

Buffel Grass Weed Advisory Committee

Time: 8.45am

Date: 21 May 2024

Location: Tom Hare Conference Room, John Hayes building,
Arid Zone Research Institute (AZRI), Alice Springs

Attendees:

Phillip Cowan - Director, Central Australian Parks, Parks and Wildlife Division,
Northern Territory Government (NTG) Department Environment Parks and Water Security (DEPWS)
Absent 2:39pm - 2:42pm

Tracey Guest - Natural and Cultural Resource Manager, Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṟa National Park, Parks Australia.
Absent 1:58pm - 2:09pm

Nathaniel Staniford - Assistant Director Operations, Bushfires NT, DEPWS.

James (Jimmy) Cocking - Chief Executive Officer, Desert Knowledge Australia

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

Absent 11:50am - 11:52am

Departs meeting 2:37pm

Josef (Joe) Schofield - Regional Operations Manager, Central & South Australia, Australian Wildlife Conservancy
Attends from 11:31am

Departs meeting 2:37pm

Ross Stanes - NT Cattlemen's Association, Director Lyndavale Cattle Co

Departs meeting 3:50pm

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

Absent 11:39am - 12:54pm

Absent 3:32pm - 3:34pm

Roy Chisolm - Pastoral Land Board

Alex Port - Environment Liaison Officer, Northern Territory (NT) Cattlemen's Association

Apologies: **Garth Forrester** - Ranger Group Coordinator Harts Range, Central Land Council

Chairperson: **Phillip Cowan** - Director, Central Australian Parks, Parks and Wildlife Division,
NTG DEPWS

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

Guests: Nil

Minutes:

Tabitha Fudge - Support Officer, Buffel Grass WAC, Rangelands, DEPWS.
Absent 2:46pm - 2:52pm

Tuesday 21 May 2024 - Meeting open 8:45am

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

Buffel WAC: Agenda and Discussion paper #2 for 21MAY24 meeting – provided at the meeting.

Item 1 Meeting open and welcome attendees:

- Chairperson acknowledges Arrernte people and country.
- Thanks attendees for their time, acknowledges 3 year appointment tenure, with need for several more meetings prior to 30 June 2024.
- Housekeeping.
- Invited attendees to go around the table and introduce themselves.

Item 2 Apologies: Garth Forrester

Item 3 Disclosure of interest - real, potential or perceived: Nil

Item 4 Minutes previous meeting:

Two members did not have an opportunity to review the minutes for April meetings. Minutes will be reviewed and finalised out of session or at next meeting.

Item 5 Business Arising from the Minutes:

Item 5.1 Action Items from previous WAC meeting: Completed

Item 6 Correspondence In:

Received late 20MAY24 from Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC)

Item 7 Correspondence Out: Nil

Item 8 Business Arising from Correspondence:

Phil will make contact with ALEC. Roni to meet with ALEC 22MAY24.

Item 9 General Business

Item 9.1

Clarification that the WAC's task is to develop a strategy and consider how a declaration may support the Strategy. Classification is neither the focus nor essential; it is optional and ultimately a Weeds Branch decision.

Item 9.2

Executive officer Roni Opden – presentation on geographic boundary of Strategy

- PowerPoint on geographic scope/boundary of Strategy.
- Refer Regional Weed Strategies 2021-2026 for Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.
- These documents reflect 3 years of research, data and community consultation.
- Alice Springs Zone – strategic control and pathways of spread.
- Tennant Creek Zone – pathways of spread, monitor distribution and risk.
- Zones outside of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek will be monitored.

Item 9.3

Executive officer Roni Opden – presentation on zoned management approach to priority sites management for Strategy

PowerPoint on zoned management approach to priority sites and areas for strategic control.

Zoned Management Approach:

Zones Classification:

- **Red Zone:** Focuses on community, environment, and culture. Includes areas with high population, priority assets like parks, and fire protection zones.
- **Blue Zone:** Emphasizes environment and culture. Contains moderate conservation areas, lower population density, and difficult accessibility.
- **Green Zone:** Prioritizes economy, industry, and environment. Includes conservation sites but primarily industrial and high-use areas.

Key Discussions and Concerns:

Limitations of Classification:

- Concerns about the limitations of these zone classifications and the necessity to incorporate different land uses and tenures.

Mapping and Data Analysis:

- Existing mapping strategies (e.g., using Landsat) may be outdated and require ground truthing for accuracy.
- The need for updated and precise mapping for effective management.

Erosion Control:

- Debate on using buffel grass for erosion control versus other modern methods.
- Obligations to prevent the spread of buffel grass if used for erosion control.

Fire Risk and Management:

- Buffel grass increases fire risk, especially in non-grazed areas.
- Importance of fire breaks and prioritizing fire mitigation efforts.

Management and Strategy:

Reasonable Management Actions:

- Focus on what is reasonable on different land tenures to manage buffel grass effectively.
- Emphasize follow-up actions to ensure ongoing success and prevent the spread.

Funding and Declaration:

- Discussion on the benefits and challenges of declaring buffel grass a weed.
- Declaration could unlock funding but also introduce new obligations and complexities.
- Current funding (\$750K) is significant but not necessarily tied to a declaration.

Coordination and Collaboration:

- Importance of collaboration among landowners, managers, and stakeholders.
- Sharing knowledge and resources, and conducting workshops to improve management practices.

Implementation and Future Steps:

Mapping and Prioritization:

- Continue mapping efforts without waiting for perfect maps.
- Focus on priority areas and corridors to prevent the spread.

Best Practices and Innovation:

- Use best practices in buffel grass management and encourage innovation, especially with chemical trials and new methods.

Communication and Education:

- Educate landowners and the public on buffel grass management.
- Utilize tools like public reporting apps and provide equipment and education on vehicle hygiene at strategic locations.

Regulatory Considerations:

- Address conflicts between the Weeds Act and Pastoral Lands Act.
- Ensure compliance with both laws while managing buffel grass effectively.

Future Items:

- Discuss priorities for the allocated \$750,000 funding and focus on effective use of resources.
- Organize sessions with experts to learn from other regions and improve local strategies.

Morning Tea Break 10:34am

Reconvene 11:05am

Item 9.4

WAC to workshop Goals and Management Options for Strategy

Summary of Workshop Discussion on Buffel Grass Management Strategies

The Committee highlights the complexity of managing buffel grass, emphasizing a need for a flexible, **targeted Land Use Tenure-Based approach** that considers different land uses and responsibilities. The goal is to develop realistic, practical strategies that engage all stakeholders, protect key assets; minimising the spread and impact of buffel grass through coordinated and sustained efforts.

Detail:

Overview of Management Approaches:

Zoned Approach:

- Zones (Red, Blue, Green) initially considered, with the goal to classify areas based on priority and management needs.
- Concerns about the zoned approach being too blunt and potentially complicated.
- Decision to use a **Tenure-Based approach, focusing on Land Use types** such as pastoral, parks, residential, etc.
- Decision made to group tenures into categories like conservation, which could simplify the approach.

Key Points and Considerations:

Land Use Tenure-Based Management:

- A **Land Use Tenure-Based approach** will simplify and focus obligations and management strategies.
- Examples of land tenures include pastoral, parks, Aboriginal land, Crown land, road reserves.
- Different tenures have different management needs and responsibilities.

Obligations and Responsibilities:

- All landowners and managers have responsibilities to manage buffel grass on their lands.
- Ensuring prevention of spread both within and off the land is crucial.
- Compliance with statutory laws and regulations is necessary, but practical enforcement and capacity are concerns.

Fire Risk Management:

- Buffel grass significantly increases fire risks, especially in certain zones and along road corridors.
- Fire breaks and control lines are necessary to manage this risk, though implementation and enforcement are challenging.

Mapping and Technology:

- Use of updated mapping and technology, such as drones and AI, for monitoring buffel grass.
- Ground truthing remains essential for accurate data.

Funding and Declaration:

- Declaring buffel grass a weed could unlock funding opportunities.
- However, there are concerns about the adequacy of funding and the potential conflicts with existing land use regulations.

Community and Cultural Impact:

- The spread of buffel grass affects cultural assets and community areas.
- Engaging the community and promoting awareness are important for successful management.

Best Practices and Goals:

- Developing best practice guides tailored to different scenarios and land uses.
- Focus on realistic and feasible management actions that protect assets and life while minimizing buffel grass spread.
- Ensuring management actions are reasonable and measurable, avoiding overly prescriptive mandates.

Specific Management Strategies:

Buffer Zones and Corridors:

- Implementing buffer zones (ie buffel control lines) and managing road and railway corridors to prevent spread.
- Addressing challenges posed by animal grazing along roadsides.

Erosion Control and Rehabilitation:

- Utilizing buffel grass for erosion control and re-establishment of native flora in certain areas.
- Targeted grazing and controlled use of herbicides to manage spread while maintaining organic status.

Industry and Mining:

- Including mining areas in management plans, ensuring they address buffel grass spread in their operations.
- Leveraging environmental consultants and best practices for industry-driven management.

Lunch Break 1:07pm

Reconvene 1:58pm

Item 9.5

WAC to workshop Management Objectives and Actions for Strategy

Summary of Workshop

Proposals and Key Points:

Land Use Tenure-Based Approach:

- WAC decides on a land use tenure-based strategy, adjusting for specific needs and contexts.

Erosion Control:

- Discussion on buffel grass being preferred for erosion control, but emphasized that this is a buffel management strategy, not an erosion plan.
- Best practices should minimize soil disturbance and manage erosion effectively.

Buffer Zones and Corridors:

- Buffel grass buffers were debated, with concerns about feasibility and effectiveness.
- Priority corridors (e.g., roads to conservation sites) should be managed to prevent the spread of buffel grass.

Vehicle Wash down Facilities:

- Installing clean down facilities at strategic locations (roadside stops, houses) to prevent the spread of buffel grass and other weeds.
- Education on best practices for vehicle hygiene.

Funding and Maintenance:

Cost of Control Measures:

- Spraying costs (e.g., \$8,500 for 20 hectares using aerial spraying) were discussed.
- Vegetation management plans should include buffel control in consultation with underlying land tenures.

Inconsistent Roadside Maintenance:

- Roadside maintenance varies, making it challenging to standardize buffel grass control.

Buffers and Spread Prevention:

- Difficulty in preventing spread through road trains and other vehicles.
- Investigate how other states manage similar issues.

Regulatory and Practical Considerations:

Reasonable Measures:

- Emphasis on taking all reasonable measures to manage buffel grass, with legal backing (e.g., 'Preventing Weed Spread Is Everybody's Business' standards).
- Use of public apps like Weed Mate for tracking and mapping efforts.

Seed Management:

- Limited market availability of buffel grass seeds due to their short shelf life and preference for locally harvested seeds.

Follow-Up and Consistency:

- Essential to follow up on initial efforts to ensure native plants return and maintain consistency in management actions.

Best Practice and Knowledge Sharing:

- Track progress using a color-coded system and share knowledge through workshops and presentations.
- Upcoming Buffel Conference in Brisbane and relevant research papers were highlighted.

Erosion Control:

Alternative Methods:

- While buffel grass is used for erosion control, modern alternatives may be considered.
- Obligations to prevent spread off the property if using buffel grass for erosion.

Inspections and Permits:

- Regular inspections and potentially requiring permits for using buffel grass in erosion control near protected sites.

Closing and Future Steps:

Best Practice Management:

- Management should follow best practices to avoid negatively impacting adjoining tenures.
- Reflect on these discussions for the next meeting.

Future Agenda:

- Discuss priorities for the allocated \$750,000 funding in the next meeting.

Item 9.6

Round table – In your land management program what challenges and opportunities does buffel present?

How can we help, what do you need?

This item will be sent to members via email.

Meeting closed 4:25pm

Next meetings

- **Meeting 2**- Proposed 12 June 2024
- **Meeting 3**- Proposed 27 June 2024
- **Meeting 4**-

Dates to be confirmed.

Actions list

Action	Who	Due	Status
Investigate availability of approved organic herbicides	Ross Stanes		
Investigate the specific amount of Federal funding that would be available for the Territory if buffel grass was declared a weed.	Tracey Guest		
Item9.6	All WAC		