that might be a native fungus to South-East Queensland may not necessarily be native to other parts?

Dr Galea: Yes, that is a concern. One of the things we do in this research is that when we find organisms that are of interest or have some efficacy we normally conduct a genetic analysis to understand what it is exactly and what strain it might be and then we compare that to the bank of information that we do have. There are of course different concepts of how far ranging a genotype can be. You could literally go from one side of your lawn to another and find drift happening, so, yes, Australia is a big country. There are some organisms which are global in their distribution. For instance, one of the ones that we work with is *Macrophomina phaseolina*, which causes charcoal rot in a lot of crops, and it is endemic in many native species and can do anything from kill some plants to live harmlessly in others. We know that is the same no matter where you get it from across Australia, but there are other species which could literally vary from kilometre to kilometre, and that is why you need to conduct the appropriate research to put those checks and balances in.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr MADDEN: Thanks very much for coming in today, Dr Galea. It is good to see you again. I am very pleased to hear about the PhD student working on fireweed. If I played a small role in that happening, I am very pleased to hear that as well. I am curious about this issue of funding for research. I am a graduate of this university and I funded myself for my postgraduate studies. I presume there is some access to funding from the state government and the federal government and private sources. Do you ever get funding from local government?

Dr Galea: No, I cannot say that I ever have. However, through the research we do with regional bodies we get in-kind support. More often than not when we do that sort of work there are also staff from local government contributing to that work. I can talk about the sort of thing I have done around Longreach and in Richmond et cetera where we are setting up a field trial and all sorts of helpers come out of nowhere to assist, and quite often we have had a weeds officer from the local council. We do get support, but it tends not to be the cash type of support. However, that is understandable given that local councils are not there to fund research but we are actually doing our research to hopefully benefit them.

Mr WEIR: In regard to these weeds, it is just chemical control. From my experience at Cecil Plains, we have weeds such as feathertop Rhodes grass and fleabane that have now developed a resistance to these chemicals. Have you seen any indication that that may be happening, or what is the potential for that to happen in these species, do you think, like the rat's tail?

Dr Galea: Resistance to chemicals? It is probably not so much an issue of potential. All species have the potential to develop resistance. It is really a basic rule of natural selection, which is if you apply the same selection pressure over a certain amount of time, eventually a resistant genotype will pop up. In reality, there is probably 1,000th of one percentage of plants in a population that will be resistant to a chemical. By applying it, you eventually weed out the others and the resistant ones remain. We see this process of chemical resistance occurring in insect pests, in weeds, and in microbial pathogens—fungi bacteria et cetera. The reality is that all weeds will develop a resistance to a chemical over time if we use a narrow spectrum of chemicals and we do not have a rotational practice. As the range of chemical products shrinks over time, as more and more are being removed for different reasons, we have fewer tools to use.

Mr WEIR: Do you think that is widely recognised? Has any strategy been put in place?

Dr Galea: It is widely recognised in field cropping circles—people who are dealing with weeds in field crops. The concept of Roundup resistance in weeds and resistance to other herbicides is well established. However, in the management of environmental weeds, it is probably a concept that is not that well understood, or accepted. Bear in mind that, in a cropping situation, you are applying a herbicide in a field three, four, or five times a year, or maybe more. The selection pressure is a lot greater than if you are going up and down the roadside and maybe spraying once or twice a year. The resistance will build up more slowly in that situation. However, it will eventually build up.

Mr MADDEN: This may have been touched on by the member for Condamine. With fireweed, we think that it is a disadvantage that we have native species and that we cannot introduce biological controls, but perhaps it is an advantage in that those native species would have pests and diseases

and, as they invade an area, they may not bring those pests and diseases with them. That opens up the opportunity that, if we could identify the pest and diseases in their home areas and locate them, we can introduce those into the invasive areas as a method of control.

Dr Galea: That is right. The classical approach to biological control is to go to the centre of origin of the weed and look for its natural enemies and bring some of those over, or you could look to see what may develop locally as well. There have been many examples of invasive species that over time have become less aggressive because a native organism has developed a taste for it.

When you get the initial introduction of many weed species, they will positively overrun the place and then you may get some native insects that might develop a taste or they may move from a native species of that plant, or a native relative, and then develop a taste. There is no way of predicting whether that will happen. The work that we are doing is looking at fungi, for instance, that have developed a taste for introduced weeds, which is why we are looking for those organisms, particularly in those weeds.

Getting back to this issue of the native fireweed, just because you introduce a biological control does not necessarily mean that you will wipe out the native species. You might introduce some competition, but biological control never eliminates the weed that you are targeting. All it does is put it in check. Sometimes you have to weigh up the benefits against the risks. I was hearing today from some of the other people who have spoken that it appears that the native fireweed seems to be on the increase as well. It is becoming weedy, obviously. That is probably an influence of the grazing system that we have. Let us face it: more than 200 years ago we were not running cattle. What was that native fireweed doing then? It was probably in small pockets here and there and in low numbers and kept in check. So it is probably the grazing practices that are increasing its capacity to overrun the place. These are risks that have to be determined, but I would be looking at biological controls. Maybe a little bit of collateral damage is probably not a bad thing. Certainly, I would not think that it would spell the end of the native fireweed.

Mr MADDEN: Thank you very much, Dr Galea.

CHAIR: Thank you Dr Galea. We will now take a short break.

Proceedings suspended from 2.21 pm to 2.26 pm

VITELLI, Ms Marie, Policy Officer, AgForce Queensland

CHAIR: Thank you, we will continue this hearing. I would now like to invite Ms Marry Vitelli, a policy officer with AgForce Queensland, to appear.

Ms Vitelli: Thank you.

CHAIR: Would you like to make a brief opening statement and then I will open up the floor for questions?

Ms Vitelli: Okay. Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today. Over the past four years we have seen a slip in the profile of weeds across federal and state governments. Environmental issues such as the reef have taken the overwhelming priority within governments. Over this period, weed invasion has slowed down a bit while we are in a record-breaking drought of maybe 70 per cent of Queensland, but every drought breaks and when we see this drought break we are going to see some major weed invasions and risks, especially in areas where there is limited competition ground cover. Fireweed is a case study weed. It is toxic—as we have talked about—it is invasive, with windborne seeds, and it readily spreads where there is limited ground cover. From an AgForce perspective, there are some specific issues that we see with fireweed management. We see the clash, or the interaction, or the difficulty when you have the introduced fireweed very closely related and very similar in identification to the native fireweed. They are both toxic. From a producer's point of view, they both need control, or management. The distribution overlaps. If it is okay with the committee, I can table the distribution maps of the native and the introduced weeds across Queensland and across eastern Australia. That was sourced from Australia's Virtual Herbarium. That is based on herbarium records, so that gives you a bit of an idea.

CHAIR: Thank you. Can we seek leave to table this document?

Mr MADDEN: That is fine.

CHAIR: Thank you. That is accepted. Continue.

Ms Vitelli: Thank you. The introduced fireweed is more in the South-East Queensland corner, with a few outbreaks occasionally across Longreach—once again, with fodder—and there is the outbreak in the Tablelands. The native fireweed is more through Central Queensland, but there is that bit of an overlap between the two distributions and the potential spread.

We see a lot of value in a central database such as the herbarium. Now, all the national herbaria and state herbaria are linked. I think there is importance in recording the distribution, range and change in range in time. We need that central information. For us as an industry, we can go to somewhere like Australia's Virtual Herbarium, do a free search online and see that, whereas a lot of other databases are held within government departments, or different entities. So there is great value in that.

Because of the difficulty in trying to implement control in one species versus the other, we really need some better methods for understanding or being able to identify the two weeds. Often it takes microscopic identification by technical expertise, or herbaria. They are underresourced as well. Councils are underresourced. Everyone is underresourced. Because you have only that narrow window to be able to control fireweed—about six weeks before the plant flowers and reaches maturity—you really need that rapid turnaround.

We have put out there that resourcing is required for councils, for herbaria, to be able to do that identification. If we have the technology and we have students coming through, how about developing a rapid diagnostic tool—a DNA tool? They can tell us who our parents are and where we come from. Why can we not get something that can give us instant diagnosis in the field and help all the staff out there and landholders to work out what they have when there is a clash between what has to be regulated and what is not?

Leading on to research, up until today AgForce was not aware of any ongoing fireweed research. It is great to see a PhD student coming on board. Hopefully, there are more. Owing to limited resources, we see Biosecurity Queensland really struggle to keep up with the pest facts. They are a central repository for a lot of information on weed management. We tend to turn to some of their pest facts, or other areas, for their management control and herbicide regulations, but it is difficult for them to keep up with the very limited staff and resources that they have. There is hardly anyone in head office doing it. I think one man a fortnight is doing it. In consequence, some of the herbicide registrations are not on that pest facts. One that comes to mind is a metsulfuron-methyl. It used to be sold as Brush-Off, Ally, and many other names. That is a very safe herbicide—no poisons schedule, Gattton

no withholding period. It is quite important for landholders and some of our producers to know that that will control young fireweed if you use it with a surfactant. There are other examples in our submission that should be on that pest facts, so please help Biosecurity Queensland be able to achieve keeping that information up to date if possible.

The government needs to urgently resource a succession plan for biosecurity expertise. We are losing people. There are fewer people with knowledge—that expertise, the council expertise. We need that. I would like to ask the committee if I can table another document.

CHAIR: Leave is sought to table a document. Is leave granted?

Mr MADDEN: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Vitelli: The Queensland government did their 2015 *Queensland Biosecurity capability review*. In there they talk about biosecurity capability and expertise and regional expertise. It is all here. There are a whole lot of actions. They talk about five technical officers being based around Central Queensland and North Queensland; expanding capability and expert networks; a fellows program; access retiree expertise; the mentoring of staff; a network of epidemiologists and other experts; a succession plan for graduates; leadership and engagement and partnership. It is all there. I hope that this committee can call on the government to enact this plan, this capability review. Just get it happening. That would be great.

There should be the coordination of weed programs. We saw the federal government move away from Weeds of National Significance. Fireweed is one of those. That was a great program. Since then we have seen no updates on the fireweed strategic plan or to the best practice manual. Most landholders know about Weeds of National Significance and can relate to that. It is just a real shame that we have moved away from that. That also brought a level of national coordination that fed down into regional and local coordination.

In relation to the control of weeds on Crown land, AgForce was not clear why the terms of reference were limited to unallocated state land managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. There is a lot of other state land out there and I think that we have alluded to that in the discussion today. We were aware through personal communication with Jason Riethmuller from Natural Resources and Mines that Natural Resources and Mines land, about one million hectares over 18,000 parcels, has about \$3.5 million to do on bushfire mitigation, invasive animal control management and weeds. They are limited to bushfire risk management, they do some feral animal and brumby control, prohibited weeds and only other regulated or restricted matter weeds where there is a community program happening. I do not think fire weed would be done on many, unless it is brought up in a community group. Our recommendation to this committee was that, for any state land acquisition, there really needs to be an allocated perpetual realistic annual budget for doing weed management and feral animal control, as well as bushfire mitigation.

CHAIR: Ms Vitelli, we are mindful of the time. Do you have much more to go, as we would like to open it up to questions?

Ms Vitelli: I want to raise one point: we are aware that the Queensland government wants to increase their protected area estate from seven per cent to 17 per cent, that is, from 173 million hectares to 350 million hectares. AgForce and I think everyone would like to see how the state government is going to fund a realistic budget for weed control there.

In our submission we talk about empowering networks. We believe the resellers for produce agencies are an untapped extension source and also agree that there needs to be an upskilling and training program for local government pest management officers, as well as some of those people who work in the resale industry in the produce agencies. Biosecurity is everyone's responsibility, so we also support a major extension campaign that we are all part of. We see that we really need a biosecurity levy that everyone contributes to: every community member, every visitor to Queensland or Australia. Maybe a bit of the goods and services tax could be creamed off for biosecurity as we need a fighting fund, because there are going to be other outbreaks that come from time to time and we really need to be able to address those. I will leave it there, thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you. I call on the member for Ipswich West for questions.

Mr MADDEN: I must congratulate you on your summary of issues that we should be thinking about. You probably heard my previous questions when we talked about the importance of the dissemination of information. I will put this in the nicest way I can: you seem to be a walking encyclopedia of these issues. How is information getting to people such as you, our government agencies and our universities? How is the information being moved around? Is it through symposiums, through the internet, through publications? Can you give me a snapshot?

Ms Vitelli: In my personal case, I have had a lifetime of working with weeds and with producers, which has helped me. Over that time, you develop networks. You do look at new outcomes for weed research. I am also very interested in agricultural veterinary chemicals and looking at the herbicide side of things. In my job, I deal with policies to do with ag-vet chemical handling and registration, so I am aware of that. I think it is the passion.

I have attended the Weed Symposium, but it is very difficult to have one Queensland weed symposium that all local government officers will get to. I was involved in the organising committee at Longreach. It went very well. There is one coming up this year at Port Douglas. Every two years they are run through the Queensland Weed Society. While they happen, I think you really need regional groups of maybe local government coming together, because local government does not have the travel budget to send their officers right around the state. You could then also look at local issues. Some councils are working together in regional groups. The western guys have some training activities there. I totally agree that that is a great opportunity and needs to be fostered and driven.

With some of the resellers for produce agencies, you used to have some of the chemical companies going around and providing some of that training. With all of the mergers of the big chemical companies, that provision of services is no longer there. I think they also need to be kept upskilled on new technologies. Through DAFF funding, recently we have offered some training programs for our producers on chemical usage in storage and handling for vertebrate animal control. A lot of people do not know about splatter guns or ThinLine, which is less chemical and not so far up the plant. There is lots to be updated with.

Mr MADDEN: I like your idea about localised symposiums. Which do you think is the appropriate authority for organising those symposiums?

Ms Vitelli: I would like to put that back to the local government entities. I think in some cases they already are. In the western areas I am aware of RAPAD, the Remote Area Planning and Development Board, which is several western councils working together. There is also FNQROC, the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Council, which has a node. There are other nodes. I am not totally familiar with every node, but I think it would go back to the councils, which can see best, and let them decide the program of what they want.

Mr WEIR: You said that it should go back to the councils. We have heard from the Lockyer council about the difference in income through rates for funding these things. What do you think would be a way of funding those? Do you need more government funding, more targeted funding, better coordination?

Ms Vitelli: At the end of our submission we suggested that AgForce Queensland is quite willing to work with Biosecurity, local government and anyone who wants to come into a collaborative group to work out how best to do that. We mentioned pest management officers with the council and, as I say, the produce agencies and the producers. I think there are certain weed control units. You can upskill anyone who needs to do the nationally accredited weed control unit. We also thought about trailers. You could set up one or two trailers with some of that new technology and new equipment on it, which could then go around to the training days and be housed at different local government areas. Producers and the local government staff can all have a go at calibrating and using some of those new technologies.

I think it is an area where there needs to be more discussion and maybe out of this there could be a bit of a think tank, but it really needs to involve the staff and looking at some of the models that are happening. As I say, the western Queensland land management officers do have their training days. They are a good two days. They touch on vertebrate control, as well as weeds and legislation. I have participated in one of those, presenting our fodder weed project to them. I think we could look at some of the models that are happening already.

Mrs GILBERT: You were talking about different councils working together. We have heard about Dr Galea's work. He talked about different approaches across the country with different weeds and what is working with different types of microorganisms and fungi, et cetera, in the plants. Do you think we need to start at the top by having a national approach? The fireweed was identified in New South Wales, but it did not recognise the border; it just hopped on over. Do you think we should look at a national approach around the biosecurity of weeds and make sure that we break it down from there with what the states are doing?

Ms Vitelli: To my knowledge, currently the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, RIRDC, has co-funded 10 biocontrol programs across the nation through Australian government funding under the Rural Research and Development for Profit grants. That is underway at the moment. What happens there is that the organisations had to co-match that, so groups such

as Powerlink, Forestry Plantations Queensland, the New South Wales DPI and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries have all provided some co-matching funding to go with the Australian funding, managed through RIRDC. Yes, some of that work will then be shared across the state borders.

The way that the Australian government seems to be going—and we are doing this, talking about pimelea—we have been getting producer pledges and getting a research grant application together to look at that. That is a native toxic plant, different to what you are looking at. There is a need to show that you have skin in the game. Cash is king, as our president, Grant Maudsley says. Look at co-matching and see if there is a way of co-matching some of this work with in kind, as well as cash, to get this work happening. I suppose a national approach, but it is very difficult. There has to be some state component in there, as well, because there are regional priorities that need to be addressed.

CHAIR: Ms Vitelli, would it be your experience over many years that a landholder who is good at managing one type of weed on their property is generally relatively adept at managing a range of invasive pests, whether they are plants or animals?

Ms Vitelli: Yes. Like all walks of life, a good manager will manage the whole myriad of pests, weeds and animals and there are some people who could do better. As with all our communities, even at school, there are always some who do well and some who could do better. It is about working with those who could do better, realising that they are threatening the biosecurity of the people around them and that they need to do that containment. I understand some people cannot financially afford it straight up. We believe that you have to start control and whatever you start control on you have to be able to follow up. Some of the councils have implemented, with some of these very difficult weeds, I suppose you could say, a border or fence-line approach. You keep working back from your fence lines to keep your weed contained until you can get on top of it all.

CHAIR: It strikes me, coming from a health background, that there are a lot of similarities here with what we try to achieve in a population health sense, where ultimately our goal is to change behaviours of people in society, whether they are patients, people in the community or health professionals. Are there examples in the agricultural sector whereby we have gone out there and tried to change behaviours, using a whole range of strategies to adjust people's behaviour, not just to fix a problem but to fix it for a very long period?

Ms Vitelli: As some of the councils have alluded to, in some of these community programs often it is a catchment approach. Ideally you look strategically at where isolated plants are going to be festering in other areas and maybe get together a group on barter days, which work well. If you have a group of interested landholders, they come together and work on each other's property and keep a bit of a record. It is all fair and everyone has to contribute. That is a great impetus to get work happening. Also, I suppose, there is reward for effort. When you do a community day and you are sharing, you can all see where you are making progress and you take an interest in each other's work. That has worked in the past. It worked with landholders in the Dalrymple shire who used to take that kind of catchment approach to weed control through community days and barter days. I know it worked in Hughenden. We talked about the fireweed day where we pulled a lot of plants. I think trying to develop that ethos will work in some areas.

We have a lot of absentee landholders these days. That is a difficult one, because they come and go. They might not be there or have the time to invest in weed management. They might not know they have the weeds, so absentee landlords or land managers are a difficult group to crack in some cases.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing here today. We appreciate your contribution.

Ms Vitelli: Thank you.

LUNDIE-JENKINS, Dr Geoff, Manager, Fire and Pests, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing

CHAIR: Dr Lundie-Jenkins, would you like to make a brief opening statement before we go to questions or are you happy to take questions?

Dr Lundie-Jenkins: I would like to make a brief statement. First of all, thank you for the opportunity to appear. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has a responsibility for managing more than 400 of Queensland's state forests and timber reserves and over 600 protected areas, which includes national parks, conservation parks and resources reserves. That represents a combined area of almost 13 million hectares. As probably the largest land management agency within Queensland, Parks takes its obligations under the legislation very seriously. We have obligations, as other landholders do, under the Biosecurity Act but also have complementary obligations under both the Nature Conservation Act and the Forestry Act with regards to the estate that we manage on behalf of Queensland.

Parks recognises that a landscape-wide across-tenure approach is the most effective way of achieving significant pest management objectives. QPWS contributes through cooperative projects with neighbouring landholders, other agencies and local government. We are a very active participant in the State Lands Pest Management Committee. We have representation on the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative Oversight Group. We have longstanding relationships, positive relationships and cooperative arrangements with Biosecurity Queensland and a range of local government councils.

In 2016-17 Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service budgeted over \$8.5 million specifically on pest management and that includes a total of about \$900,000 to a strategic pest management program which funds specific priority projects across the state. That funding includes projects to tackle key pest species impacting on priority parks and to manage a range of pest species including such things as myconia, pond apple, siam, guinea grass, bitou bush, prickly acacia and rubber vine. Significant resources have also been expended in large-scale control programs to address pest animals.

In terms of the species that are the focus of this particular inquiry, I think over the last 10 years, through that strategic pest management program, QPWS has supported 14 specific projects for over \$250,000 targeting prickly acacia, giant rat's-tail grass and fireweed. In addition to those project specific funds, on an annual basis QPWS allocates, in the current financial year, about \$4.1 million to labour and operating costs for on-ground rangers in terms of both their general duties and specific to pest management.

Because of the significant investment Parks has made in pest management, we have adopted a statewide pest management framework that underpins the delivery of strategic and operational outcomes for pest management. Under that framework, the planning and strategic direction for pest management for individual protected areas is documented in individual pest strategies. We have statewide priorities but we have individual strategic plans for individual protected areas and they identify the specific outcomes for on-ground activities to both protect and recover park values but also, obviously, to meet our obligations under the various pieces of legislation.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Member for Mackay, would you like to start with questions.

Mrs Gilbert: The framework that you have for pest management, do you share that with councils so that they understand what is happening within your national park? We went past some state land today and nobody seemed to know if there was anything being done there to assist with the giant rat's-tail and the fireweed. Do you work with local councils so that they know what is happening within your framework and what is happening in that location?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: Certainly there is engagement. Again I am talking across the state. It is difficult to know individual relationships with individual councils at each scale, but certainly there is deliberate intent to work with councils in a cooperative way. That will certainly be reinforced with the changes that have been made under the introduction of the Biosecurity Act through the development of local government biosecurity plans. Because we are a significant landholder in a lot of those local government areas, we will be a key player and are very interested to work cooperatively with the local councils to develop those plans.

Mrs Gilbert: Within your organisation we have heard a lot today about communication and training of people on the ground and information dissemination. Do you have the capacity within your organisation to play a major role in the information giving within areas where you do hold land?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: There is certainly a significant body of knowledge and expertise within the agency with regard to pest management in terms of on-ground pest management. We certainly work closely with Biosecurity Queensland through the State Lands Pest Management Committee and Gatton

other committees associated with that. We certainly are very keen to share knowledge and expertise in those projects and to work closely with other agencies—both state and local government agencies. Concurrent with the introduction of the Biosecurity Act, we have also recently introduced a new pest management system which provides a basis for our strategic planning but also records information we have in relation to pest infestation locations and the application of our pest management activities which will enhance our ability to communicate that information with neighbours and with other jurisdictions.

Mr WEIR: I am a bit curious as to what is included in the \$8.5 million. You said that there is 13 million hectares of national park and you have available \$8.5 million.

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: For pest management, yes.

Mr WEIR: Yet we keep hearing complaints that there is not enough action and not enough control on state owned land. How do you spend that \$8.5 million?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: As I said, \$900,000 of that is in a specific program which identifies and prioritises a range of projects across the state. \$4.1 million is the basic pest management contribution towards general salaries and operating costs for on-ground staff. Then there is a range of projects across other areas, including focus areas on management of pests on Cape York, specific pest related programs that relate to the Barrier Reef and Barrier Reef islands, as well as projects that we do collaboratively with the Commonwealth in relation to protecting nesting turtles on beaches. There are a range of projects.

Mr WEIR: That is probably where I was going. Rat's-tail grass is probably not a real sexy subject, but turtle eggs and wild pigs in the north are. I was actually wondering how much is being spent on the control of rat's-tail grass, fireweed or prickly acacia compared to those other issues.

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: As I said, I think that during the past nine years there has been 14 specific projects funded out of the strategic pest management program focusing on prickly acacia, giant rat's-tail grass and fireweed. In recognition of the position of giant rat's-tail grass as one of a suite of high biomass grasses that are causing impacts both within productive systems but also within natural systems, we are in the process of developing a statewide strategy for managing high biomass grasses with the intention that it becomes a strong focus then within the strategic pest management program.

Mr WEIR: Is there any indication of figures spent on those particular programs—not particularly acacia and rat's-tail?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: Individually I haven't got that specific break up at this stage. The new system we have will certainly allow that level of scrutiny.

CHAIR: Would you mind taking that question on notice, please, and providing that information back to the committee?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: Yes.

CHAIR: If I am a landholder living adjacent to a national park or a local councillor representing somebody who lives adjacent to a national park and I have concerns about pests that relate to that national park, who do I speak to to deal with those issues?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: The best way to approach this, and this has certainly come up in a number of statewide committees, is that these issues are best dealt with at the local scale. In all cases there will be a ranger in charge associated with a particular protected area. The initial point of contact should be with the ranger in charge to discuss an issue or identify a problem. Obviously there are opportunities then for that to escalate if there is not a suitable outcome with a ranger in charge. The hierarchy then is that at a local regional level there are senior rangers who manage a number of aggregations of parks; above those are principal rangers who then manage a number of management units; above that is then a regional director. We have six operational regions across the state. There are opportunities to escalate that. The Parks service actually has a good neighbour policy. There is quite a clear intent for the department to work closely and collaboratively with neighbours. Whilst I recognise that a number of submissions have identified issues with these pests in parks, I think we suffer from the fact that we are the largest landholder so we probably have more neighbours than any other organisation in Queensland as well. To that effect, I am confident that we do have, in most cases, very good working relationships with neighbours and with local council.

CHAIR: I will go to the member for Ipswich West for a question.

Mr MADDEN: I actually have two questions. The first one is fairly simple. Are you responsible for forestry land.

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: Parks is responsible for state forest, except for where it is plantation. HQ Plantations looks after the production plantation lands.

Mr MADDEN: The second question is could you outline how the Biosecurity Act has affected how you manage plant pests and animal pests?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: Our framework focuses both on our responsibilities under legislation but also our responsibilities in terms of the resources on parks and state forests that we are managing. There has not been a huge departure from our existing framework to address the requirements of the Biosecurity Act. What will happen as a consequence of the introduction of the Biosecurity Act, as I said before, is the need for local government to develop biosecurity plans will actually provide a formal basis for establishing priorities at a landscape scale and I guess provide a framework for better collaboration between local government, other landholders, state and private.

CHAIR: We have focused very much on the national park part of your portfolio but you have responsibilities in relation to sports and recreation as well. I am aware that there are a number of recreational facilities around the state that would have some land in them. I imagine most of the sport is managed by local government; is that correct?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: There are some state owned facilities, but those state owned facilities are quite limited in number and area. Other sport and recreation facilities around the state would, in the most part, be local government owned.

CHAIR: There are a number of camps, aren't there? There is one out near Stanthorpe at Storm King Dam. There is a recreational facility there.

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: I think there is one at Leslie Dam.

CHAIR: My question is are there issues in relation to land management on the non-national parks part of your portfolio?

Mr Lundie-Jenkins: That is not something I can answer. My area of responsibility is purely within that protected area estate. I sit within the national parks part of the department. I could take that on notice and provide advice back to you.

CHAIR: Yes, please take that on notice. Thank you for appearing today. You have taken a couple of questions on notice. The secretariat will be in touch to talk to you about time frames for getting those back.

ROBERTSON, Dr John, General Manager Invasive Plants and Animals, Biosecurity Queensland

CHAIR: Thank you for appearing again, Dr Robertson. Would you like to make an opening statement before we move to questions?

Dr Robertson: Thank you for again listening to my response and enabling me to be here. As we have all heard and seen, fireweed is a really difficult weed to manage. It is difficult to identify, as we know, from the native species, it spreads easily and once you see it it is usually by its flower and it is probably too late, unless you pick it out.

The biology and the strategies for the weed are fairly well developed. There was a lot of work that went into it in the early 2010s. A lot of national strategies have been developed. We get a lot of knowledge from that. It was a WONS species as well. It is great to hear through the University of Queensland Gatton that more research is going to be done on fireweed. That is a good thing.

We have the control mechanism, but we are dealing with a difficult beast. That is the hard bit. Where do we go from here? I would agree with Sean Madigan from Ipswich City Council who mentioned this. My belief is that we have the tools to do it, but it is about the coordinated effort to come together, to think of a strategic regional approach to this which involves a number of different approaches, involves all the partnerships we have heard about here today and others and involves a multiobjective approach which is simply that we need to manage it in certain areas and we need to prevent it from spreading further in others. I believe that is the way forward. We are all doing something. It is simply a matter of coming together more and agreeing to do something similar.

CHAIR: Once upon a time in an agricultural sector landholders would have acquired land and the community would have been relatively stable for a fairly long period of time. I would imagine in an area like this that there is a lot more mobility and movement of landholders and land management in shorter periods of time so the community is not as stable. Does that present challenges in terms of a biosecurity management issue?

Dr Robertson: Certainly. We heard from Marie Vitelli about what is happening in the industry. We often see fewer people on western properties. We see absentee landholders. We see the technology changing and that presents a challenge for weed management. We see changes in the community as well, landscape changes and the use of landscape.

From the trip we went on this morning it is very obvious that in terms of the small landholdings where people have come out here for lifestyle reasons we have to engage with those people and make sure they understand the importance of weeds and how to manage them. I think it was mentioned earlier that those of us who have come from an agricultural background or have grown up on farms have that ingrained in us. If you are coming new to it thinking it is going to be an easy life, you might not be aware of a lot of that. It is a challenge for local government and others to try to educate those people when they come into the community.

Mr WEIR: We were talking about biological control. Obviously there is the Madagascan species of fireweed and there is the native species. That seems to vary from area to area. There was a map of it that we saw earlier. In my area on the other side of the range it is mostly native. That is the problem feature out there. Obviously, in terms of biosecurity it is a bit harder to control native species. We also have that situation with giant rat's tail grass. We were talking about the release of the biological control being held back because it will affect the native species. We are probably getting to the stage where we are going to have to bite the bullet if we are going to introduce a biological control that will affect both. What is your opinion on that and how do you facilitate that?

Dr Robertson: That is really for the APVMA to decide because they are the ones that arbitrate whether that is released. If there is any chance of jumping across to a native species they are usually pretty hard on that. As was mentioned before, there are probably agents for native species that you would hope might actually be available to work on some of the exotic species that come in. Some of those were identified by CSIRO in 2012, or around about that. I do not know whether any further research has gone into those in terms of whether they are effective. You would wonder whether they should be effective already without any further work. If you have big populations of native fireweed you would think you would see them coming in already.

It is a really difficult issue—that is, how much you let through if it does have an impact on a native species. This is a case where it may well be—and I think Jim mentioned it—an advantage having a native species and whether you can find agents to work on the exotic.

Mr WEIR: I think it was the Toowoomba Regional Council that was talking about the difficulties in controlling the native fireweed species because of the biocontrol. Is there a better way to do that? Should there be some changes to the act, as has been suggested by a couple of local governments, to simplify it and make combatting these weeds a little easier?

Dr Robertson: I am certainly open to discussion. I am not quite sure what those changes would be. The act is reasonably flexible, as I see it already. I am certainly open to discuss it more.

Mrs GILBERT: You said previously that everybody is doing something. We have heard that from everybody who has presented here today. Every group that has presented here today has also said that there needs to be a strategic approach. Who do you see as the body to set that strategic approach and to be responsible for the coordination to ensure that everybody has education and is participating in this space?

Dr Robertson: I think the question about national coordination came up before. There is a national fireweed strategy. It is still current to this year—it is 2012-17. That is for the nation. You have an overarching strategy there. I do think probably a regional strategy that looks at what we do with fireweed and how everyone participates in that would be useful.

Mrs GILBERT: When you say regional do you mean within the regional councils or across Queensland?

Dr Robertson: Most of the fireweed that we are really worried about occurs in South-East Queensland so that would be a good place to start. Those affected, the bordering local government areas, the state government and the federal government—given there is a national strategy—plus some of the community groups that we heard about this morning that are doing really good work should come together and talk about a national strategy and how we should all chip into that.

I think part of it is really an understanding of what we are doing and how we are doing it and getting better coordination and consistency in that. By coming together with a larger strategy, a regional strategy, I suspect we mean better access to some funding as well if there is a need for funding to support that.

Mrs GILBERT: We have heard a lot today about lifestyle farmers and absentee landholders. Everybody has mentioned that there needs to be education and that we should try to educate these people. Do you believe there should be tighter restrictions? Do you believe we should have legislation around people's responsibilities in terms of how they will look after a piece of land if they go ahead and buy it? You just do not go and buy a pet and let it run feral. There are restrictions around what you can do. Do you think that needs to be tightened up?

Dr Robertson: I do think it needs to be looked at, at least. Personally, I think there should be some sort of inspection process for properties. It can be a one acre block to 30,000 acres. People need to understand what the weeds are on that property and the liability that they actually inherit by buying that. There should be some process for that. A house on that property gets a full inspection, why should the rest of it not. That is my personal opinion. That is one check you could put in place to make sure someone does not end up with a problem that should have been dealt with before.

Mr MADDEN: I was interested to see the maps provided by AgForce with regard to the distribution of native and introduced fireweed. There is a single dot at Longreach. Presumably fireweed found its way there with fodder and things like that. We would all be familiar with how Biosecurity has acted quickly with regard to white spot disease and Panama disease. Does Biosecurity have a similar flying squad to contain an invasive weed when it is found in an isolated spot?

Dr Robertson: If biosecurity officers hear of something in a different area they will work with local government to try to get some action. We do that across a whole number of different species. I am not aware of the spot in Longreach. I am aware of some spots in Cairns. If it can be locally eradicated or at least really well contained we would actually work on that. We have a whole number of those sorts of programs that are going at the moment.

Mr MADDEN: Have you got any examples with regard to weeds where through the good action of Biosecurity we have been able to control a small outbreak?

Dr Robertson: We have done it not so long ago with water weeds—salvinia at Miles is one. We have worked with the local government and the NRM groups. We have brought in biocontrol and that cleared the water reserve there. We do bitter bush where we work. The guys have done an amazing job of pretty much pushing it right out of Queensland. It is a major pest in coastal New South Wales. There is a whole series of those sorts of things that we do work on. We work on things like some of the pear species that might appear in someone's garden, for example. We go in and confiscate those locally. There is a whole series of different ones where we might work together.

CHAIR: You have been here today and heard the discussion around the differences between councils and their rates and ultimately their resource base. Do you have any thoughts in relation to how Biosecurity might be able to work with those councils that are less well resourced to try to address biosecurity issues in those areas?

Dr Robertson: I acknowledge that many local governments that do not have a big ratepayer base struggle with this sort of thing. A lot of those western shires really do have trouble. It was mentioned earlier that some of the councils have developed more into regional bodies which has really helped their cause. Local government would be aware that we have gone into a new model for looking at the allocation of funding by the local government precepts and the complementary state government funding. It is called the co-investment model. The major outcome of that is better transparency and joint decision-making in terms of where the priorities lie.

One of the concepts within that is actually forming together in regional groups rather than council by council. That is where you get the regional priorities, the regional action, the regional investment and much better regional coordination. I would like to see that mechanism actually being the way we come together much more and assist each other in what we do. I do think that is probably one of the best approaches we can take.

CHAIR: How would you characterise the relationship between states—our immediate neighbours—in relation to biosecurity issues and the role of the federal government? Are there improvements that could be made in terms of the role of the federal government in biosecurity?

Dr Robertson: The national biosecurity network is fairly strong. There are a number of committees that they work through. There is a committee infrastructure. The major one for weeds and pest animals is the Invasive Plants and Animals Committee, which meets on a six-monthly basis. I am a representative on that. Then we go down to state committees, where that feeds through and we have a Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Committee and then we have more locals. I would like to think that a lot of that work that happens at a federal level feeds through. It certainly does, I think, through things like the Feral Pest Initiative, which is a joint funding program with Queensland and federal money where we allocate money towards that cause. So while it could improve, no doubt, on particular issues, it does work reasonably well. If there is room for improvement, it would be great to bring that on board.

CHAIR: I have a final question. If you have an emergency with your health, there would be almost no-one in this room who would not know that you ring triple 0 and you would expect a response commensurate with the level of the emergency. If I am a land manager, or a landholder, and I have a concern about a biosecurity issue, who do I ring for assistance? How easy do you think it is to navigate your way through the system at the present time?

Dr Robertson: That is a good question. I can only deal with that from my own example where I am a landholder. If I have an issue with a weed, or other matters, I have a really good relationship with the RLO from the local government. It is a great system. I am probably lucky in the sense that I work in the game. I would know where to gain information—from online or wherever. I would like to think that that system works well in other areas. I know that it does in some. I am not naive to say that it does not work well. I think it is best where Biosecurity Queensland officers can help. Certainly, that is there as well.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today. I would like to thank all the witnesses who have come here today. That concludes the time that we have allocated for this public hearing. There were a couple of questions taken on notice and I believe that we would like the answers to those provided by the close of business on Thursday, 11 May. I again thank the university for its hospitality. I declare this hearing of the Agriculture and Environment Committee closed.

Committee adjourned at 3.32 pm