

## **6. Resources and Support for Weed Management**

A range of Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments programs can assist landholders to deal with weed problems. Some offer technical expertise, on-ground support and others provide funding for weed projects. On the whole most government programs are aimed at dealing with well-recognised weed problems such as the prevention of the introduction of species yet to be found in Australia<sup>15</sup> and with the control of noxious weeds as they affect the productivity levels of agricultural and pastoral land or weeds considered to be of national significance. Very little emphasis is placed on the ever-increasing problem of lesser known naturalised weeds or the introduction of plant species found growing elsewhere in Australia that have the potential to become problem weeds.

A number of non-government organisations have programs that deal with weed issues as part of broader land management objectives. Some are targeted specifically for indigenous communities. Unfortunately there are not programs available at all these levels that deal exclusively with weed issues on Aboriginal land.

### **6.1 Commonwealth Government**

#### **6.1.1 Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS)/Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS)**

NAQS was established in 1989 by the Commonwealth Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests Australia (AFFA), formerly Department of Primary Industries and Energy. Formerly NAQS was run under the NT Government through the NTDPIF via commonwealth funding but has recently moved back to direct commonwealth control.

NAQS activities include surveying for weeds, insect pests and diseases in northern Australia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. The primary goal is to provide early detection and warning of new quarantine threats or incursions. In the Northern Territory, surveys are systematically carried out along the coast by visiting communities and outstations within 20 km of the coastline. Currently botanists survey for all weeds (including non-targeted NAQS weed species) and cultivated plants. Lists of targeted NAQS species can be found in Waterhouse & Mitchell (1998).

This service provides extremely useful information to the NLC via regular reports of species found.

#### **6.1.2 Natural Heritage Trust**

The Natural Heritage Trust is an environmental funding initiative of the Federal Government. NHT expenditure is currently estimated at \$1.25 billion. The trust is a partnership bringing together the efforts of individuals, communities and governments, targeting our environmental problems at their source. It focuses on five key environmental themes: land, vegetation, rivers, coasts and marine, and biodiversity.

The programs of the NHT play a role in developing sustainable agriculture and natural resource management, as well as protecting biodiversity through improved management and delivery of resources. The trust provides funding for environmental activities at a community level, a regional level, a state/territory level and at a national level. At the commonwealth level, the NHT is administered by a Ministerial Board comprising the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy.

##### **NHT in the Northern Territory**

The NT Department of Lands, Planning & Environment is the lead agency in relation to the NHT in the Northern Territory, including receipt and distribution of NHT funding.

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<sup>15</sup> The recently released National Weeds Strategy relies heavily on the precautionary principal stating that a plant should not be released into any area unless it can be shown that it will not become a serious weed. South Australia restricts production to native plant species on pastoral leases based on one of the objectives of the Pastoral Act: "the prevention or minimisation of degradation of or other damage to the land and its indigenous plant and animal life". This wording is very similar to those used in the NT Pastoral Land Act.

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Other NT Government agencies who control NHT programs and have an interest in NHT are the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, and the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory. The Landcare Unit in the Natural Resources Division of the PWCNT provides support to community groups and organisations who receive NHT funding. NHT Programs operating in the Northern Territory are:

- Bushcare: National Vegetation Initiative.
- National Landcare Program.
- National Rivercare Program.
- National Reserves System Program.
- Farm Forestry Program.
- Endangered Species Program.
- National Wetlands Program.
- Waterwatch.
- Australia Fisheries Action Program.
- Waste Management Action Program.
- Coast and Clean Seas—Marine Species Protection Program; Clean Seas Program.
- Introduced Marine Pests Program; and Monitoring Program.

Assistance for on-ground weed control is generally restricted to weeds of national significance (WONS) under the National Weeds Strategy. As the funding allocation through WONS is fairly small it is likely that strategies and plans will be the focus for this support. Some assistance may be provided for weeds identified in a regional weed strategy acknowledged by the commonwealth as requiring specific NHT funding.

There may be a need for the NLC to actively encourage and support the writing of regional strategies under NHT applications so that funding for weed control can be accessed i.e. weed control outside of the weeds listed as of national significance.

Another option may be to demonstrate the importance of some of these other species so as to get them listed as of national significance. Perhaps a wider reference group from interested bodies which NLC could be a part of could help to lobby. NLC should liaise with other stakeholders re the formation of such a lobby group.

There has also some concern shown by Aboriginal people that the forms required for the NHT are too difficult and complex for them to fill out. The CFCU, the NHT Indigenous Facilitator and the staff of ALEP are all available to assist communities in the application process.

### **6.1.3 Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC)**

The ILC took over land acquisition and management functions from ATSIC in 1997. The ILC primarily funds land acquisition but has monies set aside for land management (\$12 million per annum). The initial step to accessing ILC land management funds is to fill in an ILC Land Use/Land Management Survey form (available from the CFCU) to describe the land management issues and problems you may have. The ILC in turn will ask people how their community wants to address these land management issues. There is no closing date for survey forms which can be lodged year round.

### **6.1.4 Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA)**

Offers labour market programs such as Green Corps and Work for the Dole.

Green Corps—Young Australians for the Environment—is managed by the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers (ATCV) on behalf of the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs and Environment Australia. Green Corps undertakes environment and heritage conservation projects developed in conjunction with non-government conservation organisations, community groups and local, state and territory governments. Each project involves teams of 10 Green Corps trainees and is around 6 months' duration. For the training component of the program see Green Corps under Training section. An example of the Green Corps' work on weeds was the eradication of introduced plants and the rehabilitation of native vegetation along Darwin's Bicentennial Park adjacent to the Esplanade foreshore and Lameroo Beach.



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This involved weed removal, planting, mulching and installing irrigation. A recent project at Nitmiluk National Park targeted a range of invasive weeds in the intensive use zones of the park and 15,000 noogoora burr plants were removed by handpulling at the Flora River Nature Park.

### **6.1.5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)**

ATSIC offers Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) which is a job creation program.

The scheme is a response by government to an initiative proposed by Aboriginal people. It began in 1977 as a measure to help Aboriginal communities develop an alternative to continued reliance on unemployment benefits. Under the scheme, members of participating communities, organisations or groups forgo individual unemployment benefits for a wages grant paid to the community. Each community decides on its own work program which can be very varied and hence provides great opportunities for addressing land management issues including weeds. The following is an example of a CDEP program from Manyallaluk, situated 100 km south-east of Katherine. Production and sale of artefacts, wardens/night patrol, office and financial management, child minding and basic early-childhood education, classroom and activity assistance, steel fabrication, community store, buffalo domestication, housing repairs and maintenance landscaping, tourism. Participating communities receive funds to meet the cost of insurance, administration and materials and tools for projects activities. Communities also receive funds for capital items such as equipment.

### **6.1.6 Tax rebate for Landcare**

The Australian Tax Office offers rebates on tax for some types of expenditure for preventing and treating land degradation. These are available under Subdivision 387-A of the Income tax Assessment Act 1997. They are open to primary producers and rural businesses for a variety of works including the eradication of plant pests. An annual limit of around \$5000 on expenditure applies. This rebate is also limited to incomes up to \$20,700 a year from primary production. Current information is available from the Australian Taxation Office.

Note: This tax deduction is relevant only to Aboriginal landholders who are involved in a business enterprise.

## **6.2 Northern Territory Government**

### **6.2.1 Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries (NTDPIF)**

*Weeds Branch, Resource Management Division*

The Northern Territory Weeds Management Strategy, 1996-2005, was released by the department in 1996. Its broad aim is to protect the Northern Territory economy, community, industries and environment from the adverse impacts of weeds. The key strategies include the prevention of the introduction and spread of weeds within and from the Territory and to ensure the integration of weed and land management. Essentially the department sees weed management as the responsibility of landowners.

The Weeds Branch forms part of the Resource Management Division and aims to work with landholders to implement the Strategy. It is also involved in drafting new weeds legislation for the Territory and the provision of assistance schemes.

The NTDPIF has a long history of assisting Aboriginal communities with weed management including Eley Station, Aminbidji, Nelson Springs and several central Australian communities. Training and extension work on Aboriginal land has been on an *ad hoc* basis for the last 20 years also.

NTDFIF weed officers servicing the NLC region are located at Darwin, Katherine, Jabiru, Tennant Creek, Timber Creek. Weeds officers provide advice on request.

## **Resources and Support for Weed Management**

### *Assistance schemes*

#### **Herbicide subsidy scheme:**

Allows a subsidy of 50% for landowners and managers to purchase herbicide. Further benefits of this scheme include advice on using appropriate control techniques and herbicides. The limitations are that the subsidy can only be claimed for weeds declared under the Noxious Weed Act. There is a minimum claim of \$100 dollars and an upper limit of \$5000. The subsidy is not available to home gardeners, municipal councils, government authorities or in horticultural or field crop areas.

Major limitations of this scheme include:

- Only noxious weeds are eligible for subsidy.
- The 50% rate means the full amount of money has to be found up front for purchase of herbicide with the landholder claiming back the subsidy on proof of receipts.
- Subsidy is not available if claimant's 50% contribution comes from government funding, even if the claimant is not a government body.

#### **Weed Management Assistance Scheme:**

This scheme targets returning mimosa-infested areas to a useful state within an agreed time frame. The emphasis is on mapping for forward planning, program management and a longer-term strategy. The scheme operates over a five-year period for each property. NTDPIF Weeds Branch officers provide training, supervision and support to the ground-control operations and assist with the planning and auditing of the scheme.

Eligible control options in 1998/99 include:

- Aerial mapping/photography/satellite imagery of area to be treated subsidised at 50% of cost.
- Aerial application of approved herbicides attract a 50% subsidy for application, herbicide and ferry costs.
- Mechanical control subsidised at a per hectare rate depending on methods used.
- Ground control attracts subsidies for the costs of chemicals and additives (50%), ATCV volunteers are subsidised at 50% rate.
- There is a 50% subsidy for the cost of seed or runners for any revegetation work.
- Landholders are bound by a written agreement that will be come part of the management plan once the new weeds Act becomes law.

Major limitations of this scheme include:

- To be eligible under this scheme land holders must be primary producers. This precludes most areas of Aboriginal land except the pastoral properties.
- The subsidy is available at the rate of 50% only therefore Aboriginal people have to come up with 50% of costs. However, in the first instance the full amount needs to be obtained with the subsidy being claimed on proof of receipts.
- Under this scheme there have been strategies to apply money across the areas of need however in a lot of cases Aboriginal land has missed out on funds. NLC could seek written details of the areas to which money has been allocated under this scheme. The amount of money available under this scheme is limited and not sufficient to satisfy demand.

## **6.2.2 Parks and Wildlife Commission on the Northern Territory (PWCNT)**

The Parks & Wildlife Commission of the NT acts as a management agency for the Conservation Land Corporation, Aboriginal and other land owners, managing 91 parks and reserves for conservation and the provision of nature-based tourism/recreational experiences for visitors. It is responsible for weed control within these parks and reserves. In the Murganella/Mt Borridale areas and the Adelaide River Districts the Commission is encouraging traditional owners to be involved in weed control on their own land. The need for training to assist traditional owners of Djukbinj National Park with weed control was identified and the NT Employment and Training Authority (NTETA) is meeting the costs of the training program.

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The Commission also has Ranger Training programs that in the past have allowed outside people to participate in various areas of training including weed control. For example, the Djelk rangers from Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation have attended a weed training camp on the Mary River.

Generally the Commission is primarily concerned with the areas of land under which it has managerial obligations. Outside these areas unless the surrounding land directly affects the relevant park or reserve, the Commission is reluctant to become involved in areas of land management including weed control or in the training of Aboriginal community rangers.

The Herbarium (Northern Territory Herbarium DNA) maintains a collection of dried plant specimens from all over the Territory. Although it concentrates on native flora it also has a good representation of weeds. A weeds reference collection is available for the general public to use on request. A database on the Territory's flora is also maintained and is accessible to the general public on request. A checklist of weed species is also maintained by the Herbarium although at present it is in draft form and is a working copy for herbarium staff only. The official checklist of the Vascular Plants of the Northern Territory gives broad distribution data and has annotations as to a plants weed status (see Dunlop 1996).

The PWCNT support two NHT-funded Indigenous Land Management facilitators in Darwin and Alice Springs. These positions work with Aboriginal people to develop and build their capacity to manage their lands through planning, technical advice and support. The facilitators role is also to provide advice and support, primarily through the natural heritage trust and other sources as necessary. The ILMF positions are part of a network of 12 funded across Australia for three years. All activity is aimed at working off-reserve along the wishes of traditional owners. The NLC and the CLC along with other land councils and government departments sit on a steering committee for these positions. Their work has an off-reserve focus. Both the CLC and the NLC sit on the steering committee for these positions.

### **6.2.3 Department of Lands, Planning & Environment**

#### *Landcare NT*

Landcare is a community-based approach to fixing environmental problems. The National Landcare program (NLP) is funded from the NHT. It supports collective action by the community to manage environmental and natural resources sustainably in partnership with government. The emphasis is on resource management at the catchment and regional level. Funding is typically available to support projects initiated by the community and that address issues on public and private land for public benefit. For example, money is provided to help groups with on-ground action, awareness and training activities, planning, trials, demonstrations, monitoring and project support.

There appears to be little involvement by Aboriginal people in Landcare movements in the NT mainly because firstly, in many communities, Aboriginal people are concerned about local issues of immediate importance such as housing and environmental health. Secondly, in some cases, Aboriginal people manage land that extends over the whole local catchment areas or entire regions and thus get tired of "talking to themselves".

Aboriginal approaches to environmental issues tend to be more community-based rather than regional or catchment-based as people deal with the issues of environmental degradation within their communities and the surrounding lands. Some Aboriginal groups consulted in this survey are considering joining landcare groups purely to access funding even though they acknowledge its not their preferred option for managing country. The necessity to set up a structure that takes on the responsibility of landcare groups was not always evident in communities and is clearly different to traditional cultural and social systems for responsibility of managing country. There is also a perception in some areas that the distribution of landcare funds is allocated by some sort of bureaucratic criteria that is unrelated to the desires or the needs of Aboriginal landowners i.e. there is a lack of empathy with Aboriginal land management aspirations in assessment panels. For a landcare perspective on the participation in landcare groups by Aboriginal people see Melville (1982).

The CFCU is primarily focused on delivering land management from a regional and catchment perspective, thus there appears to be great opportunity to facilitate the formation of Aboriginal landcare groups under its guidance. There is an identified need look into the formation and structure of landcare groups to make the process more applicable to Aboriginal people.

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### **6.2.4 Northern Territory University: The Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management (CINCRM)**

CINCRM was established in February 1997 at the Northern Territory University in Darwin. The primary focus of CINCRM is research. The Centre aims to be a national and international focal point for research which meets the needs of indigenous Australians and which facilitates career opportunities for indigenous researchers. CINCRM supports indigenous students and scholars to undertake research in natural and cultural resource management, community development and sustainable development issues affecting Australians. CINCRM is managed by a board of 15 members, 10 of whom are indigenous Australians and represent community and regional interests from across northern and central Australia.

The core of CINCRM comprises full-time Centre staff, adjunct fellows and contributing key staff from Northern Territory University and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Land councils and other indigenous organisations also contribute to the core activities of the Centre, supporting and facilitating the participation of indigenous people in research activities through project steering groups. These organisations provide direct links to other community organisations and land councils, and significantly assist CINCRM in consultation, identifying research priorities, and disseminating Centre research outcomes. Existing networks between land councils and community organisations are used to assist research activities and participation by indigenous people, and to ensure the dissemination of research outcomes. The indigenous partner organisations play a key role in this networking process.

## **6.3 Non-government organisations and statutory authorities**

### **6.3.1 Northern Land Council–Caring for Country Unit (NLC–CFCU)**

The Northern Land Council (NLC) is a statutory authority established under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976 (ALRA) to represent Aboriginal people in the north of the Northern Territory, other than the Tiwi Islands and Groote Eylandt.

The NLC has certain statutory functions set out in the ALRA s.23, which include:

1. To ascertain and express the wishes and the opinion of the Aboriginal people living in the area of the Land Council as to the management of Aboriginal land in that area; and
2. To protect the interests of traditional Aboriginal owners of, and other Aboriginal people interested in, Aboriginal land in the area of the Land Council.

The Natural Heritage Trust Agreement between the NT Government and the Commonwealth Government regards the NLC as a government agency, for the purposes of NHT, although in effect it has been treated as an NGO in respect of representation on the regional and state assessment panels. There are about 28,000 Aboriginal people living in the NLC region within which Aboriginal people own about 170,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land including around 87% of the Northern Territory coastline.

The Land Council has 78 elected members from communities throughout this region. The NLC region is split into seven smaller regions (see Figure 1): Darwin/Daly/Wagait, Katherine, Borroloola/Barkly, West Arnhem, East Arnhem, Victoria River District and Ngukurr. The NLC has regional offices in each of these administrative regions. The NLC established the Caring for Country (CFCU) in 1995 to assist Aboriginal landowners through a range of actions including:

- ensuring environmental protection and promoting sustainable management of Aboriginal land and sea.
- negotiating aspects of joint management for future national parks.
- assisting traditional owners to develop management plans for land and sea estates.
- providing an integrated planning and land management service to traditional owners.
- developing NLC regional environmental strategies.
- providing effective support to conciliation of Aboriginal land disputes (source: *NLC Strategic Plan: A strong future for us all*, unpublished report).

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The CFCU is a small unit with little capacity for delivering on-ground works directly. It seeks to achieve on-ground outcomes through assisting landowners and their resource organisations in local areas to build capacity for better land management.

Capacity building strategies include:

- facilitating participatory planning with landowners and their local agencies.
- provision of technical evaluation and advice to landowners.
- facilitating collaborative relationships between landowners and relevant outside agencies with technical expertise.
- assisting landowners to identify and secure access to appropriate external land management resources.
- facilitating greater cooperation and coordinated land management activities between neighboring groups and agencies.
- assisting landowners to develop economic strategies which address both sustainable development and conservation needs.

Caring for Country recognises that traditional ecological knowledge is a valuable but often undervalued resource in the ongoing management of Aboriginal land. It is particularly important in the understanding of ecological processes and of paramount importance in the management of fire in the northern landscape. Caring for Country also recognises the limitations of traditional ecological knowledge in dealing with emerging land management problems on Aboriginal land which are new to the experience of Aboriginal people. Dealing with the spread of exotic plants into intact native ecosystems requires acquisition of new knowledge and skills for Aboriginal land owners and managers.

### **6.3.2 Greening Australia–Aboriginal Landcare Education Program (ALEP)**

Greening Australia's *Aboriginal Landcare Education Program* (ALEP) has been operating since 1994. It is managed in partnership with the NLC and is based in Greening Australia NT's Darwin office. ALEP employs a team of indigenous landcare officers who visit communities across the Top End. Its aim is to facilitate land management projects and conduct on-site capacity building workshops. It provides support to a range of natural resource management projects including revegetation and weed control work for land rehabilitation. ALEP works with communities at their invitation and has an effective network with the suite of land management agencies that work across the Top End.

### **6.6.3 Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers (ATCV)**

ATCV is a volunteer organisation that provides on-ground assistance to landcare groups, and can also act as a broker for national labour market programs (e.g. Green Corps) to provide labour to landcare and other community groups. Their mission is "To attract and manage a force of volunteers in practical conservation projects for the betterment of the Australian environment". ATCV has in the past carried out some weed work on Aboriginal land as part of its volunteer program.

### **6.3.4 World Wide Fund for Nature**

The Threatened Species Network Community Grants Program (grants up to \$50,000 are available) was established under the NHT to help community groups take an active, on-ground role in the recovery of Australia's nationally threatened species and ecological communities. The grants fund community-based projects which work to remove threats to local populations of threatened species or local remnants of endangered ecological communities which are considered a high priority for conservation. Funds are also available for vulnerable species under this program, where other criteria are met.

In 1999 the WWF's Wetlands of Oceania program made a commitment to matching funding from the Indigenous Land Corporation for the employment within the CFCU of a Conservation and Development Planning Facilitator on a two-year contract.