



# ***AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE***

## **Members present:**

Mr JP Kelly MP (Chair)  
Mrs J Gilbert MP  
Mr R Katter MP  
Mr JE Madden MP  
Mr LL Millar MP  
Mr PT Weir MP

## **Staff present:**

Mr R Hansen (Committee Secretary)  
Ms M Salisbury (Assistant Committee Secretary)

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

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**WEDNESDAY, 14 JUNE 2017**

**Brisbane**

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### **Committee met at 8.57 am**

**CHAIR:** Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. I declare open this meeting of the Agriculture and Environment Committee. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today. I am Joe Kelly, the member for Greenslopes and chair of the committee. With me today are Mr Pat Weir, the member for Condamine and deputy chair of the committee; Mrs Julieanne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Mr Jim Madden, the member for Ipswich West; and Mr Lachlan Millar, the member for Gregory. Mr Robbie Katter, the member for Mount Isa, may join us at some point this morning.

The purpose of this meeting is to assist the committee in our investigation into the impacts of invasive weeds and their control in Queensland. Witnesses are not required to give 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. 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 may be present, so it is possible that you might be filmed or photographed. When we begin I ask witnesses to please identify themselves when they first speak and to speak clearly into the microphone.

### **ROBERTS, Mr Sean, Legal Counsel, Real Estate Institute of Queensland**

**CHAIR:** Before I invite you to speak, Mr Roberts, I just want to give a bit of background because we have asked you and your organisation to make a presentation today. We greatly appreciate you making yourself available. We have visited Gladstone and Gatton and investigated two case studies in invasive weeds: giant rat's-tail grass and fireweed. One of the issues that has come up in those areas has been—I welcome the member for Mount Isa, Mr Robbie Katter—the growing number of people who are moving into these areas and taking up what are termed 'lifestyle' blocks. These are people looking for a rural lifestyle who are often taking up smaller holdings not necessarily for agricultural business purposes, although some will dabble around the edges in that space. Issues regarding the state of the land have come up during the transfer of title, particularly around the disclosure of information that is passed from vendor to purchaser concerning the state of the property. That is the area we are particularly interested in. As a committee we felt that the REIQ would perhaps be well placed to assist us to understand some of the issues in relation to that particular matter. You are welcome to make a short statement. Otherwise we will go straight to questions.

**Mr Roberts:** I am happy to proceed to questions.

**CHAIR:** I represent a very non-rural electorate. The purchase of property and buildings in my electorate is generally accompanied by a series of searches et cetera. Most people will automatically get building and pest inspections done on properties, and they will be looking for those things that are not obvious to the layperson in terms of potential problems with the property. The committee has seen situations where a person has purchased a property and issues regarding weeds have not necessarily been disclosed at the time of the sale. The new owner then has obligations under the Biosecurity Act to control the weeds on that property. That obligation often comes with a price tag for control, and they were not aware of the weeds at the time of purchase. We are seeing that the new owners are not necessarily in a position, financially or technically, to take responsibility for controlling those weeds. I would be interested in your views or the views of your organisation with regard to whether or not there is more work that can be done in terms of the disclosure of issues around invasive weeds, particularly those that are regulated under the Biosecurity Act.

**Mr Roberts:** There are currently numerous statutory obligations to make disclosure to purchasers or lessees of properties in Queensland. There are also common law duties. The REIQ standard form contract also picks up on other areas of disclosure, some in statute and some additional. The REIQ contract itself does make it conditional that a party does need to disclose if there has been a notice to treat at the time of the contract. Sorry, I should say that if a party has not disclosed that a notice to treat has been issued then that does give grounds for termination. The REIQ

contract is the only contract that is endorsed by the QLS for residential sales. It does apply to rural property and it is probably the most widely used contract. There is some form of protection for potential purchasers. However, that would work on the assumption that, firstly, noxious weeds had been identified on the property; secondly, a notice to treat had been given; and, thirdly, that biosecurity order had been placed on the register.

Searching of the biosecurity register itself is not something we believe you would come across or that agents in suburban areas such as Brisbane would necessarily be aware of. Prior to coming to this committee I did make a point of speaking to some agents who have worked in rural settings before, and they have assured me that those agents who are aware—for example, in certain areas where there may be issues with noxious weeds—would be likely to at least make people aware of that.

**CHAIR:** Does the REIQ have a grouping or a section in your organisation specifically for real estate agents who operate in those rural and semirural areas?

**Mr Roberts:** The REIQ has chapters, so we do have various branches throughout the state including around some rural areas such as Townsville and up the north coast a bit more.

**Mr WEIR:** One of the weeds is giant rat's-tail grass. Do you have a list of areas where you have identified this is a problem that buyers should be notified of or made aware that they could be buying into an area that is a known hotspot?

**Mr Roberts:** I have been employed by the REIQ for only two weeks, but admittedly in my inquiries it is not something that came to our notice until we were asked to comment on it for this committee. It is not something that we would, but of course now that we are on notice it is certainly something that we would look at. We generally limit our training first and foremost to matters regarding express statutory obligations plus other good practice that goes with that.

**Mr WEIR:** Are you aware of the devaluation of any properties because of noxious weeds?

**Mr Roberts:** No.

**CHAIR:** Is this notice to treat given to a property owner by the council or Biosecurity Queensland?

**Mr Roberts:** On my review of the act, my understanding is that there is a facility in the Biosecurity Act whereby a notice to treat can be given to a property owner, and I believe that there is a register of biosecurity orders that is kept whereby that information would be available. I believe it can be obtained for a fee.

**CHAIR:** What you are saying is that if there was a notice to treat there would be an obligation on the vendor and the real estate agent under the REIQ contract to make known that there is a notice to treat?

**Mr Roberts:** If there were a current notice at the time of entering into the contract and the seller failed to disclose that, anytime up to the date of settlement that would give grounds to terminate the contract.

**CHAIR:** I appreciate your brief period of time with the organisation. This is obviously not a policy area that the REIQ has turned its collective mind to at this point. Would the REIQ have any views regarding how onerous it would be if the committee were to make recommendations requiring further disclosure at the time of sale, particularly with regard to noxious weeds?

**Mr Roberts:** Whilst that would certainly help achieve the objective of bringing that to light, education is probably the better way to address this, in our view. In Queensland in particular disclosure obligations are a hodgepodge at best. There are obligations, as you are probably all aware, through various statutes as well as contractual obligations, to bring things to light. For instance, when I was looking into this—admittedly I am from Brisbane, so the issue of noxious weeds is not something that I have been exposed to—I found at first it was very difficult to find that sort of information, so making it more publicly available and bringing it to light is important. Particularly from reading these submissions it appears that some of these weeds can be quite devastating to people in rural areas, so bringing that to light would certainly assist. Also with the register itself, I found personally when trying to access the information that it was hidden behind links, so it should be made more readily available. In certain circumstances, the information on the register should be made a lot easier to obtain if some of these noxious weeds are prevalent so that consumers can access it.

**Mr KATTER:** I have past experience as a rural valuer, and the thing that has always stood out to me with the real estate industry and the issue of weeds is that when you go out to see a block with prickly acacia, the agents, banks and probably the valuers themselves would say, 'There's no

difference in value with prickly acacia,' but if we were more scientific about our approach to land values and productivity you would say, 'It's not worth the same if it's heavily infested with prickly acacia,' so there was an education element to that for valuers. You have the CPD points with the REIQ.

**Mr Roberts:** We do, yes.

**Mr KATTER:** Is there anything educational within the rural real estate chapter on the impact of prickly acacia? For instance, I remember the DPI bloke in Cloncurry saying that once you get more than 50 per cent canopy you are just about down to zero Mitchell grass underneath. It sort of tells you how much your productivity goes down and that must impact on values. It would be good to have that taught to valuers and real estate agents. Is there any effort there or understanding or awareness that that needs to be done?

**Mr Roberts:** In all honesty, there currently is not. After listening and reading some of this material there certainly is some awareness and more awareness can be done, yes.

**Mr KATTER:** It is probably more a comment, Mr Chair, but that is where I think a lot of it starts. When someone buys a block and it is heavily infested and everyone has worked off the bank valuation then they are stuck, and no-one talks about it from that point onwards because they do not want to devalue the place. I think that is a really significant problem that goes right back to the initial inspections, when someone has come out from a different area to look at Mitchell grass on the block and they have prickly acacia on it. I think there is a real gap there in valuing real estate and the property industry that needs to be addressed with regard to this.

**Mr Roberts:** It is something that we could definitely look into.

**Mrs GILBERT:** I wanted to ask you about a property we viewed on one of our tours. It was one of those lifestyle blocks where an owner had bought a block of land to start up a little business, so they were out in a rural area. We were told that the real estate agent said, 'Look at this wonderful grass. It's nice tall grass, great for cattle feed,' when it was actually a grass that cattle cannot eat. It was giant rat's-tail grass. When you have somebody coming in who does not know what good grass is and they are told, 'This is great grass if you want to run cattle', and it turns out to be quite poisonous to cattle, how does that fit within the legal framework?

**Mr Roberts:** The Property Occupations Act does prohibit certain practices with real estate agents in the selling or leasing of land in connection with sale. That includes making false and misleading statements. Wilfully concealing a material fact is included within that definition. There is no express statutory definition of what a 'material fact' is. The common law, in our view, up to this point in time, still has not sufficiently addressed what a 'material fact' is, but the dictionary meaning is that it is something that is germane to a person's decision. In our view, if an agent was aware, first, of the existence of the weed and, second, that it was important for the purchaser to know that they could use that property for grazing, it is certainly arguable that the agent may be in the wrong.

**Mrs GILBERT:** In towns and cities, if you are going to buy a property you get a pest and building inspection, as the member for Greenslopes has just said. Do you think that with rural properties there should be something in the contract where it is recommended that they go and get a pest and weed inspection, as you would do in town?

**Mr Roberts:** In certain areas where there are issues with those weeds, then certainly publicising and educating people on their existence and their impact would assist. As far as requiring people to get those inspections, the purchasing of property and leasing, in Queensland anyway, is still based on the old premise of 'buyer beware'. We would think that it would be better addressed, again, with more education and making people aware of what these things can do.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Is it mandatory to get a pest and building inspection when you buy a property or is that just going through education as well?

**Mr Roberts:** Education.

**Mr MADDEN:** With regard to the issue of invasive weeds—we do not use the term 'noxious weeds' anymore—there are two problems that exist. One is that some are perennial, such as giant rat's-tail grass, and some come and go. A weed like fireweed is only there during the fireweed season. If someone inspects the property and it is not fireweed season, they do not know that fireweed is there.

The other problem is that, with the change in the Biosecurity Act, we do not have notices anymore; we have orders. Just to explain what that means, under the previous legislation, if a compliance officer from a council identified an invasive weed, probably called a noxious weed at that time, the landholder was automatically served with a notice to treat. Under the new legislation, they are not served with a notice to treat; they are ultimately served with an order that they must control

the weed, but the new act requires the council officers to negotiate a treatment plan with the landholder and it is only if they fail to comply with that that an order is issued. Previously there were many notices issued in a weed season, but now very few orders are issued, mainly because the order attracts a monetary penalty or fine if it is not complied with.

Consequently, with the register that you talk about that is supposed to let landholders know if there is a problem with the land, because there are so few orders being issued there is very little information, as you may have noticed. There may even be two registers now, one for notices and one for orders. With the issue of some weeds being seasonal, it is only the landholder who really knows that fireweed is a problem on that property and if somebody comes in the middle of summer they will not see any fireweed. Because of those two unique situations, you could have the council negotiating a weed control strategy with the landholder but it is not recorded on the register and it may be the off-season for the weed.

As a former lawyer I understand the importance of the REIQ contract. It is the only contract I ever saw being used. It is like the bible of contracts. Do you think there is some benefit in a tick-the-box sort of situation where you have the throw-ups such as 'does it have a switch in the power box'? There would be a positive obligation on the landholder to tick a box to say whether they are aware of any invasive weeds on the property. That is simply the landholder's knowledge. Would it cause any legal problems if there was a box that the landholder had to acknowledge, a bit like a waybill, that there were invasive weeds known on that property?

**Mr Roberts:** From a practical perspective, I could not see there being a big issue with putting that in there, no.

**Mr MADDEN:** So it would be a relatively simple thing, wouldn't it?

**Mr Roberts:** It would, but, again, to achieve the effect, in my view, you are just ticking a box on a contract and saying that there are invasive weeds present but people still need to know the effect of those invasive weeds and how they will affect issues such as property valuation and their ability to use the property. That comes back to education. I agree, but you would need a two-step approach.

**Mr MADDEN:** I guess you would also need things like weed maps, a bit like flood maps, which we do not seem to have now. We do not seem to have weed maps.

**Mr Roberts:** The Queensland government recently updated a program, the Queensland Globe. I am not sure if any of you are aware of or have used the program. It works similarly to Google Maps. You can actually zero in on certain properties and get important information—title information, gradients on properties and a whole raft of things. It is something that we at the REIQ are certainly pushing as a tool for our members to use when doing research on properties. Perhaps putting on information such as if certain properties are prone to these things would definitely assist the process as well.

**Mr MADDEN:** You are legal counsel for the REIQ?

**Mr Roberts:** Yes.

**Mr MADDEN:** Would you see any serious problems in an item being included in the standard REIQ contract that requires the landholder to disclose if they are aware of invasive weeds on the property?

**Mr Roberts:** I could not see an issue, no.

**Mr MILLAR:** Let me play devil's advocate here, if that is okay, Sean. How many real estate agents are there in Queensland?

**Mr Roberts:** I could not tell you exactly how many. I can say that we have about 4,500 individual members, which accounts for a large portion of them. It would be upward of that figure.

**Mr MILLAR:** I suppose it could be quite difficult to educate real estate agents to identify weeds, such as giant rat's-tail grass or prickly acacia—not that you would find too much prickly acacia down here in Brisbane or in South-East Queensland, although it is on its way, I guess. The difficulty, I suppose, is an education program to pass on to real estate agents that this is a weed that should be identified and reported. Could that be an issue?

**Mr Roberts:** It could be. Our view is that the identification of weeds themselves is not something that is within a real estate agent's expertise. You engage a real estate agent to market and sell your property. For example, you do not expect an agent to necessarily pick up issues with a building. That is why you engage a building and pest inspector. Whilst I think certainly you can give them a high level of awareness of what these weeds can do, I do not think that necessarily giving them that expertise or trying to enforce that expertise on them would be of great assistance.

**Mr MILLAR:** I am being the devil's advocate here, again. When you say 'marketing', they are marketing the positives: 'It's a renovator's dream' and all that sort of stuff. I am looking at the practicalities of being able to identify weeds. When you buy a block of land, the real estate agent usually passes over a parcel of important documents that includes what you need to check for, such as getting a building inspector to check it et cetera. For people who buy rural blocks or acreages, should there be some sort of identification that if you are buying a five- or 10-acre block you should contact the department of agriculture or something like that to find out what weeds are there or if there are any issues there? Could that be a part of the process?

**Mr Roberts:** If there was a government fact sheet, for example, that was issued by the department that we could recommend our members put into a pack so that then the buyer, before they sign on the dotted line, could make those inquiries and then instruct their solicitor or their conveyancer to make those checks if need be or to make further inquiries, that would probably be the better approach.

**Mr WEIR:** A suggestion was made to tick a box on the contract saying that you have invasive weeds on the property. I suggest that that would probably affect about three-quarters of the properties in Queensland, but to what scale is that invasive weed? I think that would be the major thing. It goes back to what you were saying, that you would have to call on somebody who is an expert in that field to do the inspection and give the report. I see that as the only way that you would be able to do that.

**Mr Roberts:** Potentially. Again, that could very well make the process much more onerous. As it stands with the conveyancing, many will be subject to finance and the buyer has to deal with those issues. They have to arrange for the building and pest inspection. They have to pay the money for the building and pest inspection. If you have a weed inspector or some sort of horticulturalist, you have to arrange those things and pay those fees. It makes the process even more onerous. Again, as we have said before, the effect of invasive weeds on a property in the suburban setting may be completely different to a property in a rural setting.

**CHAIR:** Mr Roberts, thank you very much for making yourself available today. Thanks to the REIQ for participating in this inquiry. It has been extremely useful for the committee. Thank you very much for your time this morning.

**Mr Roberts:** Thanks for having me.

**WILD, Mrs Fiona, Livestock and Rural Transporters Association of Queensland Inc.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning, Mrs Wild. By way of a little bit of background, the committee has been conducting a number of inspections and hearings in regional areas around a number of different weeds. In the course of those inquiries and inspections there was discussion around the impacts of the transport of livestock. The committee took the view that it would be very useful to have your organisation provide us with some feedback and thoughts in relation to this issue. We are really appreciative of you giving your time to come here today. If you would like, you are most welcome to make an opening statement and then we will move to questions.

**Mrs Wild:** Thank you very much. The LRTAQ is the peak body for the livestock and rural transport industry of Queensland. We have a strong membership base of around 110 members, with over 400 body trucks or prime movers being used, as well as a very large number of trailers. We believe that we are quite a strong force within Queensland. One of our main aims is to influence all sectors of government, whether that be local, state or federal, to the importance of our industry.

The association was formed in 1981 to provide a united voice for livestock transport operators. We have a committee of around eight elected representatives from various districts throughout the state, plus three field officers who service the whole state. This committee meets regularly to discuss pertinent issues relevant to each district, the state and the nation.

Since its inception the LRTAQ has developed and maintained a strong relationship with the state government of the day. One example of this ongoing association has been the ministerial appointment of the LRTAQ as a representative to the Ministerial Freight Council. Throughout the years, the LRTAQ has worked continuously to have longstanding relationships and connections with various government departments, particularly TMR. We have built up close working links with the Remote Area Consultative Group, the Queensland Trucking Association, the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland, local councils and other groups that are aligned to the betterment of the rural transport industry.

The LRTAQ and other state livestock and rural transport bodies are well supported by our national body, which is the Australian Livestock and Rural Transport Association, and together we believe that we are a fairly formidable group which lobbies for the best interests of our members. Our

state and national bodies have been heavily involved with the abolition of the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal; gaining a variation to driving hours for livestock drivers; having a very strong animal welfare variation to standard driving hours; working with the state government towards the retention of a livestock loading concession scheme; and the ongoing issue of access to abattoirs and ports as well as the concept of first- and last-mile access.

First-mile access is probably particularly pertinent when considering the topic of weed control. Most times livestock transport operators are traversing hard stand roads; however, there are occasions where drivers do travel through paddocks or need to use paddocks to gain access to cattle yards and ramps. Unfortunately, these are the times when weed seed may collect on the body and underbody of trucks and trailers, thereby creating opportunities for weed spread. I am sure that in Queensland there are very few or nil farmers and graziers who supply wash facilities when loaded livestock vehicles leave an infested area of their land.

The other point of concern with regard to weed spread is what is contained within our livestock trucks and trailers, and that is dung—and plenty of it—mixed with grass, seed, grain and perhaps other food by-products. Most livestock trailers are fitted with, or are being fitted with, containment tanks and/or fold-up/hold-up drains on the back of trailers. This is driven by the chain-of-responsibility law. In November 2016 our national body requested the NHVR to gauge whether graziers, farmers or producers who fail to provide adequate curfews of livestock prior to transportation present a breach of current law.

Under the current law, if a spillage occurs there are steps that a party could be reasonably expected to take to prevent that spillage and to be held accountable. In 2018 there will be an overarching duty on all parties in the chain of responsibility to, as far as is practicable, ensure that their conduct does not directly or indirectly cause a spillage. We believe that there needs to be a national approach which holds all parties accountable, and we suggest that an industry code of practice for effluent management should be part of the solution.

Going back to the preparation of stock when leaving properties, under the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for the Land Transport of Livestock, water and feed curfews can be an important part of livestock management for transport. The issues include faecal/urine contamination of livestock vehicles and roads and the slipping or falling of livestock in wet livestock crates. Water curfews must be managed in the context of the total time off-water with regard to animal welfare, and of course as soon as cattle or any form of livestock arrive at their point of destination feed and water should be considered as soon as possible after unloading. There have been occasions where probably effluent may seep from trailers onto road surfaces and edges which then can lead to the growth of weeds along road corridors.

Recently the animal welfare committee of our national body sent a delegation to New Zealand to view effluent dump sites and their management of such. The ALRTA is very keen on the building and operation of dump sites within the south-east corner of Queensland. This is looking at it from a national point of view. This is probably significantly due to the fact that a lot of abattoirs and saleyards are located within the south-east corner of the state, and of course with urban creep those facilities are coming into contact with more urban dwellers. I am afraid to say that if you are driving along beside a livestock crate, the last thing you want to have is something spill onto the windscreen or through the window.

When considering the last mile, some abattoirs and saleyards in Queensland do not have wash-down facilities for vehicles following the unloading of livestock. Some do have them, however access is not available even though they will profess that they do have them, and others have anything from one truck at a time to multiple wash bays, all varying in water pressure and all varying in the state of the cleanliness of the water, whether it is recycled or mains. In late 2016 our association made contact with a north-western council and asked them to investigate the construction of a wash-down facility for rural operations, particularly from the point of view of livestock transport. We felt that by having this resource for livestock operators and other machinery and vehicles the spread of weeds and seeds could be significantly reduced, thereby creating a more cost-effective positive for graziers, farmers and landowners, whether that be council, business or private.

We believe there are many parties involved in the spread of weeds. These can include heavy trucks, machinery, the travelling public, caravanners, Energex carrying out meter checks going across private paddocks, the mailman, fuel deliveries, farm vehicles, people walking through paddocks and even the weather—rain, wind, storm or cyclone. No one group is responsible and no one group is the solution. We believe that it is a shared responsibility to achieve the best outcome for the natural environment.

**Mr WEIR:** You talked about containment on the trucks. That would vary dramatically from the north, where the prickly acacia is, to the area where I come from in the south-east.

**Mrs Wild:** Yes, it would. By the time you have a vehicle traversing from north-western Queensland to an abattoir in the south-east corner, I am sure that those crates would be significantly dry, with very little effluent.

**Mr WEIR:** One of the suggestions is that the cattle be held off-feed and held off-water so they do not pass the seed. How practical is that? I am sure there have been efforts by industry to do that in the past.

**Mrs Wild:** Yes. We believe it is a very important point that graziers and farmers curfew their stock prior to loading. Unfortunately, there are many within the industry who believe that their cattle should be coming straight out of the paddock and put on the truck. I can attest to this personally. Yesterday afternoon I washed out one of our truck bodies for the third time this week, and that truck was full of green grass coming out of the rear end, so thinking that your cattle can come straight from the paddock we believe is a bit of a fallacy if you are considering the issue of possible weight loss. If you or I do not eat a meal for 24 hours we are not going to die. We are not going to lose a significant amount in terms of body weight, and the same could be attested to with farm animals.

**Mr MADDEN:** Thank you very much for coming in today, Mrs Wild. That was a very good summary. I am very pleased to see that your association has been proactive with regard to the spread of weeds. Prickly acacia was mentioned as a weed that is spread, but giant rat's-tail is another weed that can be spread through the dung of cattle and sheep. I am very interested in this idea of trucks that are modified to collect the effluent. Is that by regulation at the moment?

**Mrs Wild:** No, it is coming through that way and there is an onus on the industry to be proactive. The NTC, the National Transport Commission, is looking at load restraint, and those laws are also being investigated to align with chain-of-responsibility changes next year. Under load restraint, at the current point in time, unfortunately, if we have an effluent spill we are within the public view so at this juncture we are the ones that seem to be coping the fines. Under chain of responsibility, if it can be assumed that someone has not done their best to reduce the risk of effluent spills then that can be taken a step back. With regard to the trailers, yes, it is not obligatory to have containment tanks constructed underneath the floor of trailers but, as I said, we wish to be very proactive.

**Mr MADDEN:** Your association's position is that it should be mandatory, either by state law or federal law?

**Mrs Wild:** I do not think we would like to see it be mandatory; however, our influence may not be enough in that regard. As I just said, we wish to be proactive. We see ourselves as part of a chain and we believe that all efforts should be made.

**Mr MADDEN:** You were talking about dump points. I am more familiar with dump points for caravans, where we have dump points spread throughout the state. Is it your association's position that we should have dump points at strategic locations for companies that move stock so they can get rid of effluent if they have collection tanks on their trucks?

**Mrs Wild:** Yes, it is. At the present time there has been a conversation with TMR, who are also looking at a site west of Rockhampton heading from Gracemere through to the abattoirs on the other side of the city. In the south-east corner we are most interested in creating an effluent dump site this side of Toowoomba, where two to three major highways meet, and having it available for livestock vehicles.

Your mention of caravanners is a concern to us, because the national body has also made contact with a company here in Brisbane that plans, develops and puts in place effluent dump sites and also the treatment of those facilities, ranging from a very simple process to quite elaborate ones where you then collect the effluent, burn off the methane gas and put it back as power within the grid. You then collect that dry product, reinstate it into a product that could be suitable for landscaping, for example, or put it into biomass. We are trying to be proactive in creating dump sites and having those systems. Our concern is that those caravanners may believe that they can access those sites as well and therefore we have contamination of product. Education is very significant with regard to that issue.

**CHAIR:** You mentioned that delegates of your organisation went to New Zealand and had a look at issues around how you might make modifications to trucks. Did you produce a report?

**Mrs Wild:** That is currently being compiled. The trip was made in April so it is a bit of a short time frame to have that done; however, we envisage having it done in the next few months. As I said, it is not only the development of dump sites but also what we can do for economic and environmental advantage in value-adding to those dump sites.



**CHAIR:** It would be extremely useful for the committee if we had an opportunity to look at a preliminary report or an executive summary or something as soon as possible. That would be extremely useful.

**Mrs Wild:** I will make available contacts and information for you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much. You talked about the lack of uniformity of wash-down facilities at abattoirs. Is it the case that there is nothing regulating the wash-down facilities that abattoirs have in place?

**Mrs Wild:** No, it is purely on the owners of those companies that operate those abattoirs that provide those facilities.

**CHAIR:** It sounds to me like we are talking mainly about cattle, but are there issues in relation to other types of livestock?

**Mrs Wild:** I am sure there would be. My background is more in cattle, but particularly with sheep which come in from maybe western areas there are other weeds that are paramount; however, that depends on the diet of the sheep and what they like to forage on. I do not have enough expertise to answer that for you.

**Mr MILLAR:** Certainly the Livestock and Rural Transport Association is recognised as a very proactive organisation. There are a couple of questions I want to ask with regard to the ongoing costs of trucking companies, whether it is Frasers or RTA or something like that. Have you done any investigations into the additional costs of implementing dump points and procedures that have to be done if this were to go ahead?

**Mrs Wild:** As I mentioned to Mr Kelly a moment ago, we are doing that study with regard to the construction of effluent dump sites. Our major concern is the south-east corner of the country. With regard to more rural and western areas, most livestock vehicles wash out in facilities that are provided in those shire areas. There are probably not as many as we would like to see; however, they are used extensively by our members. I was speaking to one member last night about a wash-down facility in central western Queensland. DAF put up a sign, even though it was a council facility, saying that it was an appropriate facility for weed wash-down as well.

**Mr MILLAR:** Obviously we need more wash-down facilities.

**Mrs Wild:** We do. Not only is it abattoirs as well as councils; it is also saleyards.

**Mr MILLAR:** The only issue I have is, certainly for the business owners of the trucking companies, the on-costs that they have to add to that if they have to help pay for dump sites. Do you think there should be a role for government? If eventually this becomes not voluntary but mandatory, do you think governments should be investigating and funding dump points?

**Mrs Wild:** We do. We have had conversations with TMR with regard to the construction of these dump sites. There has been a little bit of a hesitant response from them in regard to having this done. We believe that it is probably a natural partnership, particularly when we look at the Toowoomba range crossing that is currently in that building phase. We feel that the added cost of putting in, say, a side road and having an effluent dump site would be negligible or very little when you consider the whole picture.

**Mr MILLAR:** I agree, absolutely.

**Mr KATTER:** Are the modifications you are making to the trailers mandatory yet or do you just advocate that?

**Mrs Wild:** Yes.

**Mr KATTER:** Not only to do the right thing but also to demonstrate that you are serious about trying to manage these issues. The on-costs was a good issue to raise—how this all gets paid for. Presumably there is a bit of time associated with the drivers doing this.

**Mrs Wild:** By having a dump site you also are adding to the hours of drivers and their legal responsibilities attached to that. This is probably a step aside to what our discussion is about, but it could come under the same umbrella—that if you are going in to, say, a dump site it is not taken as part of driving hours.

**Mr MILLAR:** So not on the logbook.

**Mrs Wild:** Yes, so that that 15 minutes or half an hour steps outside of what you class as driving hours.

**Mr KATTER:** That is a good idea. There are more and more weighbridges going in up north. Normanton is looking at building one. Curley has built one in Cloncurry. That seems to tie in. If you are stopping to weigh cattle, that might be a good time to wash down vehicles. Are there already a lot of weighbridges in the south or central west?

**Mrs Wild:** There are weighbridges—private and public—within the south-east corner. As to whether such a thing would be considered along with private weighbridges—you spoke of cost before—who is going to take on that responsibility?

**Mr KATTER:** Of course.

**Mrs Wild:** If it is a public weighbridge at, say, for example, Burpengary, which is north and south—when you look at the width of the road, there would be no room, really, to consider doing such a thing. Also, when one looks at a wash-down, I do not think the odour of effluent would be a positive. I can attest to driving—me and my husband—onto a weighbridge. Not a lot of people appreciate the smell of a cattle truck and I am sure they do not appreciate the smell of an effluent dump site.

**Mr KATTER:** Those holding periods are relevant for prickly acacia. They say in 10 days it can just about clear its stomach. They are saying we could make all this effort if we want to try to eradicate prickly acacia, but not until you stop spreading it in the paddocks. I imagine it aligns pretty well with the transport industry because that has more truck movements. It is probably commercially more advantageous to the trucking industry, which is a good thing.

**Mrs Wild:** I do not have a lot of knowledge around prickly pear. We live in Maleny and we move a lot of cattle, for example, out of the Mary River Valley, which is fairly full of giant rat's-tail. We have our own wash bay facility at our property and we are always very mindful of where we have been. I like to regularly spray our wash bay because of my concern of having giant rat's-tail on our own property. I am not saying that we do not, but there is a possibility that it could be there. It is always being aware of what you have.

In regard to giant rat's-tail and stepping away from livestock transport, as an example of the volatility, if you wish to say, of the spread of giant rat's-tail, my husband and son were viewing a property just east of Gympie on the weekend with the idea of purchasing. They left their own vehicle at the front gate and drove in with a real estate agent. Going back to your conversation earlier with a previous representative of the community, they drove around the property, they came back to the front gate and the bonnet was covered with the seed of giant rat's-tail. That is a very light seed. That particular agent let my husband and son out and who then drove off down the road. When we talk about seed spread—and I spoke earlier of the huge community involvement—when we go back then with livestock vehicles and you are driving, say, within the Mary Valley and you do have giant rat's tail, the ability for it to be spread is very high.

**CHAIR:** You said that your association has links to other similar organisations around Australia and federally. Is there any other state or jurisdiction in Australia that is doing things that are more appropriate or better than what we are doing here in Queensland in terms of this?

**Mrs Wild:** I am unaware of that. I do not have any knowledge of that so I would have to say that my understanding is only in Queensland. I could endeavour to make further inquiries for you.

**CHAIR:** You mentioned that you have a wash-down facility on your property. I assume that is an expense that your business has taken on. Is there any obligation on you to have that facility, or was that something you did because you understand the importance of it?

**Mrs Wild:** We have had that facility for over 25 years. We developed it in the first place because of the type of stock we carry. We carry a significant amount of small stock, meaning bobby calves, weaners and calves, as well as adult stock. The largest small stock abattoir facility is at Gleneagle, which we have carted to for many years. Small stock are not as robust as adult cattle—and I will talk of good cattle—so consequently you cannot afford to have downers, as in young calves going down in the crate. If it is full of dung you have a higher risk of injury or death occurring. From our point of view, we had to look after our transport interests. That is why we developed it in the first place.

Because of the number of small stock that we carry, I have washed out three times already this week. We go into JBS at Dinmore, which has a two-bay wash-down facility. Not always is that facility available to us because the facility may be in breakdown, and that can happen, or because of the quantity of vehicles that are unloading at Dinmore. It is quicker and easier for us to traverse home back to Maleny for two hours and wash out at home.

**Mr WEIR:** Back on holding livestock, as I said, in my area there are a lot of feedlots. They are basically within short distances. They are there in a matter of hours. In the country of my colleagues on my left, those cattle will be in the truck for some time. Given the chain of responsibility as far as loading and unloading, how practical is it to have them empty out before they are loaded?

**Mrs Wild:** As an association we probably do not have that issue for exactly that reason, coming from the west into the south-east corner. The significant movements are the south-east corner and the Darling Downs region because of their proximity, again, to large abattoirs such as JBS Dinmore.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for making yourself available. Can you thank your association for making a valuable contribution to this inquiry.

**CURLEY, Mr Ben, Lands Protection Manager, Gympie Regional Council, via teleconference**

**RIDER, Mr Ernest James, President, Gympie and District Landcare Group, via teleconference**

**SMITH, Mr Ross, Treasurer, Greater Mary Association, via teleconference**

**THOMPSON, Mrs Margaret, Treasurer, Mary River Catchment Coordination Committee, via teleconference**

**CHAIR:** Thank you for joining us today. My name is Joe Kelly. I am the member for Greenslopes and the chair of the committee. I am joined today by Mr Pat Weir, who is the deputy chair of the committee and member for Condamine; Mrs Julieanne Gilbert, member for Mackay; Mr Robbie Katter, member for Mount Isa; Mr Jim Madden, member for Ipswich West; and Mr Lachlan Millar, member for Gregory, who has stepped out of the room for a short period of time and may join us before we are finished. Thank you very much for joining us today and thank you very much for taking the time to make a submission to this inquiry. We greatly appreciate your contribution.

**Mr Rider:** My name is Ernie Rider. I am president of Gympie and District Landcare. I am a board member of the MRCCC, the local catchment organisation, and of the PFSQ, the not-for-profit forestry organisation based at the Woodworks Museum in Gympie. My profession was forestry and botany.

**Mr Curley:** I am the lands protection manager with Gympie Regional Council. I oversee all of the weeds and pest animal work for a council perspective in the Gympie region.

**Mr Smith:** I am the treasurer of the Greater Mary Association, which works on preserving the environment on the Mary River. I am also a delegate to the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee. We are involved at Tiaro with producing biocontrols for cat's claw vine.

**Mrs Thompson:** I am a dairy farmer from Maleny. I am also treasurer of the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee and a number of other things.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We would like you to make a brief opening statement if you so desire and then we will move to questions from the committee. We have only half an hour, so if we could keep the statements very brief that would give us more time for questions.

**Mr Rider:** Gympie and District Landcare have been leaders in producing biocontrol insects locally and spread over a wide area now. We also do contract spraying of weeds and treatment of woody weeds.

**Mrs Thompson:** I would like to commend past governments on their efforts with biocontrol, but I must stress that we need more assistance. If organisations like Gympie Landcare and Tiaro are to continue with these things, they need to be funded because it is of public benefit to everybody, not just the groups themselves, and they are doing a sterling job.

**Mr Smith:** I would like to endorse Margaret's comments. Our production of biocontrols has been magnificently supported by MRCCC. Without that, we probably would not have been able to do it. We need more consistent support for environmental weeds particularly, and biocontrols specifically. There has been a bit of ad hoc funding in the past—it has been up and down—but, because these things take so many years in the pipeline, we need some sort of guarantee that there is funding coming right through. In addition, we need support for those community organisations which will spread the biocontrols.

**Mr Curley:** Gympie Regional Council is here to continue to participate in a cooperative and coordinated fashion, so for any partnerships we can build to better implement on-ground control works for weeds and pest animals we are here to cooperate in that capacity.

**CHAIR:** Margaret and Ross, could you explain to the committee what inputs you receive from any of the three levels of government or what you use from those three levels of government to guide the setting of priorities for your weed control projects?

**Mr Smith:** We received federal funding through BMRG to initially set up our biocontrol production facility, but most of the ongoing funding we have received has been support from MRCCC. I could not answer what source that comes from initially but, yes, we have not received any assistance from local government or directly from the state government to carry on. I feel there should be more work in the biosecurity area. I really think it has been a little bit restricted in the state government area, but that is open to debate I guess.

**Mrs Thompson:** Some of the funding for the expansion work has come from the biodiversity project. It was a six-year project that we ran from the federal government. The other money comes out of what else we can earn from other things. It is difficult for landcare groups and catchment groups to get money from other organisations. We also are supported by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, and Gympie Regional Council helps to support us in many ways. They are probably the main supports that we get, but it is piecemeal—a little bit from here and a little bit from there all the time.

**CHAIR:** On the second page of the submission there is a note that funding for a biological control program was cut when new biological control agents were in the pipeline. I am just trying to understand that a little better. Are you saying that we had a biological control agent that you were being funded to utilise and then a new biological control agent was being developed but while that was still under development the initial biological control agent was defunded? Am I understanding that part of your submission correctly?

**Mrs Thompson:** You have to understand that seeking out biocontrol agents costs a lot of money. It is a long-term project. If it is cut off in the meantime, there is no follow-up for the other things. Especially environmental weeds, such as cat's claw, need a number of vectors. You never control them but you can control their re-establishment. If anything, it is slow and not one thing ever does the job completely. You would understand if you were doing this weeds thing, but it is a long-term project and we cannot have stop-starts.

**Mr Smith:** I do not know the full detail of what was cut back, but there were some other cat's claw vine biocontrols in the pipeline. I am sure you understand that the pipeline is several years long. I know that the beetles and tingids that we raised, particularly the beetles, were tested for a number of years in South Africa and probably as well in South America, where they came from. That is why I say the funding needs to be guaranteed for so long, because it is an easy program for someone to cut because nobody knows that it is being cut. That is the way I look at it.

**CHAIR:** You mention in your submission that there have been a number of successful control programs for a number of weeds. I do not think you have listed cat's claw among those but that is one I am familiar with from a relative's property. I am interested in your organisation. To what degree do you find that private landholders are willing to work with your organisation to eliminate or reduce weed infestations if there are options available?

**Mr Rider:** There is an amazing level of ignorance after so many years of attempted education by Landcare, MRCCC, local councils and some very good brochures—for example, 'plant this instead of that' referring to weeds. It is amazing the continuing level of ignorance among the general public, and especially the new landholders. There is a real need for real estate agents to be fully cognisant of the problems on the land so that they can advise their clients.

We participated with the local council on the development of their pest management strategy, right from the old one to the new one. We get tremendous support from the council in the form of lower rental on our accommodation and annual grants on the rates. From the state government we get the occasional grant to fund us. From the federal government it is the same thing: we get the occasional grant. We also get advice on things like weeds of national significance, of which cat's claw creeper and Madeira vine are two. Madeira vine is a sleeping giant. In recent floods it has washed all the way down the Mary River. It is a monster. It is in some ways worse than cat's claw creeper. Its tubers are aerial and if you chop the vine off it produces thousands of tubers up in the air which rain down for the next year or so. Birds take those tubers off to other localities and it spreads like wildfire. It is a monster waiting to erupt along the Mary River. We have one beetle biocontrol for that.

The direction of federal money to the regional bodies has largely deprived Landcare and similar organisations of direct funding for work on the ground, especially in regard to funding for full-time or part-time managers of these organisations who can take the day-to-day burden of management off the volunteers.

We have one beetle for Madeira vine. I am in despair, really, over the biocontrols for cat's claw creeper and Madeira vine. They are effective and they are reducing the growth rate of these pests, but it will just delay them by a few years and give us more of a grid base to attack them manually. I think that is the answer. We need more funding for biocontrol for these pests and many of the others, including giant rat's-tail grass.

**Mr Curley:** The Gympie region is really good example of where the demographic is changing. We get a lot of tree changers and sea changers who move here and do not understand it. We are also in a very high rainfall and high vegetation growing part of the state so we are very suitable to a

lot of different types of weed in this area. In relation to your question, there is a mixture of people's willingness to uptake methods of control. Plants like cat's claw are notoriously difficult to control, so I think a lot of it is due to ignorance or lack of understanding. A lot of people may not understand what the threats are. Of course, there is such a complexity and diversity of land use, and a lot of different tenures including state land, where the problem is quite severe as well.

**Mr WEIR:** Is it the coordinated approach that is letting you down or is it funding? I dare say you will probably say that it is a mixture of both, but how could the coordination between your groups and the council be improved?

**Mr Curley:** Council works in the space of trying to gain cooperative coordination across many groups as well as playing a compliance role for the declared weed and pest animals in the region. From that perspective, we see a lack of state government coordinated control efforts and a lack of state government coordinated funding effort. We see a patchwork approach to the way that pests are managed and some government departments, in particular DNRM on new unallocated state land, have been very difficult to get cooperative arrangements with for weeds and pest animal control projects. We are working with them to try to improve that, but it is something that is very difficult when departments are just not willing to cooperate for one reason or another.

**Mr Smith:** Can I relate that question back to the chair's question? We cannot force landholders to do things, generally speaking, so we need some sort of encouragement and we need coordination of that encouragement. It is all tied in with funding, but the previous question was: what is the landholder's interest in tackling the weeds? Most people are driven by finance. They cannot see the return in tackling one little giant rat's-tail plant or one little cat's claw plant or a few of them, but if they were educated about the dangers of letting this plant get out of hand they could probably show a lot more interest. I think coordination is all part of that—some sort of coordination of education and awareness.

**Mr Rider:** Backing up what was just said, for example, forestry plantation growers are not worried about giant rat's-tail grass. It is only the borders of their forest that need to be cleared of rat's-tail because the rat's-tail does not affect their industry, whereas, of course, it is of vital importance to graziers. It is the same with quite a few other weeds that are around the place. We get right back to gardening even, with garden escapees clumping off into the pastures and into the forests. There are several of these weeds which are called transformational weeds. They have the power to completely change the ecology. Some of these would be Madeira vine, yellow bells in the understorey, ochra in the understorey and camel grass, which is a very useful pasture plant which grows three metres tall. I describe it as the gamba grass of the south. It is a monster ecologically. There is Chinese celtis, camphor laurel, Chinese golden shower, African love grass, the weedy sporobolus grasses and broad leaf pepperina, a just to name a few of the transformational weeds. I think these should be given a higher priority in funding for attack on them.

The other point I would like to make is the public awareness aspect. That needs to be pushed all the way every year at every opportunity—field days, displays—and that is what the council and Landcare and MRCCC are doing all the time.

**Mrs GILBERT:** One of you said that some landholders are not interested in clearing up their weeds. Is it that notices are not being issued for those farmers requiring them to clean up the weeds they have on their properties?

**Mr Curley:** It is a good question in that there are many weeds, and not all of them are declared to the level landholders must or are legislatively required to clean up, for example cat's claw or lantana. It is not classified that they must—we obviously promote it—whereas weeds like groundsel or giant rat's-tail grass or parthenium have a higher level of classification. We issue hundreds of biosecurity orders from council to landholders requiring them to clean that up on their land. In some instances we send contractors in under an entry situation to clean up the weeds and then they get sent the bill. Particularly some of these environmental weeds are not able to be acted upon in that way so it requires, in a lot of instances, voluntary compliance.

**Mr Rider:** Cat's claw creeper has become an economic weed but it is not listed as such. In forestry it is a big impost on such a long-term rural occupation to have the cost of control of this vine hanging over your head for 40 or 50 years.

**Mr MADDEN:** I would like to begin by thanking you all for making a contribution today. With regard to the terms of reference of this committee, one of the things we are investigating is whether

the three levels of government—local government, state government and federal government—are properly coordinating with regard to invasive weed control. Do any of you wish to make any comment on that? If you do have concerns about that, how do you think that issue may be addressed?

**Mr Rider:** It seems that a lot of these powers have been devolved onto local council which in many ways is a good thing, but I consider them inadequately funded by the state government. The federal government provides some excellent guidelines on some of the worst weeds and the state government, of course, has its marvellous legislation on pest weeds, but the poor old councils have the hard task of doing everything on the ground in the sociological context locally and with the limited funding locally.

**Mr Curley:** In recent years more responsibility has been devolved from the state to local government in the way that new legislation, in particular the Biosecurity Act, is written. That being said, I am not necessarily saying that in itself is a bad thing, but what has not been coming forward with that change is, I guess, an adequate level of support and funding from the state government. I can give many specific examples of that. In this particular region around Gympie we have lots of state owned land and there are many examples of where some of that state owned land has perhaps some of the worst pest animal and weed issues and we are getting a lack of agreement with some state government departments to tackle some of those problems. We are working with a number of them quite well, I will add, but there are one or two departments in particular that are notoriously difficult to work with in that space. There is definitely room for improvement with that.

**Mrs Thompson:** A couple of your examples that were given on the sheets were whether weeds are being controlled properly on crown land and whether adequate resources are being allocated. I would have to say a very definite no. They are not being properly controlled and there is not adequate resources for them to be controlled. How do you expect our group to assist with the control of weeds in national parks, because it is not exactly a state government business? We cannot really go and work with them so much as we do with our landholders, but it definitely becomes an issue, especially to adjoining landowners. They see weeds growing in the national parks et cetera while they are trying to clean up. Sometimes you just get very exasperated.

**CHAIR:** Ben, in relation to those areas where you have land that is managed by state government departments, do you have the capacity to talk to somebody who is responsible for the management of those pieces of land?

**Mr Curley:** I will not say names or exact locations, but there is one example I can give that relates to unallocated state land in a coastal area where we are having significant weed infestations and a wild dog problem. We have been in negotiations with that state government department for four years to try to get more active and proactive on-ground control works happening. They just do not seem to be taking it seriously, to the point where we are offering to those state government departments to go in and do the work on their behalf for free, but we have not been able to gain approval to work on their estate. There is a level of frustration in some of these areas with individuals within state government departments. I do not necessarily think it is a state government department position—I think we are dealing with some local difficulties in a lot of cases - but they certainly need to be worked through and resolved and I think direction from possibly higher up in state government departments needs to be forthcoming that requires state government departments to be better stewards of the land they have and align better with the legislation that they implement, in particular the Biosecurity Act and regulations. There are many examples I could give you around that, but that is in a nutshell some of what we experience.

**CHAIR:** Do you ever encounter a situation where there is land that is supposedly managed by a particular state government department but you cannot find the person to make decisions or take responsibility for the management of that land? Is that something you have come across?

**Mr Curley:** It can take some time to pinpoint the right people, but generally we do find out. On our rates database we have access to ownership details so we are able to track down the right state government department and eventually get the right person, but it can take some time to do that.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the time we have available. Thank you very much to all of you for making yourself available. Thank you for your various capacities and the various organisations that you work in to care for the Mary River and the catchment around it.

**Mrs Thompson:** Can I say thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to talk with you. I just wish you could have come and visited so that you could see what we are doing to the best of our ability to control the weeds.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Margaret. We would have loved to come and visit. We unfortunately have limited capacity to get to everywhere we wanted to get to, but we have endeavoured to get to as many regional areas as we can, but thank you very much.

**Mr Smith:** I would like to endorse those comments and thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.27 am to 10.43 am**

PROOF



**DRYSDALE, Mr Andrew, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective**

**CHAIR:** I welcome Mr Andrew Drysdale.

**Mr Drysdale:** As well as being the Chief Executive Officer of the Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective, I also chair the Biosecurity invasive pest advisory committee and for a number of years I have sat on the Biosecurity Queensland Ministerial Advisory Committee. I am able to bring a couple of perspectives to you.

**CHAIR:** We appreciate you making yourself available today. We called you and your organisation following your presentations at the flood resilience inquiry. The committee felt that there were a number of common themes emerging in that inquiry and we felt there could be some value in your organisation providing some testimony for this inquiry. Would you like to make a brief opening statement? Then we will go to questions from the committee.

**Mr Drysdale:** My appreciation for effective weed control was ingrained at a very young age when my father picked my brother and me up off the school bus at the end of the school year at Augathella to take us home, feed us chops and eggs and give us a burr hoe, and we would go cutting burr for the next three weeks in 40-plus degree heat. If we fast-track a year or two from then, I think we have come a long way in weed control. The message we gave at the flood resilience hearing is very similar to the message here. We need to have a whole-of-landscape integrated approach to weed control, and it has to be integrated from a policy right down to an on-ground level. Without it, we are really not going to effectively reduce the environmental, social and economic impacts of weeds.

**CHAIR:** There is a draft Queensland Weed and Pest Animal Strategy. Is that the sort of plan that might achieve that type of outcome if it moved from a draft to an actual plan?

**Mr Drysdale:** It is very much a step in the right direction. That strategy highlights the need for an integrated approach—as I said, integrated from a policy level to a planning level to a funding level and to an implementation level. That strategy, as does the draft Biosecurity Strategy, talks about shared responsibility. I think that is a big key—shared responsibility is about identifying those in the best place to deliver the actions required to deliver on-ground outcomes. I see in the questions there are questions around compliance, there are questions around planning and there are questions around engaging land managers. They are all key components of effective weed control, but I do not think we have the right people doing the right things at the moment.

**CHAIR:** Your organisation is basically a peak body for NRM groups; is that right?

**Mr Drysdale:** That is correct.

**CHAIR:** They are they basically voluntary groups for the most part, aren't they?

**Mr Drysdale:** The organisations are primarily funded through state and Commonwealth funding programs. They work with land managers and through landcare groups, local governments and others to give them the capacity, whether it is through knowledge or through some seed funding, to better control weeds.

**CHAIR:** Would groups like catchment coordinating committees be what we are referring to here?

**Mr Drysdale:** I am referring to catchment coordinating committees and regional NRM bodies. Some regional NRM bodies have a network of catchment coordinating committees. If you go out in the wider areas like Desert Channels Queensland, they are the NRM body and the catchment coordinating committee in one, or northern gulf or southern gulf. It depends on where it is in the state. It is about taking a whole-of-catchment approach to getting better landscape management, which includes weed management.

**CHAIR:** The reason I ask is that in my area I have two catchment committees which are voluntary associations of individuals who come together who have a concern and seek funding. The individuals who are in this association come from all manner of backgrounds. Some are highly skilled professionals with high degrees of knowledge and understanding, and others are like me who are just well-meaning volunteers who probably did work akin to what you did as a child but nowhere near as hard, I can tell you that for sure. One thing that strikes me in talking to groups like those and the ones we have had here earlier today is that there seems to be a wide diversity of activities of those groups. Do you feel that the NRM groups around the state are heading in the same direction? Do they need more guidance around what their activities and objectives should be?

**Mr Drysdale:** The NRM groups are the keepers of what is called a natural resource management plan. That plan is developed in consultation with community, it is informed by the best science available, and it also draws on other stakeholders in those regions. Those NRM regional plans identify the priority areas around natural resource management identified by the communities and those groups I mentioned. Inevitably, weeds are always near the top priority, if not the top priority. The reason for that is that they are the most visible thing. When a land manager or someone in your community walks along Norman Creek, they see weeds because they are very visible, but they are also one of the hardest things to control.

I think the NRM groups have that pretty well under control in terms of looking at what needs doing. It is more around the policy platforms that need to support that, and it is also more around getting a more integrated approach to doing on-ground work. For example, in your area, if you have a well-meaning community group trying to knock over cat's claw on Norman Creek yet it is growing further up the catchment then that work is pretty well useless. That is where we need to get that more integrated approach. It is a shared responsibility approach ethos that Biosecurity are promoting and we support across the sectors, but we have a long way to get that shared responsibility ethos adopted.

**Mr WEIR:** A common theme that comes up in all of this, as you would have heard, is crown land and management of crown land. How does your organisation deal with that?

**Mr Drysdale:** If I can use an example in your electorate, the road from Millmerran to Goondiwindi, which you have probably travelled many times, is about a 400-metre-wide corridor and it is heavily infested with harissia cactus—frighteningly so. We have a situation where the local regional NRM body and landcare groups are working with landholders who sit outside that corridor trying to get them to control harissia cactus. We have a situation where Main Roads have responsibility for controlling it from I think within about 20 metres from the centre of the road—or it might be 40 metres—and they are doing their little bit. The other is local government. At the moment I think they are starting to—there was a long time when they did not have the capacity, the means or the will to do anything with it, so we had a seed bed there.

Again, I talk about integration and an integrated approach, but you have to get Main Roads sitting down with local government in that situation to get that integrated approach, otherwise the landholders are wasting their time and money. The good neighbour policy was around for a long time, more around control of feral pests in national parks. It worked for a while but then we saw the capacity of National Parks reduced and their ability to engage in that good neighbourhood policy decline. I think the intent is there. The ability may not be so much there, but crown land is a big issue.

**Mr WEIR:** Do you think that is a funding issue or an issue of getting it coordinated between various levels and departments? Where do you see the problem lying?

**Mr Drysdale:** It is a combination of both. If a landholder does not control a category 1 weed, he or she could be prosecuted. If there is not control of category 1 on crown land, you cannot have a government agency prosecuting another government agency. It is a serial problem we have had for a long time, so they look at other things like codes and the like. Utilities are exactly the same. There is an issue there. Around Biosecurity we have tried to find ways of doing it through the new act, but we always seem to come up against the fact that you cannot have an agency prosecuting another agency. Therefore, you are relying on resources to the agencies to control those pests, be they weeds or feral animals. The resources are not there, largely.

**Mr WEIR:** I believe it sends a message. The example you use of that road is a good one. It does not give the landowner a lot of encouragement to go and clean up their property when they look at what is happening on the verge of that road.

**Mr Drysdale:** That is exactly right.

**Mrs GILBERT:** From what you have just been saying and from the previous witnesses we spoke to from the Mary River Catchment Coordination Association, there seems to be a similar theme around needing to have integration. Everybody is talking about integration. There is obviously something missing there with everybody doing their little bit or some people choosing not to, as the last group identified. How are we going to manage that integration? As with the example you gave, if the group in one spot on a river is looking after cat's claw but upstream they are not bothering, they are just fighting a losing battle. What needs to change so that we can start looking at that integrated approach that is the catchcry of everybody we have spoken to?

**Mr Drysdale:** If I can use the catchment analogy again, you need to start at the top and work your way down. We need to have integration at our departmental levels around weed control.

**Mrs GILBERT:** Is that with the federal and state governments?

**Mr Drysdale:** Yes, and there are mechanisms there for that, at both the federal and the state level. We talked about a catchment council in the flood resilience hearing. Again, what you were just describing supports the need for the establishment of a catchment council to provide that cross-agency integration and coordination. Then we need to feed down to a regional level with local government working more closely with NRMs, industry and other players as represented by your previous witnesses and then right down to the ground. Unless we have that leadership from the top, it is pretty hard. It is a bit like when the landholder sees harissia cactus growing along the road and they think, 'Why should I worry?' I think there needs to be some major leadership from the top to drive that more integrated approach.

There is an example in your electorate or next to your electorate where it is happening really well—that is, with the control of red witchweed, which is a catastrophic weed if it gets out in terms of economics, but there are agencies working with local government and with landholders who are doing that very well. There are good examples where it is happening out on the ground, but there are plenty of examples where it could be done better.

**Mr MILLAR:** Thanks for coming along, Andrew. The NRM groups do a wonderful job in trying to bring everything together. Would it be fair to say that one of the worst offenders of not cleaning up weeds is the state government? When you said that governments cannot prosecute between government departments, it just becomes red tape and bureaucratic, whereas what we want to do is get rid of the weeds on crown land, on stock routes.

**Mr Drysdale:** I probably should know what percentage of Queensland is crown land compared to private, but you are right. I also think we have to be careful not to look to others as being the problem. We have to take responsibility for it ourselves. We have that shared responsibility. A part of that is definitely that government needs to take responsibility for the control of pests on crown land.

**Mr MILLAR:** I was on disused stock route just last week and there was parkinsonia all over the stock route. It is a disused stock route. The government wants to continue to have it as a disused stock route, yet it is starting to fill up with parkinsonia. I cannot see any attempt by the government of the day, whatever government of the day it is, to try to clean that up.

**Mr Drysdale:** In that example—and there are plenty of examples—you would think government could sit down with local landholders and say, 'If you have access and use of this disused stock route then part of your responsibility of that—it is pretty well free; they may have to pay a fee—is that you need to control the weeds.'

**Mr MILLAR:** This is cultivation going into a disused stock route going back into cultivation.

**Mr Drysdale:** It is not being used.

**Mr MILLAR:** It is not being used and there is no real avenue there for the primary producer to use the stock route.

**Mr Drysdale:** You are correct. In your electorate and that of Mount Isa, you know well the effort that the NRM groups are doing to try to control prickly acacia. To work with landholders only to then have the area reinfested by moving stock coming in on trucks—that is where we need to have regulation working hand in hand with incentive schemes. Again, that means that we need to have those discussions at a policy level, at an agency level, to try to get that going properly. Clearly we know the problem and we know the solution, but there does not seem to be the will to do something about it.

**Mr MILLAR:** Here is your chance. Normally when you front these committees there is an opportunity for people like yourself and the NRM groups to have your say. If you were given the opportunity to fix this problem, how would you fix this problem? In regard to the government of the day getting on and cleaning up their own act, what procedures need to be put in place and how do you fix this?

**Mr Drysdale:** I have probably outlined what I think. I do think the draft Biosecurity Strategy is something that has been developed in close consultation with stakeholders. There is some ownership there, but I do think we need to have the government's foundations around that to ensure we get that whole-of-government approach to weeds. I refer again to something like an NRM council, which would have agencies along with sector groups and community representatives on it, to help provide that major leadership. There is an issue there. There will never be enough funds. We could always ask for more money and we always do ask for more money, but it is not only an issue of asking for money but also an issue of being more effective—how do we apply that funding? That is where we need to identify the right players to do the job.

**Mr MILLAR:** We are expecting landholders to clean up their properties, yet governments are a bit behind in doing that on crown land or state owned land. Surely the government has the capacity, the willpower and the funds to clean up its own land if it is going to ask landholders to clean up their land.

**Mr Drysdale:** You would think so.

**Mr MADDEN:** I like that you mentioned the possibility of catchment management councils. I like the example you gave about Norman Creek. There is no point controlling cat's claw on Ipswich Road if it is not being controlled in the headwaters of the creek. To expand on that idea of a catchment management council, could that council deal with flood mitigation and coordinating the groups within the catchment—the state groups, the federal groups and the local government groups? Do you see that council dealing with possibly a wide range of issues—invasive animals, invasive weeds, flood management and that sort of thing?

**Mr Drysdale:** We advocate that that council should be dealing with natural resource management or landscape management, which includes all of those aspects that you just named and many more. Landscape management and weed management is hugely complex. It is very hard to find examples—if you apply pressure here, it results in something happening further down there. That is why we need to identify the complexities of having whole-of-landscape management and to recognise that the need to deal with that complexity requires integration and an integrated approach. Unless we can get that at the very top from our government working across the multiple agencies that all deal in one way or another with natural resource management, it is very hard to then expect those at a community level or at a regional level to take an integrated approach. It just makes it hard. It does not mean that we do not—we still try to—but it makes it hard.

**Mr MADDEN:** We are obviously Queensland-centric in this inquiry. Do you know of any other states that have adopted a model like that?

**Mr Drysdale:** The Victorians have a very effective model. The government there invests pretty heavily into it. Their government invests, I would say, five times the amount of money into catchment management as our government and many other governments. Our government invests a lot more than some other governments. We are not at the top; we are not at the bottom. It would be good to be at the top. I think the Victorians do it very well. The South Australians are doing it pretty well, too. Our friends across the ditch in New Zealand are probably even doing it better.

**Mr KATTER:** In terms of advocacy or a policy position for the NRM groups, I always thought there was an opportunity to be involved in the classification of clean versus dirty properties. It gets a little bit tricky. You get resistance from industry. I thought it would be a gentle place to start, say, with prickly acacia. You have people out there who engage, like the NRM groups who will work with the Southern Gulf NRM to do all of the good work but then their neighbours do nothing. There is really nothing in the system that benefits the person who is doing the good work—spending \$50,000 or \$100,000 a year of their own money to do the job that NRM groups want them to do. Do you see that as an idea? I cannot think of a better way of explaining it.

It is the same with vegetation management. They will market a place and say, 'It is all category white, so it is a good place. There are no worries about tree clearing.' I have seen that on sales brochures before. If you are selling a block in the north-west or in the central west, you might say, 'This is category A—clear of weeds.' I have floated this around before but it has never gained too much traction. Do you see that as an option?

**Mr Drysdale:** It is definitely an option. It is a good option. How you do it and how you fund it is probably the next question that would follow. In terms of the role of NRM groups, I think we have a huge capacity that is not utilised in acting as the honest broker. They sit in the communities. They have built up respect within the communities. They are not seen to be government, so in a lot of cases they have built up trust. They can play that honest broker role. If I use your example, someone has to go out there and categorise that property. We are looking now at another example of the rehabilitation of mines. They are saying there needs to be ongoing monitoring of rehabilitated mines. Again, that is a role that we could be playing.

We obviously have to be careful around there being a free market and there could be issues with a landholder wanting their property to be categorised as 'clean' going into a sale and then someone buys it and they find in the back corner there is some prickly acacia. Therefore, they have been misrepresented and you end up in court and so on. There are some things that need to be managed there. I think there is definitely a big role and an opportunity for NRM bodies or others to play that honest broker role and provide some indication of land condition generally, which includes weeds.

**Mr KATTER:** You picked up my point perfectly. It is probably more the point that in the north-west or the southern gulf, if you like, you have the best presence in terms of people on the ground and probably the best reputation as an independent person to be that broker. At the moment there is nothing for those blokes who are doing the right thing. Whether it is clearing rat's-tail or prickly acacia, they are spending all the money and there is no recognition of that. It is frustrating that there is no mechanism there. You picked up my point perfectly. You are in a perfect position. You probably have the trust and have done the work on the ground to have a presence there.

**Mr Drysdale:** You need to look behind the reasons why the state government or land managers, whoever they are, are not managing their pests. In some cases it is because (1) they are not aware that they have it, (2) they are not aware of how to manage it or (3) they are not aware of the need to manage it because of the economic or environmental consequences of it. Some are aware of it but do not have the capacity in terms of dollars. What do we do to give them capacity? Dog fencing is an example of where the state government and federal government have helped land managers to put dog fences up.

Then, unfortunately, there are those who know the consequences but they do not care. That is when you need the regulatory boot to come in behind and sit there. At the moment that regulatory boot sits with local government. Local government always say, and probably rightfully so, that they are the form of government closest to the ground or to the community, and it is hard for them to prosecute when they live next to the guy they are going to prosecute. I do not think necessarily that local government are the best placed to prosecute for not controlling pests. At that on-ground level, that is some of the discussion that needs to be had. You need to look for the reasons people are not controlling pests.

**CHAIR:** Mr Drysdale, thank you very much for your presentation today. We greatly appreciate you making yourself available.

**Mr Drysdale:** Thank you for the opportunity.

**SATHYAMURTHY, Dr Raghu, Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO**

**van KLINKEN, Dr Rieks, Senior Research Scientist, CSIRO**

**CHAIR:** Dr Sathyamurthy and Dr van Klinken, thank you very much for attending today. Would you like to make a brief opening statement before we go to questions?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** Thank you and the committee for inviting us to come along to this hearing. As indicated in the submission that CSIRO made to the committee, we have been working for about half a century in close coordination with Queensland on various aspects of ecology and management, particularly the biological control of weeds in Queensland. That is the perspective from which we made our submission and that is the perspective that we are representing here today.

Specifically around the topics that were circulated of importance that we thought we might be discussing today, it is quite fitting to follow Andrew because he made the point that there are limited resources. We cannot work on everything all the time. Making the decision about how we go about working on various weeds needs to be guided to a significant extent by information on what the impact of the weeds is and how best we might be able to go about mitigating that. To some extent, knowing what successful management is as we embark on weed management is particularly important. To us, that is an important guiding influence for how we deploy various management tactics or suggest the deployment of various management tactics from a research and management point of view.

We also felt, as part of the scope of the terms of reference of the inquiry, that it was important for better information sharing across those different agencies and jurisdictions that are involved from research and development of management tactics to those who experience the impacts and actually do the on-ground management on a day-to-day basis. In terms of how that could occur, there are many different platforms from which we could achieve that. There is also increasingly sophisticated technological infrastructure that could facilitate that coordination. As an example, we have the Atlas of Living Australia, which is already used by various land management groups, including regional NRM bodies, which could be a nice nexus by which information on weeds could be coordinated and also disseminated equally.

Specifically around the integrated management framework for weeds, it is always going to be the key that the management is integrated. Often there is a quest in the pursuit of management for silver bullet type tactics. There is no silver bullet. Whether it is biological control or any other tactic, it is a case of horses for courses and how best we deploy those to achieve the landscape-scale control that was talked about earlier. It is going to be quite important.

More specifically around prickly acacia and the two queries that the committee indicated they might want to talk to us about, eradication is always the desirable option. Whether or not it is the realistic option, one has to consider. For a species as widespread as prickly acacia, over some six million hectares and 2,000 kilometres of bore drains, whether that is realistic at that scale is something that needs careful consideration. Whether any one tactic is going to achieve that is also something that needs careful consideration.

In terms of biological control, I know that Queensland government colleagues whom we work with quite closely have been developing biocontrol solutions. They are working on about five different agents at present, two of which potentially could see a release application submitted over the next two years. That is just a brief opening statement around the dot points that were presented to us as topics for conversation.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**Mr WEIR:** Following on from your comments about biocontrol, we were introduced to that with prickly pear and the cactoblastis, myxomatosis in rabbits and so forth. It does not eradicate, as we well know, because they get down to a certain base and then build up, but obviously it keeps it under control. Would you agree that any ongoing investigation and funding of that would still be vitally important?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** That is correct. The key is, again, knowing what the management goal is. Where do we want to get to? In some contexts we might want complete control or removal of every single individual, in which case biological control is the inappropriate tactic. There are good chemical control options, like what Desert Channels Queensland is doing. However, whether they are functional at scale is an important thing to consider. Where biocontrol helps is that it comes back in on the back of that and keeps a check on the population. Chemical control or mechanical control helps control the current reproductive adults at the upstream end of catchments and then biological

control in the system can provide a chronic stress from that point on. The other nice thing with biocontrol is that it can jump across property boundaries without permission, because nature just moves.

**Mr WEIR:** You also talked about a portal. Could you describe that a little more?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** The Atlas of Living Australia is just one example; there are other examples. The Atlas of Living Australia is a federal piece of infrastructure funded through the NCRIS, the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy, which is a federal government program. It is basically a geospatial database on which information can be posted. The information still belongs to the people who collect the information, whether it is state governments, regional NRM bodies, CSIRO or whoever. That information then gets shared through the Atlas of Living Australia. It is geospatial, so you know physically where a particular weed exists. You can also include information on where a particular type of management tactic is being employed. If I am doing biological control, I can have a sense of where some other types of control are being applied and maybe applying the biocontrol in different parts of the landscape or in better integration of the landscape. The nice thing with that is that software and that infrastructure does not need to be developed again; it already exists. It is just a question of scaffolding on to that to make new tools available in terms of information and better coordination of weed management.

**Mr WEIR:** Earlier we were talking about buying real estate or buying properties and whether you have any access to information such as if the land is in an area that has a high level of giant rat's-tail grass, for example. Is that possible through this portal? Does it give those areas and that information?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** It is possible, but there are the obvious sensitivities associated with information that goes up and the ability to pinpoint individual landholders. Ultimately, what information gets posted is dependent on the person who owns the data. If it is a state level agency or it is a regional agency that uploads the data, they can choose to put that data up. They can also censor which data is available to broad public view. If there are certain sensitivities associated with significantly impacting land values, it is possible to censor that information.

As in all cases, the data is only as good as the people who are entering it. There is also that risk with inaccurate information. Sometimes we do find inaccurate information gets uploaded. That has consequences as well. It is possible to put up that kind of information, but there are sensitivities, obviously, associated with it.

**Mrs GILBERT:** In your submission to the committee you state that there is not sufficient quantitative information on triple bottom line impacts provided for the effective assessment of weed management options and you have talked about the portal. How can we be more effective in collecting the data that you need so that it feeds better information into your portal?

**Dr van Klinken:** There are a couple of things there. It is a better understanding of what the weeds actually do. A lot of what we discuss is about killing weeds and, at the end of the day, that is not the game we should be in. It is about preventing the current or potential impacts of the weeds. A trap that researchers, managers and policymakers fall into is that we often get taken to places where the weed is worst or from where farmers are making the most phone calls or where the farmer is a good operator so you end up working with them. Therefore, you get a distorted view of what the weed impacts are on a bigger scale—at a shire scale or regional scale or state scale. The real challenge is getting the information that allows you to make those assessments of just how serious the weed is beyond individual people's properties. Inevitably, you are going to have weeds that cause issues in some landscapes and not others, under some management regimes and not others. Having an understanding of that really allows you then to have a strategic management approach that goes beyond the reactionary.

Some of the work we have done shows that once you start asking those sorts of questions you get some surprising answers. For example, in the late 1990s parkinsonia was ranked No. 1 in the Weeds of National Significance. A lot of the work that we have done and that others have done since suggests it is not a very serious weed at all. That are some points around impact. In terms of what data is required to make those assessments, I think there are enormous resources devoted to mapping weeds and monitoring weed management programs. There are lots of different agencies at lots of different scales. There has been a lot of discussion about why that data should be shared and the benefits of sharing that data, but the big barrier to that happening is the sensitivity about what happens on people's properties and who can see that data in the end.

I think the technology is now there where you can easily control access and get around that issue, and allow access to the people who are allowed to have access and avoid the sensitivities. If that platform is in place, you can start answering those sorts of questions much better and also get a much longer time series on what is happening. Prickly acacia on-ground management has probably been happening through state funding since the 1950s, I am guessing. Some of those other programs are very long running. Without the data, you are really just relying on the memories of some people who have been around for a while, and that is not good enough.

**Mr MILLAR:** Thank you so much for coming in. It is always good to see the CSIRO. I know of the efforts that you are putting in to biological control. The seat of Gregory, like the seat of Mount Isa, is right in the middle of something such as prickly acacia. It does frighten us to see so much of that country being taken over by prickly acacia. Where are we at with the biological control for prickly acacia? How successful has it been? Can it be implemented? What is the realistic time frame? At the moment we are using grasslands and drones to knock out prickly acacia, but are we getting closer to a biological control?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** There are two agents for prickly acacia that have been established. The seed-feeding insect is found pretty much across much of prickly acacia's distribution, but that on its own is not going to give control. There is another insect that was released that seems to be doing much better in the more coastal kinds of areas. Colleagues I know from the Queensland government have been undertaking research in much more dry, semi-arid and arid habitats in the country of origin of prickly acacia, from India through to Senegal, parts of Ethiopia and places like that. They currently have one insect that is being tested for its safety against 50 or so native and closely related plant species. That testing has been completed under quarantine. Because there are so many native acacias in Australia, they have to ensure that the safety of the agent is adequately tested. In anticipation of this question, I spoke to my colleague in the Queensland government who is working on this. They believe that by about June of next year, if this agent proves to be safe enough in their testing, they should be able to submit an application to the Commonwealth government to petition its release.

**Mr MILLAR:** Are you confident that this will work?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** It is a question of what 'work' means. What this agent is likely to achieve—it is an insect that forms galls, which are basically like stem lesions that can stunt plant growth. That could potentially reduce the amount of reproduction of that plant and, through that, potentially limit the spread and further expansion of the population. As I said before, it will be one more tool in the toolbox. It will not be a silver bullet.

I think to some extent Queensland has been spoilt by the cactoblastis experience. That was a nationally coordinated program with huge investment on one weed. That was an amazing effort and that legacy remains with us. In the case of the biological control of something like prickly acacia, biological control would be one more piece in the puzzle. It will need to be integrated with the chemical tactics and the mechanical tactics that are already being done by various landholders and local land management groups.

**Mr MILLAR:** I am very interested in this, because right now we have prickly acacia on the headwaters of Lake Eyre Basin. If we see prickly acacia moving in to the Lake Eyre Basin or the Channel Country, I do not know how we are going to stop it. At the moment, it is north of Winton and north of Barcaldine. As you know, that is the headwaters of the Channel Country with the Thomson, the Barcoo and the Alice rivers. We need to somehow speed up that biological control, to get that tool in the toolbox and coordinate it with the other efforts we are putting in place.

**CHAIR:** I am interested in the part of your submission where you talk about data and making that more available. It seems to me that we use data to find cheap airfares or cheap hotels, but we seem to have somewhat of a market failure when it comes to using data for this type of application. What needs to happen in a practical sense for this data to be put in a format whereby it can be used by various bodies and people to make a difference?

**Dr van Klinken:** The technology is there, so the software platforms are there. That is not the issue. The people who have the data and who might use the data need to come to agreement on how best to make that data available and in what formats. The technology will be there to allow that to happen, but I think the first step is to work through what the needs are and what the potential is of making that data available.

**CHAIR:** How would we coordinate that? Who is best placed to do that? Is that a state or federal government thing?



**Dr van Klinken:** I think that should be discussed. I suspect going national would be more challenging than the state getting its house in order. That is my guess.

**CHAIR:** My next question is on the Weeds of National Significance program. One of the submitters said that it had been shut down. Your submission talks about how it historically provided valuable coordination. Can you advise on the current status in relation to the Weeds of National Significance program?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** My understanding is that the Weeds of National Significance are in different phases. There are the early phases, which require better coordination and management, and then the later phases are really around—we have already got the coordination; everybody knows what needs to be done and the information exists. As part of the Weeds of National Significance program there used to be funding available for a coordinator for each of those weeds—sometimes the same person for multiple weeds. The intent of that sort of coordinator role was to really serve as the nexus for the different types of management, different types of research and different types of information products that were being generated perhaps in Queensland that could be useful for the Northern Territory or generated in the Northern Territory that could be useful for Queensland. Information sharing was facilitated through that.

My understanding is that that coordinator role is no longer funded through the WONS program, and that is a challenge. Whether that gets picked up at a different level, at the state level or the regional level, and the resources that are needed to facilitate that sort of coordination are provided is going to be a conversation that needs to be had. There are technological ways by which we can make that information sharing and coordination a little better. That needs to be looked into as well.

**CHAIR:** In your submission you have made a series of statements where effectively a new weed infestation is really not concerning unless it moves beyond a certain infestation level or rate. It seems that if we have brought a plant in from somewhere and have it in the back garden and it suddenly escapes, that would not be something that generates any grave concern. In fact, where we start to turn our attention is once the problem has expanded to such a degree that we feel we have to deal with it. My question is around what we are doing about that surveillance of the potential for new threats around weed infestations that might be coming through your backyard gardeners or other sources of introduction.

**Dr van Klinken:** There are probably 20,000 naturalised species in Australia now.

**CHAIR:** You had a number in there. I just cannot find it.

**Dr van Klinken:** That is an enormous number. Certainly the principles in weed management are that if you can nip something in the bud, that is the best return on the dollar, but the trick is being able to identify which of those thousands of species that have very limited distributions is going to become a serious problem down the track. I think that is always the challenge. As a weed management community we get surprised both ways. Sometimes something that we think is going to be the end of farming turns out to be a fizzer and in other cases ones that become very serious we did not think much of at the time. I think that is the point: it is not a matter of as soon as it jumps over the fence you have to start acting. The challenges are—and it is partly a science challenge—around which ones are going to become serious, and you want to nip them in the bud, and which ones you will just sit back and observe for longer.

**Mr MADDEN:** You would be aware that the terms of reference of this committee include the coordination between the three levels of government. We know what local government does and we know what state government does, but it is a bit unclear what the federal government does. You are really the spearhead of the federal government. We have spoken about biological control. We have spoken about dissemination of data. Can you give me a snapshot of the footprint CSIRO have in Queensland? I know that we have spoken about biological control, but how many research stations do you have? How many staff do you have? What are your priorities? Can you give me a snapshot?

**Dr van Klinken:** In our group we have about 25 staff.

**Mr MADDEN:** In all of Queensland?

**Dr van Klinken:** We are all based in Brisbane but we have a national focus; we work on weeds. Most of the weeds in Queensland are issues across the top. A lot of that work is around biocontrol but also around integrated management and spatial modelling to help you make decisions. Much of that latter work gets done more at the grassroots level, so more at NRM region type scales and council scales where they are making decisions on the ground. That is our group. There are other people working on invasive plants in CSIRO based in Townsville and in Atherton. They work in different parts of the organisation but we all work together.

**Mr MADDEN:** There is a CSIRO facility at Atherton?

**Dr van Klinken:** There is a CSIRO facility at Atherton. They work on some of the eradication weeds. There is also a CSIRO facility in Townsville.

**Mr MADDEN:** It is mainly to do with biological control?

**Dr van Klinken:** No. Biocontrol is just operating out of here. Integrated weed management, weed surveillance using drones and decision-making support are done out of all of the centres. The Atherton group has much better links into Cape York—that is quite a complex space to be working in—NRM regions, Indigenous groups and the like. Townsville tends to have more of a focus in the rangelands. Our work is agnostic; it is right across.

**Mr MADDEN:** You said initially that you work closely with the state government. Can you give me some idea of how that is achieved? Do you have meetings like we are meeting today? Are there committees? How is that achieved?

**Dr Sathyamurthy:** Our state government colleagues obviously have much more intricate networks throughout the state. Often we collaborate with them in terms of getting biological control agents out. For example, in relation to some of the weeds we work with the Tropical Weeds Research Centre in Charters Towers in terms of both primary research of what the weed is and what its impacts are. There are collaborations associated with that. Often those meetings occur when we do field work with them or they come to Brisbane, or it happens over the phone or via videoconferencing. Also in terms of research collaborations we try to reduce inefficiency in terms of working across each other, so that if they have a certain area covered in terms of releasing biological control we try to do something complementary to that and work across different areas that they may not be covering, or we work on one set of biological control agents or one set of research questions that are complementary to the ones they are working on. That is typically how that works.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time here today. That concludes our hearing. I now declare closed this public hearing of the Agriculture and Environment Committee.

**Committee adjourned at 11.37 am**