



AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

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

Staff present:

Mr R Hansen (Committee Secretary)

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

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

THURSDAY, 27 APRIL 2017

Gladstone

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Committee met at 1.18 pm

CHAIR: I declare open the Agriculture and Environment Committee's public hearing in relation to its inquiry into invasive weeds and their control in Queensland. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath, but I do 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 rules and orders. In this regard, I remind members of the public that, under the standing orders, the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. Mobile phones or other electronic devices should now be turned off or switched to silent.

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

DYKE, Mr Eric, Bundaberg Regional Council

DYKE, Mr Josh, Pest Management Coordinator, Gladstone Regional Council

MACLEAN, Mr Nick, Bundaberg Regional Council

CHAIR: I welcome our first witnesses. We have a very tight schedule this afternoon; I apologise for that. You are welcome to make a very brief opening statement. We have received your submissions. I will leave it up to you whether you want to make an opening statement otherwise we are happy to open up to questions. How would you like to proceed?

Mr E Dyke: We are happy to take questions.

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

Mr MADDEN: I have not so much a question but a statement. About two months ago I organised two workshops on fireweed. One was held in Gatton and one was held in Marburg. The one in Marburg was open to the public. All landholders could go to it. The one that we held at the Gatton research station was purely for pest management officers from councils. We had councils represented from Redland Bay to the Scenic Rim to Toowoomba—right across-the-board.

I am just wondering whether part of what the state government should be doing is providing workshops for officers like yourselves to keep up-to-date with what is happening with regard to research and practices and even be provided with information from chemical companies. We had representatives from Nufarm speak at the workshop. They were talking about the research they were undertaking. Do you think that is something the state government should be providing to council—basically extension officers for the extension officers?

Mr E Dyke: I think it would be a good idea. Many years ago the state government had local government workshops that they held every year. Chemical representatives and researchers would come along to those workshops and provide information to local government officers. They would also provide training. They would normally go for three or four days. They were well received. They have not held them for probably the last 10 years.

Mr MADDEN: If I were to ask you, would you make that a recommendation of our committee?

Mr E Dyke: I certainly would. I think it would be a good idea.

Mr MADDEN: With the one we did we had four speakers. We had a lecturer from UQ talking about wash down. We had a lady from the Herbarium talking about identification. This was about fireweed and there are 90 native species of fireweed and six introduced species. Identifying *brigalowensis* from *madagascariensis* is extremely important because *madagascariensis* is a controlled plant and *brigalowensis* is not a controlled plant so you do not spray it. That was the range of speakers we had. Are there any other speakers you think we should have if we were to hold a workshop?

Mr E Dyke: We do not get contact with our local biosecurity officer for the Bundaberg region. I am only talking for the Bundaberg region. I know that it is the same in several other regions, but I am talking about ours. Sometimes we might only see them once a year, if we are lucky, and that is only if we request them to come up to help us at a field day. Other than that, we do not even hear about them. It would be good if they could come up and have sessions with us around new ideas. Half the time the research is not really passed on to local government. It would be good for them to come up and say, 'Have you seen this?', on a one-on-one basis with the council.

Mr Maclean: Just to add to that from a bean-counting bureaucrat's perspective, we pay \$94,000 every year in preset levies. A component of that, which has been extended to us by the state government in the past, is supposed to be for the service of the biosecurity officer. If that is the case, then like any other contractual arrangement there should be some service levels established around what we get out of that contact with the actual BQ officer. As Eric has mentioned, we see them once a year or something like that.

To backtrack to your other question with regard to the other people who could be involved, I think linking the officers up with some of the research is very important too. That happens in a pretty haphazard way at the moment. If we ask what we are getting for our money, we get this long list of everything back to 2002—and we can cherry-pick some things out of there that are relevant to us—but we feel that that should be invested back in the region a lot of more directly.

Mr MADDEN: I should say that one of the speakers at the Gatton workshop was the local biosecurity officer, but we restricted him to talking about legislation because we had other speakers dealing with research and chemical application. It is very important to know what is over the horizon with regard to fireweed and what the possibilities are for the future.

Mr WEIR: I go to a question that I asked earlier with regard to funding. What are your views on funding, how should it be targeted, how could it best be utilised and through what form?

Mr J Dyke: From Gladstone's perspective, I struggle to see that there is a significant amount of funding that is provided for giant rat's tail chemical control to actually have any major effect simply because it is not just one year of control that you need, it is the next three, four, five years. I do not think that any major lump sum funding would achieve too much.

With regard to the best bang for your buck, biocontrol would definitely be the best large scale approach—that is, giving more funding for investigating biocontrol. There are a number that they are looking into at the moment, whether it is pathogens or the leaf tying wasp. Boosting those projects would be better than giving millions of dollars out on the ground for chemical control and then constantly going back and looking at those that were controlled and ensuring that they are being maintained. In the past, that has never proven to be effective over the long-term.

Mr WEIR: So you do not believe that it can ever be managed or the battle will be won with chemicals?

Mr J Dyke: For giant rat's tail grass, no. I think a significant amount of money would be invested into it. It would be a lot better to invest in biocontrol.

Mr E Dyke: People would take up the funding. There are good and bad landholders, as with anything in society. A group of people might do a good job. You will get another area where it is not done. Unless it is done on a wide landscape level those areas that are left untreated are going to continually infest the treated areas.

From the council's perspective, we run a chemicals subsidy program where we give landholders flupropanate at a 40 per cent discount. We have 623 landholders signed up to that program. We are already offering fair assistance as well as a lot of cheap spray equipment and yet we still have an ongoing issue with trying to get a large percentage of people on board to undertake the work, particularly when it is needed. A lot of people do not treat it at the optimum time.

Mr WEIR: We heard a lot about flooding. There have also been long, extended dry periods over the last 10 years. Do you think those fluctuating seasons have had an impact? During dry times it would be harder to control with chemicals, I would imagine?

Mr J Dyke: I think the biggest issue with having a dry time is that you are going to have a lot more bare ground. Once you receive rainfall the first thing that is going to come back will be weeds, not just giant rat's tail. Those long spells of drought definitely increase the ability for GRT to start spreading throughout the region.

Mr E Dyke: Like Josh said, in good times there needs to be a bigger focus on pasture management. Weeds will spread worse on properties that are poorly managed—where people overgraze them and flog them out; keep the stock on their paddocks for too long. The better pasture is down and then you are going to get all these weed species come up. There needs to be a better

focus on that. The cheapest management option that farmers have is better managing their stock. They are going to have better stock anyway, they are going to be in better condition if they are maintaining better pastures.

CHAIR: You were here for the earlier discussions, does the experience of your two councils match that of landholders when it comes to dealing with state government managers of land? Are you able to access the people who are managing land and making decisions and work with them?

Mr Maclean: I think access is a really good word to use there. We have had issues with unallocated state land, for example, where we arbitrarily send a notice off to DNRM and hope it gets to the right person. Most times it does. It would be really nice if we were able to actually contact that person and had their details—if we had a refidex type document of who is in our area and who we can contact for different issues.

Getting back to the best principles of management—whether it is a catchment approach or something else—probably one of the biggest things is knowing when they are going to do the spraying so we tie compliance and our own spraying in with that to make sure the money, whether it is taxpayer money or ratepayer money, is getting spent well and we are getting the best bang for the buck. I think there are a lot of improvements that could be made in that regard.

CHAIR: My final question relates to the suggestions made around cluster management and incentivising cluster management. Do you feel that councillors would be in a position to be play a coordinating role in identifying a logical place where a cluster might exist and to encourage people to participate in something of that nature?

Mr J Dyke: Identifying, yes. We map our pest infestations so we would be able to identify where GRT is located and identify properties affected by it. We would be able to assist in trying to get those landholders to work together. It depends on resourcing. Funding might be a little more difficult. A lot of local governments are now trying to save a fair amount of funds. As Bundaberg Regional Council said, we have a number of assistance programs at the moment which subsidise chemicals and which offer cheaper hire rates so we are offering assistance, but we can definitely work with landholders. If a group of them get together and agree to undertake a management plan on rat's-tail grass, we are definitely keen to work with those landholders to do that.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing here today.

BRENNAN, Mr Pat, Councillor, Banana Shire Council; and President, Capricorn Pest Management Group

CHAIR: Thank you for participating this morning and sharing your experiences in the banana shire with us. Councillor Brennan, we only have about 15 minutes. Would you like to make an opening statement or would you prefer to go straight to questions?

Councillor Brennan: I would just like to say that in terms of GRT the Gladstone approach of containment lines is probably the only way to treat it where it is bad and to try to stop it from spreading. We definitely do not want it to spread over the range to our shire. It is already there but in smaller lots. That is all I wanted to say.

Mrs GILBERT: We have heard a lot about clusters and the health of properties. In previous round tables people were saying that landholders should have got on top of giant rat's-tail when it first became an issue. Somebody made a statement that a person could have bought a block of land and may not have recognised giant rat's-tail or known the problem that it is. If I was going to buy a house or a property such as a shop, the bank would expect me to get a building inspection to make sure that the building was well constructed and that it was not going to fall down. Do you think we need to have in place a land inspection? Say you have a landholder who is doing a tree change and they let their land go, they are not working it properly, looking after it or keeping it clean, and then they offload it onto somebody else who also does not know what they are doing. Do we need to start putting in stricter regulations around the sale of some of these properties? For instance, if you wreck it you need to clean it up or you are not going to sell it for what you are think you should because the person buying the property needs to clean it up.

Councillor Brennan: GRT is a class 2 weed, or an old class 2 weed. It is a prohibited weed. I know that in our shire our rural officers know where all the outbreaks are. If someone buys a cattle property and their solicitor is not on the ball and has not asked the council if there are any restrictions on that property, the sale will just go through. Any solicitor who asks any of our staff whether there are any class of weeds on there that are prohibited we will tell them straightaway. We will answer them within an hour.

Mrs GILBERT: But at the moment there is no requirement for them to ask?

Councillor Brennan: I do not think so. Some solicitors do when doing their proper searches and other solicitors ask nothing. Maybe it should be a requirement. Maybe it should; I don't know. Obviously they are not ticking all the boxes.

CHAIR: Thank you, Councillor Brennan. I acknowledge the arrival of the member for Gladstone, Mr Glenn Butcher.

Mr WEIR: Pat, you made a comment that in the banana shire there is very little of it as yet. Is that what you said at the beginning: it is only in small lots?

Councillor Brennan: There are sporadic outbreaks of it and we know where they are. Some properties have fair sized infestations but nothing like what we saw this morning.

Mr WEIR: Do you believe you have a chance to eradicate it in your shire at this stage?

Councillor Brennan: Our shire spends \$100,000 a year on GRT. We partner with the property owner who has to put in 50 per cent so there is \$200,000 a year. I think we have two or three properties west of Moura now that are on the list to spray next. If the property owners come and see us and say, 'We want to try to clean it up,' and it is in a strategic area—say it is in Punchbowl Creek, west of Moura, which is where it started—we will get stuck into it. They will have to put in 50 per cent of the funding and it will be aerial sprayed with flupropanate. We have had a pretty bad drought. No-one has done anything for six months since winter. It has rained now and I would expect a little bit of activity now. We rang those aerial operators this morning. We have five tonnes of flupropanate sitting at Moura ready to go. As long as a rural owner contacts us and they are prepared to put in 50 per cent, we will go and spray their place.

Mr WEIR: There were a couple of figures quoted this morning to spread that chemical by air. What would it cost per hectare?

Councillor Brennan: I have sort of corrected that figure. To treat an area costs \$10 a kilogram at 15 kilograms per hectare. It is \$150 per hectare. That is for a blanket spray. A lot of properties only have isolated patches. They might have 10 acres or down along a fence line there is a lot there. They go into the aerial operator and they will map out where the aerial operator has to spray, and he will come in and spray just those areas. We have since been back and resprayed those 1,400 hectares that I was talking about at the top of Clematis Creek which we did a couple of years ago. That wasn't a blanket spray, if you get what I mean. It was just spraying where the GRT was.

Mr WEIR: Where the infestations were.

Councillor Brennan: It is \$150 a hectare for a blanket spray. Not all properties are like that.

CHAIR: Councillor Brennan, do you have many hobby farmers in the banana shire?

Councillor Brennan: We have our share of them. We probably have a lot more professional cattle producers. Our big areas are big areas, and what I call prickly farmers are on the fringes of town. We do not have a lot of problems with them. I have lived in Gatton. From Gatton to Brisbane it is all prickly farms as far as I am concerned.

Mr WEIR: Not all of them would agree with you.

CHAIR: Some of them are possibly from a long line of prickly farmers in the Taroom district. You mentioned in the earlier session your attempts to work with a group of landholders and the problems related to—

Councillor Brennan: Harrisia cactus—

CHAIR:—some state forest.

Councillor Brennan: Overdeen State Forest.

CHAIR: What has been your experience as a councillor in trying to work with the managers of state government land regardless of which department they sit?

Councillor Brennan: It has not been a very positive experience. We sprayed up at Clematis Creek, which flows into the Comet River and ends up in the Fitzroy. It is right at the top of the catchment of the Comet River. Below the properties we sprayed was national park. They would not spray. We tried to get them to spray. We said, 'We have the plane. Put some money towards it.' 'We haven't got any money' is the typical answer you get from those people. 'We've got no money.' They should have sprayed because that flows into the Comet which goes into the Fitzroy which ends up in Rockhampton.

CHAIR: Can you tell me a bit more about the Capricorn Pest Management Group? You are here as a representative of that group rather than as council. What is that group? Who is on it? Does it play a coordinating role in terms of not just rats-tail weed but also other weeds?

Councillor Brennan: It is a group of councils in the Fitzroy catchment. We try to encompass all the councils in the Fitzroy catchment area. It includes Gladstone, Rockhampton and the banana shire. Isaac shire were with us but they have since gone to the Mackay catchment area, which is fair enough. We have not been able to get Central Highlands or Livingstone on board, but we are working on them to come in. We try to take a coordinated approach to weed management. We have a meeting every three months and our rural officers come in and we try to train them, as you did, but we do not have the resources or the funding to train them properly. As the chairman of the group, that is what I want to see. We are only there to train our rural officers so that some new type of technology—as Josh explained to us the other day, Gladstone is recording where all these outbreaks are on their iPhones and their smart phones. We have not got a coordinator. We applied for funding for a coordinator for our group and the funding was rejected. We have only just applied for that. Rebecca French is with the FBA, and the FBA is involved with us now. It is a partner with us. I could not see how our councils could work without the Fitzroy Basin Association. It is the overarching body for NRM groups in the whole of our catchment area. That is basically what we are.

Mrs GILBERT: The previous representatives from Gladstone and Bundaberg regional councils put more emphasis on biocontrols than chemicals. Is your group moving that way as well?

Councillor Brennan: Yes.

Mrs GILBERT: We need to put more emphasis on biocontrol instead of sprays?

Councillor Brennan: Yes, there is no doubt about that. The trouble is that Charters Towers is the only weeds research place in Queensland. They might be doing work on GRT—and they probably are doing work—but we do not get that information. There is no extension of the research results back to us. We desperately need an extension officer somewhere to get that research back to the grassroots people. It is completely lacking.

Mrs GILBERT: So you have a lack of communication in terms of what is happening there?

Councillor Brennan: Yes. You have heard the precepts from Bundaberg. Our council's precept for the year last year was \$63,000. We feel like we are not getting value for that, until we get the results back to us from the research.

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CHAIR: Councillor Brennan, for my understanding, do you have large commercial operations that are owned by corporations rather than owner managers and families who live on farms in your shire?

Councillor Brennan: No, most of them are family operated. Some of them are fairly large operations but there are hardly any large corporations.

CHAIR: But you do have some large corporations?

Councillor Brennan: I cannot think of any—not many. There are not many absentee landholders.

CHAIR: Do you notice any difference in dealing with landholders based on that? I know there is only a small sample based there, but do you find that both approach weed management as a—

Councillor Brennan: Could you ask our coordinator?

CHAIR: Absolutely. Gordon, feel free to step up to the microphone so that Hansard can record you.

TWINNER, Mr Gordon, Rural Services Coordinator, Banana Shire Council

Mr Twinner: In the shire there is an expansion of a lot of families now where the father was there and now they have a couple of sons and they are expanding out through the system. That is taking over a lot of our country. We have very few absentee landholders. The communication is quite good with them. There are issues that you do come across but other than that, no.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. Is there anything else that either of you would like to add before I call the next witnesses?

Mr Brennan: The only thing I would like to say is that GRT might have passed us, but if we do not get on top of the cactus species—I have been to a weeds conference at Longreach and the cactus seem to be taking over there. You have coral cactus spread from Winton to Windorah. If we cannot do some sort of research on cactus and get biocontrol on cactus, it will be the next big one. Unfortunately, they are garden plants that have gone feral. They should be banned. Cactus plants should be banned throughout Australia full stop.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

FRENCH, Ms Rebecca, Fitzroy Basin Association

CHAIR: Hello. Welcome, Ms French. Again, we have about only 15 minutes. So give us as much time for questions as possible. It is up to you. If you would like to make an opening statement, you are most welcome to.

Ms French: Yes. I have a fair few slides that basically summarise the submission that I have put into the inquiry. I would probably prefer to go through that, if I can?

CHAIR: Do you have copies of those slides for the committee?

Ms French: No.

CHAIR: Okay, that is fine.

Ms French: I did not think that you would need them.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms French: Basically, FBA is the natural resource management group. There are six to eight local governments that are in our region. Sheila Charlesworth was here from the MRG. They are our neighbouring NRM. I do not specifically speak on behalf of that NRM. This is something that we have done with our subregional partners and in our liaison with local governments that we look after in our region.

From my perspective, there is a lot that has been done that is good and a lot that is being done with due diligence. There are threats to the success that local government has, and you would have heard a lot of them today. Some of them are about restricted budgets. Some of it is the diversity of pests that they need to address—no-one will think that that is a new thing; competition between activity types that they do. They are performing a large range of activities. They are doing the awareness, they are doing the treatment and they are doing the compliance. I would say that each council may be doing each of those activities in a different way to a different level.

The differences between council and agencies can confuse land managers about who is doing what and why and why this compliance is stronger in Gladstone than it is in maybe Emerald. They are just examples. I am not saying that that is the case. It can be confusing to land managers. I think it is a bit of monkey see, monkey do. A lot of the feedback that I have been given from our stakeholders is that some of the efforts that have been done get constantly undermined. Governments of all levels need to lead by example, and that includes managing their own land, and there are quite a few examples that may have been raised here today but have been raised to me also about councils not showing that, especially on the road signs. That really leads to lots of weed spread and more pest growth really.

Also, to foster landholder responsibility, consistency and management and compliance is needed. Neighbourhood approaches are needed. They need to be complementary, coordinated and collaborative. I think that there is a real resource drought in terms of the coordination. There is no-one really there who can help coordinate and push those approaches who has the resources and the time and the staff to do that. Education is still required regarding the impacts, the obligations and how to identify.

There is a real difference between urban and rural. I know that small landholders are a problem with not knowing what weeds are on their property and not knowing how to treat them, or even that they should. So I think biosecurity support is key. The work that they do in the trials and the research is appreciated, but it is few. The dollars and the support to turn the outcomes of the trials and the research into practice, change and solutions may be lacking somewhat. Just the education about what that research is and what the outcomes are is feedback that we have that does not then make it to the next level and does not then make it to the councils and the landholders.

The sole focus on one noisy pest is unsustainable for local governments. There is a conflict. If the state or Biosecurity is focusing on GRT, that is not the only thing that councils are concerned about. They are almost giving up the fight on GRT, because they cannot do it. So they are investing their efforts in other weeds and pests as well. They need to do that to keep their communities happy and serviced as well.

Increased information sharing is needed. There is a high risk for duplication and I think that is at all levels. Even the community awareness is a risk for duplication. Queensland government departments have great resources, but I have not seen any evidence of those departments working very closely with organisations such as FBA, such as CPMG, such as local councils to then use their networks to promote that information. They are all trying to do their own separate thing. It is not very integrated.

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In summary, I think the things that are heading in the right direction are the regional approaches. NRMs and groups like CPMG are critical, because they do not take the individual region focus. Weeds and pests do not have boundaries like local governments do. There are some really good people in the region trying to look beyond their boundaries and trying to figure out how we make that action happen where we are doing the projects together, where we are integrating them, where we are managing in the same way at the same time for greater impact.

The prioritisation across boundaries is positive. Through CPMG and FBA, we are about to go into a formal way of prioritising pests across the region and then state government work in that space through LGAQ was announced. That is an example where that duplication was about to happen and neither of us knew that we were in that space working on the prioritisation. With the CPMG and the FBA, that was about getting a robust tool that decreases the competition between councils so that we can prioritise regionally and then have decisions regionally about where we focus the money. So the membership fees that CPMG gets, or the projects that FBA can run with the limited funds that we have, we can do it as a collective and then not have councils going, 'But that neighbour got that project and this neighbour got that project and why didn't I get my project funded?' It is about the bigger picture

Funding models that require collaboration to apply are really good. With the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative, we put up three applications. We got one, which was the standard pigs and dogs, which was a continuation. To me, that was disappointing, because funding was written as, 'If you collaborate, you will have a great application.' So we collaborated. FBA wrote the application and then we got asked not to submit the application, because we were not a council. The issue with that is, when you are working with up to six councils—which for two of our projects we were going across the region—you are putting the ownership with one council out of those six, not an organisation such as CPMG, which is who we changed the application to be written from. We do not want one person, or one local government in charge of that. It just does not help that bigger picture and does not help people see beyond the boundaries that they are used to working within. I have only been in the NRM industry for about 18 months, but I do not hear a lot of the collaboration talked up and promoted. Some of that community awareness I know can be bolstered and could be targeted towards rewarding those great projects where things are happening and where people are looking over their fence and working with their neighbour, whether it is an NRM counterpart or whether it is another council.

In closing, my recommendation is that regional collaboration is critical. Funding and support for coordination activities and joint across-boundary projects do not really exist. Everyone is trying to find where that funding is and organisations like CPMG would be more effective if they could tap into some of that kind of funding. That would make them more efficient and they would be able to get projects off the ground quicker.

Uniformity across boundaries and agencies—whether that is compliance, whether it is education; it does not matter what type of activity. Leading by example—consistency in compliance and management and then making research count. I think there is a strong call to revisit the extension officers available. I am not here to say whether those extension officers need to support landholders or need to support different levels of government, but having that support there would be valuable in both of those instances. Shared community campaigns for education awareness, but with one organisation taking the lead on that, not several. That is it, really.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I will go to the deputy chair for questions.

Mr WEIR: This lack of coordination that you have talked about extensively, what do you see as the answer to it? You are talking about local government, state government, agri-political bodies.

Ms French: Yes. I honestly think that people do not talk enough. Groups are not talking to each other enough. That is why FBA has come in and really tried to support CPMG, because they recognise it as a group that is trying to talk to each other, that is trying to share information. They are keen to get projects that benefit more than their own backyard. I think some of it is about talking and maybe some clarity. I have not done a lot of the analysis or research of this, but some organisations could be doing awareness raising, or community education where maybe they should not be the lead agency in that, but they are putting resources into it. I spent 10 years in local government and I would say that you feel like you have to promote everything. If it is the state government's responsibility to do community education awareness around weeds or pests, then we should let them do that, but the council would feel like they need to enter their community and do their own stuff, so they are probably spending their own money in that space. As limited as it is, it is still resources.

Mr WEIR: And the allocation of funding, how do you—

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Ms French: I do not see a lot of funding, to be honest. FBA works with multimillion dollar funding sometimes and bigger programs, but the stuff that I have seen for weeds is smaller buckets of money. I like the fact that it requires collaboration and multiple partners. It does not worry me that funds could then be split up across a larger area, but I would say that most people in this room would say that they think that funding in regard to pests and weeds has reduced over the decades.

Mr WEIR: How much of that would be targeted at the giant rat's tail grasses as opposed to—

Ms French: Yes, I would say that there would be more funding at the higher levels of government and agencies that would be focused towards GRT. I cannot even speak about maintenance from a local government perspective. I did not work as a pest management officer, but I would assume that they would have larger budgets for maintaining than trying to mitigate the impacts of various pests. GRT is definitely one of them and it is definitely one, when I have looked and asked and conducted workshops myself in my role, of their top five problems—if not for three out of our six councils—the top, No. 1 pest concern, yes.

Mr WEIR: Thank you.

Mr MADDEN: I am very interested in what you are talking about, Ms French. I think this might be a good time to remind you and the other people present today of one of our terms of reference for why we are here. It says—

The committee will investigate and report to Parliament on the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland, particularly whether—

and I will read the fifth term of reference—

Federal, state and local government weeds programs are coordinated to maximise their achievements and to have a whole of government approach.

It seems what you are talking about addresses that aspect that we have to report to parliament about. Do you have any thoughts as to how we can coordinate the three levels of government? I know that it is a tough one, but do you see a state board? A state agency that represents local government, state government and federal government? Do you see that as addressing that coordination aspect?

Ms French: My gut, very quick answer would be that if you call it 'state', it is not going to work. You cannot call it that, even if you set it up that way. There has to be a lot of local leadership and ownership and input into that. An example for you would be—and I am not saying that this is not a good project and it is not the best way to run it—the LGAQ is doing the state prioritisation working group at the moment to look at regional priorities. That is great except that there is one person from each council who is allowed to sit on that group. That frustrates a number of people and I think it makes a lot of perspectives unheard. In my experience, which may be more limited than others, you cannot expect one person in one local government to represent the interests of everyone in that region, especially when you have such diverse, huge regions. I think that is sometimes why anyone who is not part of state government feels they are not listened to when that is where the funding is coming from.

I would start by looking at the membership of that but looking at how it is communicated back. It cannot all be in papers and reports that people have to access themselves. Some of it has to go back to the conversation and really having clarity about roles. Each level, layer or stakeholder should have a role and should know what their role is. Even though you might have a lead agency that might coordinate a group, then your next layer down, whether that is Biosecurity, AgForce as a stakeholder—every single person who is involved should know, for example, AgForce is going to do all the formal community engagement if we need to collect information from landholders. State government will worry about the funding and the programs and coordinate all that. Then you might have NRMs that are potentially responsible for some of the extension activities as well because they are already out there. They have people like RLF—regional landcare facilitators—out there or there are subregional groups. We have three in our region, for example, on the ground with landholders working on other projects. You may be able to use them for a different role. Then maybe local councils drive the community awareness and education or maybe they just do the community awareness and education through on-ground mechanisms, not the paper mechanisms. I think there is always room for more growth. It is really, really tricky. I do not honestly feel anyone really has the perfect answer. It is about how people feel in that process.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms French, for your contribution today. I call Mr Jim and Mrs Jenny Elliot from 'Koombooyana', Calliope.

ELLIOT, Mr Jim, Private capacity

CHAIR: Mr Elliot, are you seeking leave to table a submission?

Mr Elliot: Yes, I would like to seek leave to table that submission.

CHAIR: Leave is granted.

Mr Elliot: It would save a lot of time. It has the maps in it that I will refer to.

CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement in support of this submission?

Mr Elliot: Basically the information that is in my submission is the reiteration of what we went over in our field inspection today. I am unashamedly and openly critical of the government in the failure to control the rat's-tail on their land, which is the absolute source of all our problems for the downstream landowners. We talked about that this morning. I throw it open to you, Sir.

CHAIR: Thank you for that. Yes, you made your thoughts very abundantly clear to the committee members and I thank you for that. I also thank you and your wife for the wonderful hospitality extended to the committee.

Mr WEIR: In your opinion what is the best way to control this grass now that it has reached the stage that it has?

Mr Elliot: Ultimately I believe the only logical and practical control will be biological control. Unfortunately we do not have it at present. I also have landholdings and involvement out west. We had major problems out there with things that were spoken about earlier such as prickly pear, harrisia cactus, parthenium all of which are now fairly well under control. We have other pests that were imported into Australia like cane toads, which we do not have under control. We just hope that rat's-tail is one that they will find a biological control for. Joe Vitelli and his people at Biosecurity Queensland are working on it. They have a crown rot that they have trialled. In the three related plant species it seems to be reasonably effective on African lovegrass, partially effective on Parramatta but not very good on rat's-tail.

Mr WEIR: We have also heard from many sources that there has been a lack of control on government owned land.

Mr Elliot: The control on the area—and I speak specifically about the area across the road from me, which is Gladstone state development area; it is some 50,000 acres. If you have a look in my submission, on the third page you will see a map, which is a weed treatment notice to landholders near the Gladstone State Development Area. That was put out by the government, by their department, last year or at the end of the previous year with their plans for control—and I use that word 'control' rather facetiously. They show in purple that there was only a very, very narrow strip around the whole edge of the area. Basically the rest of the area was to receive no control.

I also found out that part of that was that they were trying to throw the responsibility back onto the leaseholder for the land. I have been screaming for years—and your local member is aware of it because we have had field days on that property up there—because there has been no control done of any consequence and anything that has been done you can see by your visual inspection has been ineffective. By that inspection today you could stand at the one point and see that control had been affected on a certain area—and that is marked in purple on the map—but over here the great bulk, 90 per cent of the property or whatever, there has been no attempt to control. That tells me that the government is saying, 'Yes, we have shown we can control but, no, we're not interested.' What else can a landholder downstream read from that action when you have proved you could do it, albeit there has been no follow-up to treat the isolated plants which will cause reinfestation, but you have not touched it? Therefore, are you interested in it? That is the question to the government people who run that property.

Consequently, to throw it on the land lessee and try to make him responsible for something—and we are not talking of a million dollar cost here; we are talking of a multimillion dollar cost to treat that land. I believe that is morally wrong and I cannot see it is even legally correct to try to make him do it. If the government went into a situation where they did a blanket spray, as was talked about earlier, and you knocked it down to the control that we all did when we first became aware of what rat's-tail was and then reduced that down to a spot spray situation, then I think you would be entitled to make the lessee responsible for it. Surely the owner of the land who has been there for 20 years or more must be responsible for the situation of the land as existed when they handed it over to the lessee.

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Mr WEIR: You mentioned in here the impact on the value of these lands that are impacted by giant rat's-tail grass. Do you have any evidence or anything that you can present to the committee to support that?

Mr Elliot: On the value of the land?

Mr WEIR: Yes.

Mr Elliot: Yes, we did. We had another meeting that was on a property owned by Trevor Dawson near the Fingerboard outside the Lowmead-Miriam Vale area. One of the speakers there was from the rural development bank—I am trying to remember the proper name. He stood up and spoke and said quite openly that it was one of the issues that they were taking into account now in relation to their valuation of lands for banking purposes for loans et cetera and the extent of rat's-tail on the land could seriously diminish it. There was specific discussion about some properties in the Gympie area that had suffered heavy rat's-tail down there that had already impacted on sales.

CHAIR: You outlined some figures today in our visits on carrying capacities for the lands affected by rat's-tail. Could you reiterate those figures for the benefit of Hansard please?

Mr Elliot: The average carrying capacity of land in this area is about a beast to 10 acres. That can be improved. As you saw on my property, on all my properties I go into a program for land improvement. I guess it is a bit of the blackfella in me that you work for the land; you should not work to destroy the land. I have proven the ability to develop that land in our area and I have improved that carrying capacity to about a beast to 4½ acres. However, if you get rat's-tail domination like we saw today in the Gladstone state lands, the man who is leasing it said it would only run a beast to 20. Having seen the density of it and the problems in that area, I doubt it would do a beast to 20. What that means is that even on his words—and he is the lessee knowing what will run on that property—you are halving the ability to run stock on that property. That seriously impacts its viability. If I let my country go, it would be five times worse than it is today.

Mr BUTCHER: Thank you for your time today. I do acknowledge the help you have given me in understanding giant rat's-tail grass and the visits that we have had up to your property in the past. My question is around the state development area. Do you believe that we could get on top of that area if we implemented what you said before about aerial spraying and getting onto it? Do you reckon we could control it in the Gladstone region?

Mr Elliot: I have stated on many occasions I do not believe we will ever eradicate rat's-tail, but I believe we can control it. If you have a look on my land—and the people were there today—you would get the impression driving through it that there is no rat's-tail there. I can assure you there is rat's-tail there; it takes an unending effort and it is not just one or two days a week. When that rat's-tail's head puts its spike up you have 48 hours before that seed is there. If you do not control it, each one of those seed heads puts out something like 80,000 seeds. If you miss one of them this year, it is a hell of a pain for next year. If you stand and look at that area out in the state development lands, one square metre of that is producing something like two million seeds and they float; they all come down the river. I do not think it would be easy, but yes, I do believe you can control it, not eradicate it.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your presentation here today and thank you for your hospitality again this morning. I would like to call Mr John White from Economic Development Queensland and Mr Darren Moore from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

MOOR, Mr Darren, Executive Director, Central Region, Department of Natural Resources and Mines

WHITE, Mr John, Projects Director Industrial, Economic Development Queensland

CHAIR: Gentlemen, again we are tight on time. You are welcome to make a very brief opening statement and then we will go to questions. You are welcome to skip the opening statement if you like.

Mr Moor: I am happy to take questions straight up. I do not need to provide you with an opening statement from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines' perspective.

Mr White: I might give you a quick overview of our management arrangements in the Aldoga area. EDQ has under lease about 6,800 hectares out there. That management structure is put in place through a grazing lease. It also has a specific weed management plan associated with it. The rent generated through that lease is put into that weed management plan, so there is a rental offset through that process as well.

Mr MADDEN: This might be a question for you, Mr White. We have heard about aerial spraying of areas. Has Economic Development Queensland considered a regular program of aerial spraying for this leased area?

Mr White: The weed management plan that we have in place does have that component. There is a range of aerial treatments and also treatment through burn-offs and those sorts of things as well as spot spraying. The areas that have been subject to that have focused on those buffer areas, so the Bruce Highway, for example, Gladstone-Mount Larcom Road over the last—that system has been in place since about 2013.

Mr MADDEN: We noticed when we inspected one property that the buffer was very well maintained and free of GRT but once you got beyond that buffer, then the GRT problem was obvious. Why can you not get that control right through? Why is it only the buffer that you keep clear of GRT? Why is it not the whole property?

Mr White: At the moment the plan has been to establish those buffers and I think you have seen the results of that.

Mr MADDEN: Yes, it is very good.

Mr White: There are opportunities to alter that plan once those areas have got more control, to expand those areas up the catchments, for example, and those sorts of things as well. That management plan is not a fixed document, it is something that is reviewed based on the results that we are achieving and also looking at what the other areas of opportunity are.

Mr MADDEN: It is certainly something you are looking to expand: to have the same level of weed control in the buffer area on the whole of the leased property?

Mr White: How we can expand better control across the entirety.

Mr MADDEN: Thank you.

Mr WEIR: We have been hearing a lot of reports about state owned land and assets and there being no proactive control over giant rat's tail grass. Do you have anything you would like to contribute to that?

Mr Moor: There is about 108 million hectares of non-freehold, or what we would call state owned land, in Queensland. However, across the vast majority of that there are actually lessees in place, permanent easement holders under a leasehold or a trustee arrangement. There is a difference between the amount of land that Natural Resources and Mines administers as opposed to what it is actually accountable for. The area that it is accountable for, the largest holding would be unallocated state land, then a few reserves which have no trustees and then, lastly, a number of blocks of freehold dirt that we might actually hold and manage directly ourselves. That actually results in us having active management responsibility over about point nine of a per cent of that total amount of land. Interestingly, that percentage holds both at the state level and also here within the Gladstone area itself. If I just take the Gladstone council area as a bit of an example, there is a little over a million hectares in the Gladstone area, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has active management over about 9,800 hectares of that, which includes a number of offshore islands. When you cut it down in terms of the amount of land that Natural Resources and Mines has within this local government area, it is fairly small—less than one per cent, if you like, of total land mass.

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Despite that, we, like many other landowners within this part of the world, do have rat's tail grass on our properties. We, across the state, spend about \$21,000 a year on rat's tail control. In this part of the world I think we are spending around \$1,000 a hectare on land that has actually got rat's tail grass on it. We have two properties in particular that we are aware of in the Gladstone area that we are dealing with rat's tail grass on. We use contractors. Our parcels are too small for aerial control. It is very much an on-ground operation.

Mr WEIR: What do you mean you are spending \$1,000 a hectare?

Mr Moor: We are spending on annum, in terms of the contract costs, our expenditure on those parcels is around \$1,000 a hectare.

Mr WEIR: That is not just on rat's tail grass?

Mr Moor: No, on rat's tail grass. When we are controlling rat's tail grass, that is what the cost of that to us is.

Mr WEIR: That seems incredibly high. What about areas where you lease and have trustees on to ensure that they are maintaining their obligation towards control of giant rat's tail grass?

Mr Moor: It is fair to say that the lease conditions will include a requirement for the lessee to actually control that. However, the primary piece of legislation that puts responsibility is actually administered by DAF in terms of the Biosecurity Act. I am sure you are well and truly familiar with that. That is the primary mechanisms that both leaseholders and also freehold landowners are managed under within Queensland. That is essentially a tenure blind piece of legislation.

CHAIR: In terms of some of the earlier witnesses we have heard here today, we have had a number of people raise the challenges that they have in terms of communicating with the managers of state government land. How would you respond to those concerns?

Mr Moor: Certainly where Natural Resources is involved our aim is to work, both in terms of the relative priority that we are expending on a particular weed in an area and also our day-to-day communications, with that local government or with those surrounding landowners. Whether it is a weed management perspective or a fire management perspective, that is exactly the approach that we take. Having said that though, I also readily accept that there is always room for improvement within those types of arrangements. I think the comments I have heard even while I have been here I would agree that at a state and local perspective we can always do better in that space.

CHAIR: Would there be scope or capacity for involvement in groups like the Capricorn Pest Management Group? Should DNR have some sort of representation in groups like that so that there are actually relationships being built and collaboration occurring?

Mr Moor: Certainly when we are a major landowner within a particular local government area I see no reason why we wouldn't. We contribute in that manner, from a fire management perspective, into local fire management arrangements. Where it is appropriate for us to participate in a pest perspective I would see no issue with us doing that where we are a significant landowner within that local government area. If I can, I will correct your statement before. It is actually \$1,000 per year on those two known infestations within the Gladstone area. You were correct, I was mistaken.

CHAIR: Thank you for setting the record straight there.

Mr BUTCHER: Mr Moor, can I just get you to clarify, did you say you spend \$21,000 a year in the state development area on rat's tail grass?

Mr Moor: No, we spend \$21,000 across the entire state on rat's tail grass per annum.

Mr BUTCHER: Total?

Mr Moor: Yes.

Mr BUTCHER: Do you think that is enough? Is there more work that we can do? I was just reading the previous speaker's submission about the considerable cost, and he only has 500 acres. \$21,000 would not seem a considerable cost to me for the size of the state development area compared to his private land package.

Mr Moor: I cannot offer any comment in relation to the state development area. The state invests around \$3.5 million per annum on fire and pest management activities across unallocated state land per annum. Of that spend, \$21,000 is spent on giant rat's tail grass.

Mr BUTCHER: One per cent?

Mr Moor: That is the expenditure to date.

Mr BUTCHER: I have a follow up question to Mr White. The work that you have been doing in the buffer zones sounds like a great idea and, going back to the previous speaker again, I would expect that the previous speaker would not just do his driveway and hope that the giant rat's tail grass does not come back to his driveway. Shouldn't we be looking at the whole area rather than just the buffer zone, because by the time we make sure that the buffer zone is clear and we go and start looking at the river ways or the rest of the property, the buffer zone is going to be full of rat's tail again with the amount of time in which it spreads. Is that a good practice or are we looking to do things better or differently?

Mr White: I suppose the buffer zones is where we have started from. In terms of what that level of investment has been, that is about \$130,000 a year in rental offsets that goes into that, between that and rates. That is about half a million dollars over the last five years or so.

Mr BUTCHER: Is it good bang for your buck if we are not controlling the whole problem? I can guarantee if we concentrate on the buffer for now, in 12 months time that buffer will be full of it again.

Mr White: It is trying to secure the property and, as that is secured, move our focus into other areas.

Mr BUTCHER: Who has come up with that strategy?

Mr White: That was developed ourselves in consultation with council back in 2012 when that lease was first put together and it has also been reviewed as well.

Mr WEIR: You made a comment about rental rebates. What do you mean by that?

Mr White: Instead of getting rent from that property, that rent is provided through in-kind work. It is spraying and other land management practices on that land. The ultimate objective of that land is to support industrial development. The grazing lease is an interim land use as that area transitions to a more urban form of development. You probably saw some of that today with some of the infrastructure in that particular area.

Mr WEIR: How do you work out what percentage you are going to give in a rebate?

Mr White: We took that lease structure to the market and there was an open market process where people bid, if you like, for that land and for that lease. From there we selected the current lessee and put the lease into place.

Mrs GILBERT: When a landholder leases land from the state government, if they let their property get out of control from how they first get it and they are not following up on pest control and that type of thing, do you take it back? Do you remove it from that landholder and cancel their lease? Do you go out and do inspections like you might do on a household lease?

Mr White: In terms of EDQ's lease, we have a quarterly reporting structure where we see what activities have occurred. They can be verified. There are also mechanisms in the lease if lease conditions are not complied with. There is a remedy situation which ultimately might end up with a lease being cancelled. But that is only for EDQ's particular lease.

Mrs GILBERT: Does the landholder seeking the lease have to have a level of qualification to show they know what they are doing?

Mr White: When we went to put that lease in place we looked at several selection criteria, part of which was capability and capacity to administer the lease and certainly track record and those sorts of things was a feature of that.

CHAIR: Listening to the earlier discussion, your organisation has been in control of that land since 2012; is that right?

Mr White: That is when we changed our leasing structure to what we have currently today. The land has been held by the state, as I understand it, since the late nineties when the state development area was declared over that particular portion.

CHAIR: In terms of your organisation though, we are talking five years. From the tenor of the discussion it sounded like you are just starting with the boundary control. From what we observed today there are still significant infestations of GRT on your properties and that seems to create significant problems, particularly at times of flooding, for nearby landholders. At what point in the plan that you are working off do you anticipate that there will be more extensive attempts to eradicate GRT from the land that your organisation controls?

Mr White: We have a review midyear and that is the opportunity to again look at how those buffer areas are working and then look if we can shift resources from those to other areas.

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CHAIR: You do not have a specific, written-down plan with time frames around when that will occur—like when you are going to move beyond the buffers?

Mr White: Not at present. Our focus has been on securing those areas first.

Mr MADDEN: You mentioned doing the review periodically with a view towards checking if weeds are being controlled. Is that following the terms of the lease? If you looked at the lease would it say you must do this? Is that pursuant to the terms of the lease?

Mr White: The weed management plan is a condition of the lease. That review looks at what activities are to occur, have they occurred and adjustments from there as well.

Mr MADDEN: Is this a standard lease document that applies to all properties? Are they all the same?

Mr White: This is one we developed particularly for the precinct.

Mr MADDEN: Would you be able to provide the committee with a draft copy of that lease—not somebody's lease, just a blank one.

Mr White: I would have to seek approval to do that, but, yes.

Mr MADDEN: Thank you.

CHAIR: There has been some discussion this afternoon around clustering properties for management. Would that be something that either DNRM or EDQ would be interested in if that was put forward as a management strategy?

Mr Moor: From Natural Resources and Mines' perspective we would be quite interested in that in terms of it is very consistent with the fundamental principles by which we manage land now in terms of involvement with councils and surrounding landowners. If we can strengthen that and do it in a better way that is something that we would participate in.

Mr White: From EDQ, we would support it, yes.

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

CHAIR: Dr Robertson, thank you for appearing today. Thank you for attending the various sessions this morning. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Dr Robertson: Yes, I would. As we have heard and I imagine submissions have said, we are dealing with a very difficult grass given its biology and given its ability to spread. The other complicating factor is that there are many species, and identification is quite difficult when you have so many native species but also introduced *Sporobolus* species. Over the years we have built up some knowledge about rat's-tail grass. We pretty much know what it is and what it does. We have various tools to apply that with varying success. I believe we have a legislative and planning framework that allows action to occur. It is just, as I said previously, a very hard thing to control.

My feeling, and the way we have approached other large-scale things, is that it is going to require—we have heard it through previous submissions as well—an integrated regional and local approach, coming together to do that. It is going to require a multipronged approach, where you have a number of different things. We have heard a lot about biocontrol. We are really working on biocontrol at the moment, but it might not necessarily be a silver bullet and you will still need those other approaches to complement it.

I think—and we have heard it, too—that it is all about a partnership at all levels, from the federal level right through government levels and through to regional community groups and landholders. There is no other way to tackle it because it is such a difficult thing. It has to consider a multi objective as well. We are talking about everything that ranges from where it does not occur, eradication approaches where it does occur in thick amounts and different strategies. The integration of those objectives has to be in the planning and the approach taken. That is probably all I have to say, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Some statements were made in the earlier session about the lack of capacity under the act for councils to hold state government owned lands to the same level of accountability as private landholders. Do you have any comment in relation to that?

Dr Robertson: Under the new Biosecurity Act, local government can serve a notice on state owned property, or state managed property at least. The managers of state property do have the obligation to minimise the biosecurity risk of weeds.

CHAIR: That includes the quangos or the power companies and those sorts of organisations?

Dr Robertson: Yes.

CHAIR: There has been some discussion—I guess this would be more of an issue closer to the coast—about the rise of hobby farmers versus the people who are running quite serious commercial operations. Does Biosecurity Queensland have any strategies in relation to attempting to increase the knowledge and the skills of people who are engaging in hobby farming?

Dr Robertson: That is a difficult one because there are a lot of them, including myself. We try to do education and awareness building. We have multiple fact sheets that we try to keep quite updated about the threats of different weeds and pest animals. We try to assist where we can through local government in having those resources there or educating to really bring about that awareness and capability building in hobby farmers, if you like. In some sense, they have to make themselves accessible to that information, too. A lot of the emphasis in the new Biosecurity Act is landholders needing to be aware of their biosecurity implications. The onus is really back on them to try to improve their knowledge, if you like.

Mr WEIR: Where I come from on the central downs we are starting to see weeds developing resistance. We have been bombarding them with chemicals for some time. Is there any sign of chemical resistance in giant rat's-tail grass?

Dr Robertson: Not that I am aware, but certainly the effectiveness of the chemical, as we heard this morning, depends on the climate, the rainfall, the soil type. We are doing a lot of work in the persistence of the chemical itself. Are there other rates or other approaches we can take to make sure it maintains its effectiveness? I think that is where it is at. There is a whole array of different research, including biocontrol, that we are doing towards rat's-tail grass. Some of the work has been done with Gladstone Regional Council and other regional councils.

Mr WEIR: How long have you been working on biocontrol? Where is that research being done?

Dr Robertson: That research is being done down in the Ecosciences Precinct in Brisbane. That is where we have all the quarantine ability and everything else. We also work with South Africa, to look at agents that we could bring across that might be effective. We do a lot of work with them.

We currently have a research program looking for something that might be attacking where it occurs natively. We are also looking at other agents, like the rust that was mentioned earlier. That has not worked that well up here. It was developed in New South Wales, looking for other agents that might work—endemic agents that might work on rat's-tail grass. It is a really difficult one. With biocontrol you have complications where you have native species as well. We do not want something that is going to jump across. That is why it takes some time. Some of our agents, of course, might be good in dense populations of rat's-tail grass but you actually have to mechanically move them across to other areas because they might not spread. A whole integration of methods is really important to emphasise, I think, rather than hoping that this thing is going to work. Often it takes multiple agents; it does not take just one. It might be effective in a local region but it might not be the be-all and end-all across many different climates.

CHAIR: A couple of points were raised in earlier discussions. There was some discussion around roles that could be played by groups like the rural fire brigades and other groups that are moving on to land. Does Biosecurity Queensland have any strategies or thoughts in relation to how those groups might be incorporated into a biosecurity plan?

Dr Robertson: A lot of the biosecurity plans that are done at a local or regional level—the Biosecurity Act allows that to happen—do encourage all those major stakeholders that have some sort of say in that to be involved in that planning. A lot of local governments do that really well already. They will include all those involved to make sure it is a plan that represents their region; it is not just a plan for the local government. That is where I think a lot of them—we are not just talking about a local government shire—can be a plan for a number of regions, which we do see in some areas, which is an amalgamation, if you like, of different local governments and the stakeholders within those. There is the ability to do that. I think that is where it is going to be the most effective, that you make sure those groups feel a part of it. We certainly can do that within research programs or approaches that look at a particular issue, and GRT is certainly one of those where that sort of model can occur. We do it in other areas as well for other weeds.

CHAIR: You mentioned the centre at Boggo Road, the environmental centre. Probably 500 metres from there is the Translational Research Institute, which is tasked with taking health research and turning it into practical clinical outcomes. This is a problem right across the sphere in terms of academic work not necessarily translating into the real world. Somebody has raised that issue in relation to the research that is happening in Charters Towers. Does Biosecurity Queensland have any strategies in relation to trying to improve translating research into action?

Dr Robertson: I am a little concerned about that comment that was made earlier. We give a lot of addresses to the Queensland Weed Symposium, which is every two years. Our researchers go there and give the update on where that research is at. Also every year we send out to local governments the technical highlights, which is the sort of synopsis of where we are at on around 40 projects that we do across pest animals and weeds. We have all the fact sheets, and our local officers also engage where they can with local authorities and also local, state and different groups. While that can improve, without a doubt—I am sure it can—maybe some of the penetration of some of those methods that we are already doing is not as good as we had hoped.

Mr MADDEN: Dr Robertson, as you would be aware, to manage a weed there are two aspects: the actual control of the weed in situ and the containment of the weed, to make sure it is not spread. A number of speakers here today talked about the issue of spread—spread with regard to vehicles, spread with regard to stock ingesting GRT and then moving to another property. Do you think that aspect of containment has been adequately dealt with in the Biosecurity Act? Do you think that is something we need to look at from an educational point of view, a legislative point of view or both?

Dr Robertson: We have been promoting quarantine approaches for a long time now, of general weed hygiene. We promote that the best practice is that you quarantine anything that comes on to your property for that five to 10 days relating to the weed and also you do something similar when you transport or you are actually notified to say that it has been quarantined well or has not been exposed to particular weeds. There is voluntary weed hygiene that livestock owners can use. How well that is used or how well that is policed is a whole different story. Often you do not know whether an animal has been on a contaminated property or not. It is just too difficult to do that. While attempts have been made at state and federal levels to introduce weed declaration into the waybills as well, we continue to look at ways to try to give it a bit more power than it has at the moment. It is an extremely difficult thing to get some compliance to or even ensure there is compliance with.

Mr MADDEN: Is something along the lines of a declaration when stock are sold—weaners or stall cattle—that certain weeds are on the property of the vendor, a practical thing that could be done?

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Dr Robertson: It may well be. I think we would have to look more at how much accuracy you would have to allow that to happen well and allow for a compliance action if it was not. To make sure, you have to have fairly accurate information. I think one of the best ways to ensure we have a declaration is to tick a box, like you do with selling cattle at the moment, to say that they have not been on contaminated land or they have not got within a withholding period, for example. I still think that is probably a good way to do it.

Mr MADDEN: This has happened with the selling of houses. You must declare certain things—that you have a safety switch, if you have asbestos. It is a tick-a-box situation. I know that you cannot really compare selling a house to selling a weaner, but I think it is something that is worthy of investigation.

Dr Robertson: I agree.

Mr BUTCHER: It sounds like you are doing a fair bit of work in the controls space. Is there any way that those controls can be fast tracked? Will putting more money into it make the controls come forward a lot quicker? Is there an answer to this problem through finance or is it just time?

Dr Robertson: If we are talking about biocontrol, I think it is timing. It is not something that you can just speed up. More funding probably means marginal speeding up.

Mr BUTCHER: Is the federal government helping, along with you guys, in the same sphere?

Dr Robertson: Yes, they are.

Mr BUTCHER: Are they doing the same work or are they doing different work?

Dr Robertson: No. There are only a couple of biocontrol science groups within Australia. CSIRO does some, you have ourselves and there is a group in Queensland and then you have a group in South Australia. We really see it as an important attribute to retain. It is a core capability that we need to retain, because they are doing some great work across a whole number of species. What we have at the moment is federal funding to help with a number of species, and we put up GRT as a key one within that that we need to have biocontrol on. A lot of the work that we do on herbicide methods, on grazing approaches and the application of different regimes that might help with that comes out of precepts moneys and the moneys that the state puts in towards that, as well.

CHAIR: Dr Robertson, in terms of your interactions with other government departments that have management of lands, say, Natural Resources, Education Queensland or councils and other levels of government, how do you find the interaction with managers of land in terms of executing your duties as part of Biosecurity Queensland?

Dr Robertson: We have the State Land Pest Management Committee, which is really the state owners. That committee is at a state level. Most of the meetings are in Brisbane, so we get the head office representatives. That is really about each of those land managers making sure that we have consistent approaches for weeds and pest animals across the state, so we are not doing things differently or ineffectively. Also, it is a chance to update about the different activities that might occur. I stress it is at the state level, so we are not getting down to what is happening in a particular region. I cannot speak for those organisations because they have their own budgeting and privatisation processes. We try to make it consistent about what the key species are that we are dealing with and the key threats to Queensland.

I heard before that there is no coordination of pest animals and weeds across Queensland. We have a Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Committee, on which we have relevant state agencies or many of the state agencies. We have the NRM group collective, we have local government through the LGAQ and we have AgForce. That is about overseeing the development of the Queensland pest animal and weed strategy for Queensland, which is just about finalised now. That has been out for public comment for some time. We have just gone back to review that and put it towards the committee. That is where the input needs to be. That is where we all agree on what is the way forward and the approach. Again, it does not get down to what we need to do about GRT in the Gladstone region—it is not at that level—but there is plenty of planning mechanisms and collaborative mechanisms under that that we can utilise to allow that sort of planning and action to occur.

CHAIR: In the earlier session the notion was put forward by somebody that there needs to be more involvement or accountability for land managers of government land closer to where the land is actually being managed. What I saw in the visits that we did today is that the land managers who were there, the private land managers, certainly have a very good understanding of issues, very good Gladstone

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practices and were very committed to trying to eradicate this. I take on board what you are saying about the state level of that other group that you are referring to, but do you think there is some room for establishing land management practices or advisory groups at a much lower level, much closer to the problems?

Dr Robertson: I would answer that in a couple ways. Part of what we go to—and I think Rebecca French referred to it—is that we are going through a process of giving much more transparency and joint decision-making over the precept and the state funding. Just last week, and I chair it at the present time, we had a state oversight group and there are representatives from each region which is a collective of local governments. We are looking at a model whereby we make those decisions at a local level. The decisions are not done there. There are equivalent regional groups that will pull together the relevant bodies as well, to talk about what are the regional priorities for those and to put forward that the moneys that are spent under precepts and also the state moneys go towards those regional or statewide priorities. There is a process there and I think we are improving it out of sight.

Also, I keep coming back to the regional or local biosecurity plans that have developed under the Biosecurity Act. That really should be a reflection of who is involved—land managers or whoever—in that regional local area. It is really that ability. It is about the plan, but it is very much about the communication between that and all working towards similar goals. I think that is a great mechanism, without a doubt. We see that in the regions and the regional state representatives are there as well. It is important that that inclusiveness is still there and those plans actually mean something.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your appearance here today. That concludes our public hearing. I thank all the witnesses who have taken the time to appear before the committee. I know that many of you have travelled significant distances to be here and the committee does appreciate you making that effort. We wish you a very safe journey home. The transcript of today's hearing will be available on our website for public consumption at some point in the near future. I formally declare closed this hearing of the Agriculture and Environment Committee.

Committee adjourned at 2.52 pm