

# Buffel Grass Weed Advisory Committee

**Time:** 8:45am

**Date:** 12 June 2024

**Location:** Tom Hare Conference Room, AZRI Main Building, Parks & Wildlife, Alice Springs

### Attendees:

- **Philip Cowan** - Director, Central Australian Parks, Parks and Wildlife Division, Northern Territory Government (NTG) Department Environment Parks and Water Security (DEPWS)
- **Tracey Guest** - Natural & Cultural Resource Manager, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Parks Australia.
- **Roy Chisholm** - Pastoral Land Board  
Exit 10:12am - Return 10:17am
- **Nathaniel Staniford** - Assistant Director Operations, Bushfires NT, DEPWS - via TEAMS.
- **Garth Forrester** - Ranger Group Coordinator Harts Range, Central Land Council  
Exit 9:33 am - Return 9:35am  
Exit 12:01pm - Return 12:04pm
- **James (Jimmy) Cocking** - Chief Executive Officer, Desert Knowledge Australia
- **Josef (Joe) Schofield** - Regional Operations Manager, Central & South Australia, Australian Wildlife Conservancy  
Exit 12:00pm - Return 12:02pm
- **Alex Port** - Environment Liaison Officer, Northern Territory (NT) Cattlemen's Association  
Exit 10:08am - Return 10:10am  
Exit 12:08pm - Return 12:09pm
- **Ross Stanes** - NT Cattlemen's Association, Director Lyndavale Cattle Co

**Chairperson:** Philip Cowan

**Executive Officer:** Roni Opden - Buffel Grass Weed Advisory Committee, Rangelands Division, DEPWS

**Guests:** Nil

If you require [workplace adjustments](#) to participate in this meeting, please let the meeting organiser know.

**Minutes:** Tabitha Fudge - Support Officer, Buffel Grass WAC, Rangelands, DEPWS

**Note that these are abridged minutes, not a verbatim transcript.**

## 1. Meeting open and Welcome:

### Chairperson:

Welcome.

Acknowledge and pay respects to Arrernte peoples, as the First Nations people of this country and acknowledge their continuing connection to the lands, water and communities.

## 2. Apologies:

**Joel Andrew** - Director, Technical Services, Alice Springs Town Council

**Benjamin (Ben) Kaethner** - Regional Land Management Coordinator, Central Land Council (CLC)

## 3. Disclosure of interest: real, potential or perceived:

Garth Forrester advises he will be attending Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) ARRWENNGKELTHE event on 29JUN24 as a private citizen.

## 4. Minutes previous meetings:

**18APR24**                      **Moved: JIMMY COCKING**                      **Seconded: JOE SCHOFIELD**  
Approved out of session  
That the Minutes are a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**19APR24**                      **Moved: ROY CHISHOLM**                      **Seconded: ROSS STANES**  
Approved out of session  
That the Minutes are a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**21MAY24**                      **Moved: JIMMY COCKING**                      **Seconded: ROY CHISHOLM**  
Approved out of session  
That the Minutes are a true and accurate record of the meeting.

## 5. Business Arising from the Minutes:

### 5.1 Action Items from previous WAC meeting

<b>Actions list</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Due</b>	<b>Status</b>
Investigate availability of approved organic herbicides	Ross Stanes		Completed 14JUN24
WAC members provide response to Agenda Item 9.6 21MAY24 Joe Schofield has provided a response.	All WAC		Ongoing
Investigate potential Federal funding that would be available for the Territory if buffel grass was declared a weed.	Tracey Guest		Ongoing
Respond to ALEC email	Chairperson		Completed 11JUN24
NR Maps – fire scar, parks – circulate link	Nathaniel Staniford		Completed 12JUN24
Circulate declaration table	Roni Opden		
Source alternate brands of Flupropanate – Tussock, Taskforce	Tracey Guest		
Interpret herbicide labels	Roni Opden Joe Schofield		
Circulate existing Buffel Grass Weed Management Guide for Central Australia	Roni Opden		
Contact Troy Bowman re spray trials	Roni Opden		
South Australia practical management over 5 years, aspirational - APY lands.	Jimmy Cocking		
Fire retardant that acts as a fertiliser - investigate	Nathaniel Staniford		
Assess and build Ranger groups capacity ie equipment	Garth Forrester		

## 6. Correspondence In:

- Email invitation from ALEC to WAC members to their event - ARRWENGKELTHE: How do we heal country and stop the spread of buffel grass? WAC members provided with a hard copy.

## 7. Correspondence Out:

Email to: ALEC, Alice Springs Landcare and DIPL per Agenda item 9.6 21MAY24 –  
“In your land management program what challenges and opportunities does buffel present?”  
“How can we help, what do you need?”

## 8. Business Arising from Correspondence: Nil

## 9. General Business:

WAC recap:

Member representation on the Buffel Grass WAC.

The Strategy requires stakeholder compromise, guided by legislation: Weeds Act, Pastoral Land Act, Bushfires Management Act, Soil Conservation & Utilisation Act and the Fire & Emergency Act. Can seek legal advice if necessary, regarding various Acts intersection.

Buffel grass is a polarising issue, compromise and negotiation is necessary for management on different land tenures to protect natural, cultural, economic and built assets.

**9.1** Members are kindly reminded to uphold impartiality and objectivity in all discussions and decisions, noting that the Minister has appointed each member for their technical expertise and experience; to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister by 30 June 2024.

The Minister formed the WAC specifically to **develop a Buffel Grass Strategy for Central Australia that prioritises areas and methods where direct management actions will be most valuable and effective.**

The Strategy will inform the development of a Buffel Grass Draft Weed Management Plan.

Should the WAC determine buffel grass be a declared weed, classification may or may not follow. Classification is not a mandatory next step of declaration.

**Classification according to the Weeds Act, is outside of the WAC's Terms of Reference (ToR).**

NT Government announced in Budget 2024, \$750K for program management, planning and technical services to implement buffel grass management in Central Australia.

Transparency has been prioritised, with information being provided to the public online and via media.

## 9.2 Executive officer Roni Opden - presentation on proposed Strategy Structure and Content, Discussion Paper #3:

- Background
- Purpose

The WAC's proposed Strategy is the product of the WAC's workshop tables created in the 21MAY24 meeting. A Strategy time frame of 2024-2030, allows time to test the proposals and works with the WAC 3 year appointment periods.

The proposed Strategy is a practical, realistic, priorities and results based document; that is not focused on the punitive, but rather stakeholder education and partnership.

A resultant, contextualised "Best Practice" resource will be invaluable for all stakeholders.

A Strategy is not enforceable, which dictates the need for achievable and realistic actions with feasible outcomes. The Strategy can become, or inform a Weed Plan; a Declaration will make it enforceable.

Declaration may change present attitudes, awareness and approaches, re-direct current funding streams and open new funding streams and partnerships.

## 9.3 Executive officer Roni Opden – presentation on Priorities for buffel grass management, Discussion Paper #3.

The WAC discusses:

- Improving "Best Practice Management," a decision making tool and ensuring priorities garner long term commitment are key to success. Identifying Sites of Conservation Significance (SoCS), ie if there is a SoCS on pastoral land, there is obligation and there may be a covenant under a tenure.
- Fire scar map, also showing areas of significance ie parks, (national and international) is shown and link circulated to members. Discussion continues around current and proposed mapping, ground truthing, drone and satellite works being carried out, particularly on parks.
- On pastoral lands the less palatable species ie spinifex and kerosene pose the greatest fire risk where the presence of buffel grass is low. Regrowth of turpentine through the Barkly poses significant potential for fire, buffel is not the major fire factor there. Peri urban buffel loads are fire risk.
- Recently enacted Biosecurity Management Plans – livestock production (LPA) assurance/accreditation, all exporters (majority if not all NT Cattlemen) now require it. Largely opt in, but seems to be taken up well. "Come clean, go clean" is the maxim. The plan can be as detailed or light as the producer chooses, there are various apps available. As these Biosecurity Management Plans are already in place, they could provide a template.

**BREAK: Morning tea 10:21am**

**RECONVENE: 10:55am**

#### **9.4 Executive officer Roni Opden – presentation on Management Objectives, Discussion Paper #3.**

The WAC deliberates on:

- Inclusion of mapping and monitoring as a management technique and the need for the table to be high level and strategic. Table is re-worked to reflect the WAC member experience, knowledge and input.
- Reasonable Management Actions – Best Practice Guidelines document. Pages 7 & 8 make reference to industry Code of Practice, which will enable individual land use tenures, to develop and implement their own codes.
- Much of this (for pastoral) is covered in a LPA Biosecurity Management Plan, potential to double as a Best Practice Guide for industry. Vast majority of pastoralists in NT have them in place, or are rolling them out and they are legally enforceable. The “Come Clean, Go Clean” principle could list use of buffel in a best practice way, to not impact other tenures.
- Each land tenure use, stakeholder, industry ie pastoralist, mining, conservation, transport corridors etc could be given the opportunity to develop their own Code of Practice for approval by the WAC, or adopt one that is developed for them.
- Existing obligations and requirements of lease, are not always being met, ie road corridors.
- Management Actions and Outcomes should be measurable.
- The requirements of a weed declaration should always be based on reasonable achievable actions and how the declaration can support that, ie “Do not bring seeds in.”

#### **9.5 Executive officer Roni Opden – presentation on Reasonable Actions, Discussion Paper #3.**

The WAC considers the various elements of the table resulting from the workshop of the 21MAY24 and determines that:

- To refine the table, ensuring it reflects item 9.4 discussion.
- Be less prescriptive, enhance capacity and commitment, define “minimise impact,” include industry codes, erosion control/rehabilitation.
- Buffel not allowed in mining rehabilitation projects.
- Control lines adjoining priority areas needed definition from previous meeting, the Pastoral Clearing Guidelines state – 210m boundary buffer, 250m adjoining sensitive area. Could potentially mean a control area of 500m total (both sides of a boundary).
- Firebreaks – minimum of 4m, Bushfires NT can require more.
- When protecting life and property, particularly in town settings, buffel could be a prescribed flammable material according to the Bushfires Act.
- Important to note that this will be land manager responsibility, not Weeds Branch etc.

## **BREAK: Lunch 12:38pm**

## **RECONVENE 1:15pm**

Chair acknowledges the excellent work Executive Officer Roni Opden has put into ensuring the WAC's work is represented authentically.

### **9.6 Executive officer Roni Opden – workshop Activating the Strategy, Discussion Paper #3**

Executive officer acknowledges that after the Strategy is finalised, the WAC will be able to accept offers from stakeholders for presentations and site visits.

The WAC discusses opportunities for Activating the Strategy:

- Mapping and data analysis, ground truthing, drones and AI. There is considerable and exciting work being done in Uluru-Kata Tjuta, including Commonwealth experts working with local experts, astounding accuracy in identification, to the point of 10cm<sup>2</sup>. AI is giving percentages of buffel grass. Drones may be able to drop granules of herbicide, possibly flame as well.
- Reconnect with South Australia's Troy Bowman to determine where their experiences and successes could benefit and be replicated in the NT.
- WONS – Indigenous organisations are working together on a national front, to make a submission for buffel to be considered a weed of national significance.
- From an industry perspective, a permit system for buffel use is not attractive.
- Weeds Act is not species specific. Classifications could overly complicate or restrict approach.
- Based on previous WAC workshop input, a table is produced showing what a declaration could look like when designed to achieve the objectives of the Strategy.
- Flupropanate used on a trial at Desert Knowledge, it rained it was dispersed and not successful. Olive Pink trial, a 3 part mix of Flupropanate, Glyphosate and Pine Oil worked well.
- Flupropanate has been difficult to source for 2 years, does not provide a quick kill but works best, is selective, does not harm natives, more stable than Glyphosate and works on all African grasses, ie Lovegrass too. Although not recommended for waterways.
- Permits to aerial spray buffel grass, perhaps an option for remote area fire breaks.
- Buffel page on the NTG site is now live.
- Update the existing Buffel Grass Weed Management Guide for Central Australia.
- WONS National Established Weeds Program (NEWP), proposal to nominate, nationally buffel has been nominated, likely to become a weed of national significance.
- Western Australia is removing buffel from mine sites during rehabilitation.
- No National Best Practice exists for buffel grass – a best practice guide for NT would be leading the way.

- Partnering with and funding: community groups, councils, rangers, workforce capacity, herbicide and equipment, Fire Ready for elderly, vulnerable etc, landscape breaks for remote communities that are high fire risk; Charles Darwin University idea for an app that might be linked with the BOM that may alert after rainfall to spray, or even a whole decision making framework into an app.
- Build capacity for Ranger groups with existing and ongoing funds.
- Preventative work with key stakeholders
- Acknowledge Bushfires and NTFRS are being very proactive now
- Boom spray on tracks in and out of IPA's
- IPA Healthy Country Plans, Management Plan especially for Simpson Desert, a declaration may focus works on buffel.
- Buffel must be managed strategically, working incrementally, with a focus on follow up.
- Firescaping – clear a buffel area and plant with natives that are fire resistant. Natives will naturally come back on removal of buffel. Natives regenerate really well.
- African lovegrass, cattle will not eat it, and it will choke out the buffel, it has 90% seed viability as opposed to buffel which is around 25%. It is not the fire hazard that buffel is. Potential for WAC to recommend weed risk technical committee investigate love grass.
- Hygiene up and down the roads in regard to machinery, will be good for inhibiting buffel and African lovegrass spread.

**MEETING CONCLUDE: 3:22pm**