

Buffel WAC: Discussion paper 1

Formation of the Buffel WAC

The Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water Security has announced the formation of a Buffel Grass Weed Advisory Committee (WAC) under the *Weeds Management Act 2001*, to develop a Buffel Strategy for Central Australia (comprising the Alice Springs and Tennant Creek weed management regions). The Strategy will be used to determine how declaring buffel grass as a weed can balance the protection of priority areas with the role buffel plays as fodder for the pastoral industry and as a soil stabiliser.

Members with land management responsibilities have been invited to participate, to ensure the economic and environmental perspectives as well as the practicalities of managing buffel grass are understood and considered.

We know that buffel grass can impact on biodiversity and cultural values, due to its invasiveness and ability to modify traditional burning regimes. Its extensive distribution in Central Australia and value to pastoralists means buffel grass cannot readily be managed in the same way as other priority weeds, and resources need to be targeted to areas of greatest need where potential for successful management is highest.

The Buffel Strategy will identify landscape areas with values most at risk of buffel impact and management actions that might be employed to mitigate these impacts. Much work has already been done over the years, involving extensive consultation with community and key stakeholders (see Appendix A).

This work includes the [Alice Springs Regional Weeds Strategy 2021-2026](#), which identifies the Todd River (Alice Springs Township), Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park (UNESCO World Heritage) and Watarrka National Park as sites of conservation or amenity assets threatened by buffel. Landscape areas that require priority management attention are mapped in the Strategy. The Tennant Creek Regional Weeds Strategy identifies priority pathways of spread, such as gas pipelines and rail corridors.

Cross border collaborations such as 10 Deserts Project 'Buffel Free Great Victoria Desert' (BFGVD), have identified key priority management actions and opportunities across sub-regions of interest to SA, NT and WA.

In contrast, pastoral tenures and erosion prone areas will have lower suitability for buffel control, due to its established role in maintaining land condition objectives, and in some cases, restrictions on buffel removal (e.g. erosion hazard areas declared under the *Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act 1969*).

Using previous work as a starting point, the WAC will refine areas for targeted buffel control and provide specific advice on where and how a weed declaration under the Weeds Act would assist management effort in these areas. It would also consider other regulatory instruments available to manage the negative impacts of buffel, such as the *Bushfires Management Act 2016* in and around populated areas.

Milestones

The Buffel Strategy will be finalised by the end of June 2024. The WAC will meet at least three times between April – June. Where members are unable to meet in person, video link via Microsoft Teams will be available. Discussion papers will be circulated in advance, drawing on established research and literature, in order to facilitate strategic decision-making. Timeframes for out-of-session feedback and input will be prompt.

Next steps for WAC members:

Please provide your feedback, input and suggestions on the contents of this discussion paper, by Wednesday 10 April 2024.

Let me know:

1. Will you (generally) be available during April to June, to review, input and consult regarding development of the Buffel Strategy?
2. Are you able to use Microsoft Teams to connect and share with the committee?
3. Do you wish to nominate a specific area for prioritisation in the Strategy?
4. Any other thoughts on the proposed Strategy, including the concept of control areas?

For your interest, Committee invitations have been sent to:

- a) Parks and Wildlife Division
- b) Central Land Council
- c) Alice Springs Town Council
- d) Australian Wildlife Conservancy
- e) Pastoral Land Board
- f) NT Cattlemen's Association
- g) Bushfires NT
- h) Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation
- i) Desert Knowledge Australia
- j) Commonwealth Government

Look forward to hearing from you soon,

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Appendix A: Areas for targeted buffel control

The following lists are a starting point for the WAC to consider and refine the concept of control areas. They reflect community expectations, as captured in local land management plans and strategies, developed through community and stakeholder consultation.

[Alice Springs Regional Weeds Strategy 2021-2026](#) (p13)

Priority landscapes:

- Sites of Conservation Significance (SOC) including:
 - Uluru Kata-Tjuta NP
 - Greater MacDonnell Ranges
 - George Gill Range
 - Lake Amadeus
- Water courses
 - Todd & Charles Rivers
 - Finke Catchment (inc Finke, Palmer, Hugh Rivers)
 - Sandover River
- Key Community values
 - Telegraph Station
 - Todd River, Ilparpa Claypans
 - AS Desert Park
 - Simpson's Gap

[Tennant Creek Regional Weeds Strategy 2021-2026](#) (p15)

Priority pathways of spread:

- Land use and development
 - Mining and exploration - Clearing, slashing, grading
 - Gas pipeline - Construction & maintenance
 - Rail corridors - Construction & maintenance

[Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Plan 2021-2025](#) (p34)

- Alice Springs
- Tanami
- MacDonnell Ranges
- Ntaria, Finke Gorge

[Lhere Mparntwe Management Strategy 2019](#) (p5)

- Town area
- Rural area
- Telegraph Station