



**Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia**

24 February, 2004.

Mr Michael McLean
Secretary Senate Environment, Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr McLean

**Inquiry into the regulation, control and management of invasive species
and the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation
Amendment (Invasive Species) Bill 2002**

SUBMISSION FROM NURSERY & GARDEN INDUSTRY AUSTRALIA

Summary

The issue of environmental weeds in Australia is extremely difficult and complex. In relation to ornamental plants, Nursery and Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) is keen to play a practical and productive role to help limit the spread of plants with invasive characteristics and improve the understanding of the problems they pose within the community.

The current inquiry into the regulation, control and management of invasive species and the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Invasive Species) Bill 2002 focuses on just six plant species. However, NGIA believe that a nationally strategic but regionally focused approach is required to help limit the spread of these and many other potentially invasive plant species.

This nationally strategic and regionally focused approach should have the following characteristics:

- A national framework and set of strategies to ensure consistency and validity
- An educative and informative thrust
- Include all stakeholders, including representatives from the nursery & garden industry, local councils, community groups, government departments, etc
- Involvement of whole communities on a regional basis

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia

The Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) is the peak industry body for the Australia's nursery and garden industry. Along with the state and territory nursery & garden industry associations, NGIA promotes professional and responsible business practices. The industry is valued at over \$5.7 billion (at retail), employs over 60,000 people and comprises more than 20,000 businesses.

NGIA has already recognised the importance of invasive ornamental plants, or 'Garden escapes', and is currently in the process of appointing a National Weeds Program Manager. This person's sole responsibility will be to work with relevant organisations and government to help our industry improve the role we play in minimising the problems posed by invasive plants.

Background

In the past, the introduction of ornamental plant species to Australia was not well managed or regulated. The result was a substantial number of "Garden Escapes" that now threaten biodiversity in many areas across Australia. While the introduction of the 'Weed Risk Assessment' process by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) now provides a significant barrier to the continued introduction of non-native garden escapes, dealing with those already here is a significant challenge.

With over 10,000 ornamental plant species in Australia, and each exhibiting different levels of invasive tendencies depending on location, micro-climate, seasonal and disturbance factors, the task is daunting. And, as with non-natives, some native plants also pose significant threats to biodiversity outside of their own indigenous zones.

Of major concern is the multitude of processes currently used in environmental weed management. There are a large number of organisations, agencies and committees developing a wide variety of different 'weed' lists. However, the vastly different methods used to develop these lists make it impossible for the industry to respond and participate meaningfully. Sometimes these lists are based on local and/or national scientific knowledge and sometimes they are not. This is confusing, uncoordinated and difficult for the community to understand or the nursery and garden industry to deal with, from a commercial perspective. These problems are sometimes exacerbated by the high level of emotion invoked by the topic.

Discussion

The complexity and importance of this issue requires an integrated, proactive and practical approach. One involving all relevant stakeholder groups. This can then lead to increased levels of understanding and a unified direction.

NGIA believe the secret to success for the overall improvement of environmental weed management in Australia is to work with gardeners and the industry. This can be achieved by promoting safer alternatives to highly invasive species on a regional basis.

A national framework for achieving this is required. The framework should have national aims and provide a mechanism for regions to deal with obligations and strategies. The focus should be on identifying the most problematic plant species in each region; and then promotion of their environmentally safer (and just as attractive) alternatives. This positive approach is commercially attractive and will help galvanise industry and community efforts to limit the spread of invasive garden plants.

The role and responsibilities for each regional group should include:

- Form a group that is representative of all relevant stakeholders
- Identify and determine the bioregions to be covered by the regional group
- Collectively develop a priority list of invasive ornamental plants or garden escapes for each bioregion based on verifiable data
- Collectively determine the highest priority or focus group of invasive ornamental plants for each bioregion and identify several safer alternative for each based on verifiable data
- Promote the safer alternatives to the community, the nursery & garden industry and park and land managers.
- Regular reviews (suggest biennial) of the focus group and safer alternatives by the regional group.

A successful project already using this model is in operation within the greater Sydney basin. Titled 'Developing Alternatives to Garden Escapes', the project has resulted in an increased understanding of the garden escape problem within the community and the nursery & garden industry as well as cooperation and a way forward for all stakeholder groups. Stakeholder groups include; 16 local councils; Environment Protection Authority; Department of Planning, Infrastructure & Natural Resources; NSW Agriculture; Australian Association of Bush Regenerators and the Nursery & Garden Industry NSW & ACT (NGINA).

The project has been operating for three years. Initially the project gained some funding from the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) as well as significant industry contributions via the nursery products levy and NGIA resources. The various member stakeholder groups now jointly fund the project.

Horticulture Australia Limited has funded the position of the project co-ordinator and a grant from EPA's Environmental Trust has made possible the publication of the booklet "GROW ME INSTEAD" for distribution to growers, sellers, council and local government agencies as well as gardeners and non-gardeners alike. The booklet contains a focus list of plants known to be invasive but not yet declared noxious and three alternative planting suggestions, hence the title, Grow Me Instead.

Conclusions

The diversity of climate and environment within Australia means it is impossible to predict what plant (native or non-native) may become invasive and for what reason. Combine this with the diverse range of stakeholder groups and the current lack of coordinated effort means that a regional or bioregional approach operating under a national framework is required. This would help ensure consistency, minimal misunderstandings, improved knowledge by all stakeholders and synergy of effort.

A national framework enabling regions to reduce the incidence of 'garden escapes' is a practical and workable solution to the continuing problem of invasive garden plants. The success of the 'Developing Alternatives to Garden Escapes' project in the greater Sydney basin is testimony to this.

Such a coordinated national approach will maximise the impact and outcome of available funding and other resources. It will minimise duplication and lead to a consistent approach across all areas.

With regard to imported plants, NGIA strongly believes the current 'Weed Risk Assessment' process implemented by AQIS, provides a significant barrier to the continued introduction of non-native garden escapes. Dealing with the native and non-native garden escapes that are already here is a more pressing and significant problem.

Recommendations

A detailed project to develop a national framework that facilitates a regional approach reducing the problems of invasive garden plants should be developed. Characteristics of this project should include:

- Formation of a national management committee that is representative of all relevant stakeholders, including NGIA
- Development of guidelines for the formation of regional groups that are representative of all relevant regional stakeholders
- Development of guidelines for identifying and determining the bioregions to be covered by a regional group
- Development of guidelines for regions to determine priority lists of invasive ornamental plants or garden escapes within their identified bioregions
- Development of guidelines for regions to determine the highest priority or focus group of invasive ornamental plants within their identified bioregions and identification of several safer alternative for each
- Provision of resources to provide a national information base enabling scientific verification of regionally developed high priority or focus group of invasive ornamental plants and proposed safer alternatives.
- Provision of resources for regions to promote the safer alternatives to the community, the nursery & garden industry and park and land managers.
- Provision of resources to enable regular reviews (suggest biennial) of the focus group and safer alternatives by regional groups.

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (together with our State and Territory associations) is keen to play a proactive role and help address the challenges posed by invasive plants. We are willing to expand on this submission and respond to some other submissions made to the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee.

Richard de Vos
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER