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DALRYMPLE  
LANDCARE  
COMMITTEE

28 January 2004

Native Vegetation Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
LB2, Collins Street East  
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

## SUBMISSION

### Queensland's Vegetation Management Act Impedes Control of Declared Woody Weeds

#### SUMMARY

Control of declared woody weeds, such as *Parkinsonia* (*Parkinsonia aculeata*), is being delayed and prevented by the over-zealous interpretation and implementation of the Vegetation Management Act 1999 in Queensland. Although "clearing noxious or introduced (non-native) plant species on leasehold and freehold land is listed as exempt from requiring a tree clearing permit, clearing applications have been required in Queensland to proceed with best practice management of soil-applied residual herbicides and mechanical control of woody weeds.

Landholders are obliged to manage Class 2 weeds (eg *Parkinsonia*) as per the Land Protection Act 2002. In the Cape River Catchment (Dalrymple Shire, North Queensland), two woody weed management projects with \$0.56M of Federal and State Government funds and \$1.25M of landholders and other contributors' funds are at risk of not achieving all weed control outcomes for the catchment due to hurdles and delays imposed by interpretation of the Vegetation Management Act. There is currently \$280 000 of government funding unspent, awaiting the outcome of vegetation management decisions to permit weed control to continue before June 2004. A failure to develop a catchment approach to weed management due to legislative requirements would be an unsatisfactory outcome. What are the implications for future woody weed control in areas of native vegetation?

#### BACKGROUND

The Cape River Catchment, north Queensland, is 2.1M hectares of predominantly open eucalypt savannah with numerous major watercourses. The Statewide Landcover and Trees Study (Slats) Report (NR&M, 2003) indicated the wooded vegetation cover of the entire Dalrymple Shire was 84% in 1999. Cape River Catchment includes 70 beef cattle stations, five irrigation farms and the White Mountains National Park. *Parkinsonia* has expanded rapidly in key areas of the catchment with twenty properties having substantial infestations, while others have small strategic outbreaks.

The Dalrymple Landcare Committee Inc along with five sub-catchment landcare groups, Dalrymple Shire Council, research agencies (Tropical Weeds Research Centre NR&M, and CSIRO) and a registered training organisation (RITE) have implemented a catchment

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## **Queensland's Vegetation Management Act Impedes Control of Declared Woody Weeds.**

approach to this weed problem. The project period is from April 2002 to June 2004. An aerial survey identified all infestations. Isolated scattered infestations across the top of the catchment have been basal-bark sprayed by weed spray teams. Best practice methods emerging from research within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines were used to manage larger infestations by hand-applying a soil-applied residual herbicide (Graslan) and mechanical control using a manoeuvrable front-mounted bladeplough (Ellrott plough).

Funding for the weed project has come from Weeds of National Significance (Natural Heritage Trust) and Queensland Department of Primary Industries –Burdekin Rangelands Reef Initiative. Weed management and policy is one of Queensland's Department of Natural Resources and Mines core business activities. Whilst it has provided in-kind support to research best practice management for parkinsonia, other sections of the NR&M department have put major impediments in the way of controlling weeds.

### **PROBLEM 1:**

Interpretation of the VMA has resulted in the need for tree clearing applications because Parkinsonia occurs along alluvial floodplains which is perceived to be "environmentally sensitive areas". There are costs associated with preparing and lodging applications and departmental delays of at least four to five months in processing applications. Permits granted to five initial properties in 2003 stipulated Graslan could not be applied within 200 metres of river courses. This contradicts the Graslan label which recommends a 100metre buffer from all watercourses. When this discrepancy was queried, the response from the NR&M Minister was that the watercourse and adjacent habitat are to be protected as per Vegetation Management Policies (letter dated 23\10\2003 Ref No N/03/12681).

An additional seven property owners have applied for permits to hand-apply Graslan to approximately 1600 hectares of Parkinsonia scattered over a 40 000 hectare area. These applications are still being processed four months after lodgement (including one freehold application which should be processed within 28 days).

This delay in permit processing has resulted in:-

- (a) missing the best time of year to apply Graslan (i.e to dry soil to minimise run-off and off-target damage (Moreton *et al*, 1989)).
- (b) Increased period of time that the sixteen long-term unemployed people from the weed spray teams have been stood down due to no continuation of weed work. Two troop carriers are sitting idle each month at a cost of \$1400 per month.

### **PROBLEM 2:**

A \$10 000 trial on six properties in the Cape River Catchment to use the Ellrott plough on Parkinsonia was cancelled in November 2003, until the NR&M's interpretation of the Vegetation Management Act advises of implications for mechanical control and if this procedure is to be considered as "thinning". This front-mounted blade plough is manoeuvrable around mature native trees, however there is concern from Regional Vegetation Management Officers about impact on native seedlings and saplings. Dalrymple Landcare Committee members consider this impact is negligible considering the shire has 84% woody vegetation cover (NR&M 2003). Funding for this catchment project ceases in June 2004. The Dalrymple Landcare Committee is doubtful when and if the Ellrott plough can be trialed in the area and there will be no time for follow up work.

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### **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:**

1. Simple guidelines for all Regional Vegetation Management Officers and landholders to follow to determine when tree clearing permits are required \ not required for woody weed control.
2. Improved definitions of "environmentally sensitive areas" where mechanical or chemical control of weeds is an issue.
3. Training for Vegetation Management Officers so they can recognise control of woody weeds can increase biodiversity, maintain ecological processes and allow for ecologically sustainable land use (as per Vegetation Management Act 1999). Ensure Vegetation Management Officers understand the landholder's responsibility within the Land Protection Act 2002 and how both Acts should link and support each other.
4. Adherence to label recommendations for herbicides.
5. Quick turnaround of applications to control weeds (ideally 1-2 months), if clearing applications are required.

### **REFERENCES:**

Moreton, Johnstone and Simanton (1989). "Movement of tebuthiron applied to wet and dry rangeland soils". Weed Science 137, pp 117-122.

Natural Resources and Mines (2003) "Land cover change in Queensland, A Statewide Landcover and Trees Study Report (SLATS).

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