

Chapter 8

The Way Forward

The [invasive species] problem seems immense and there is certainly no “silver bullet” for all, or perhaps even any, of these pest species, either animal or plant.¹

8.1 This quote by botanist Mr Ed McAlister who wears, among his many hats, that of President of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, is significant for putting the invasive species problem into context. The Committee has learnt in the course of this inquiry that the scale of the problem is enormous and the challenges daunting. The traditional response in such situations is to call for larger expenditures, usually by governments, because it signals the view that more should be done. However, the Committee has been struck by the fact that much good work is being done in Australia, not least by governments but also at an individual level - by dedicated scientists, researchers, and members of the public - who are willingly committing their energies in trying to confront the pest species challenge. While greater expenditure is certainly well and truly justified at a governmental level, what is equally needed is for a national strategic approach to be developed which will guide and coordinate the efforts of all parties in seeking to achieve a common goal.

8.2 As discussed throughout this report, society pays a high price for the presence of invasive species – not just in direct costs to the agriculture sector - but also in such externalities as environmental degradation and loss of Australia's unique biodiversity. Assisted by the rapid global expansion of trade and travel, invasive species and their cost to society are increasing at an alarming rate.

8.3 Most non-native species are relatively benign. Australians are the beneficiaries of cows from Jersey and roses from England - to name but two examples. While purists may disagree, Australia is a more dynamic and attractive country for the successful introduction of many non-native species. However, Australia needs to be able to act effectively on two fronts: to find remedial solutions for the invasive species that have already passed our borders and to recognise and manage those non-native species that are not already here that have the potential to threaten our native flora and fauna.

8.4 The Committee has set out in this report – and summarises below - recommendations for action and strategies for the future that will assist Australia in its continuing efforts to combat invasive species. The Committee sees three key dimensions to resolving the invasive species challenge: a national framework, research and education. It deals with each in turn below.

1 Mr Edward McAlister, *Submission 75*, p. 5.

8.5 The way forward is a national co-ordinated and cohesive approach across all levels of government, industry and the general community. Present arrangements represent a good starting point – but there is still scope for considerable improvement.

A national framework

8.6 Invasive species do not recognise borders, yet Australian management plans and the legislative framework that supports them, are jurisdictionally based. Frustratingly, those controls introduced and managed by the States and Territories are inconsistent, which further weakens the national effort. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and the efforts to combat invasive species in some jurisdictions are undermined when other jurisdictions fail to apply the same standards.

8.7 This lack of uniformity between the States and Territories raises the issue of the extent to which the Commonwealth Government should act to ensure that invasive species are dealt with in a consistent manner, as it is the tier of government primarily concerned with the goal of conserving Australia's biodiversity for the benefit of future generations.

8.8 All parties to this inquiry have argued that it is the proper role of the Commonwealth Government to provide national leadership. Leadership should involve working with the States and Territories to develop an agreed national framework, which includes common standards and common invasive species terminology and categorisation, put into effect through national strategies and/or action plans, and providing appropriate funding. Benefits of coordination include:

- defining the respective roles and responsibilities of each level of government;
- simplification of current administrative processes;
- agreeing on objectives and performance measures on a national basis;
- closing loopholes in current legislative frameworks;
- developing a cooperative and cohesive approach between jurisdictions;
- developing a national information base to guide strategic planning; and
- establishing Australia as a leading edge nation in terms of management of invasive species, especially in the field of research, with associated benefits in the international arena.

8.9 The Committee welcomes the agreement by the NRM Ministerial Council in April 2004 that:

there remained a need to develop a robust national framework for a coordinated and strategic approach to preventing significant new invasive species establishing in Australia, and to reducing the impacts of major pests and weeds already present.

8.10 A joint Commonwealth-State NRM Standing Committee Task Group has been established to investigate and report on options for a national framework for preventative action, early detection, awareness and ongoing control.

8.11 The Committee notes that this initiative received bipartisan support in the lead-up to the recent Federal election and believes that Australia's strategic planning and management of invasive species would be assisted by the development of a national blueprint for action, the equivalent of a national corporate plan, as the visionary basis for a better coordinated approach to invasive species. The framework should allocate responsibility for action between the three tiers of government and set a timetable for the implementation of key steps.

Recommendation 1

8.12 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government strengthen its leadership role in the national effort to combat invasive species by developing a robust national framework, in consultation with State, Territory and local governments, to regulate, control and manage invasive species.

8.13 The key features of a National Framework should include:

- comprehensive scope to cover all taxonomic groups;
- national aims, principles, targets and focus;
- common terms and categories for invasive species, particularly in relation to invasive species of national importance;
- emphasis on preventative approaches, including strengthened community and expert early warning surveillance systems;
- promulgation of regulations under section 301A of the EPBC Act to provide the foundation for a national statutory framework;
- development of model State legislation to encourage harmonised state and territory legislation consistent with the national statutory framework;
- agreed Commonwealth-State cost-sharing arrangements for both eradication and strategic containment of invasive species of national importance;
- national information system to enhance national, State and regional strategic planning and review, including a national list of invasive species; and
- a regular review mechanism under NRMCC to measure performance against agreed targets and milestones.

Some of these key features are discussed below.

Common terms and categories for invasive species

8.14 The Committee heard evidence from a range of quarters that the Weeds of National Significance (WONS) was a good model of how Commonwealth, States and Territories could work cooperatively to develop an agreed national weed control list. This inclusive process resulted in the States and Territories agreeing in 2001 to prohibit their sale. On the other hand, the national Alert List of Environmental Weeds was highlighted as a poor model as it was developed by the Commonwealth with limited State consultation and was not agreed by the States and Territories. In line with the need to strengthen actions to prevent nationally important invasive species, the Committee believes that three standard categories for invasive species of national importance need to be developed and agreed to by the Commonwealth, States and Territories and included in all national invasive species strategies and/or action plans, and to cover all taxonomic groups of invasive species. The three categories are as follows:

National Quarantine List: Comprised of invasive species of national importance that are a high invasion risk for Australia, may or may not have already invaded Australia, and whose early detection will enable cost-effective eradication. A starting point should be the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy target list and the Trigger List of Introduced Marine Pest Species.

National Alert List: Comprised of invasive species of national importance that are naturalised, have a restricted range, are predicted to have a major impact on the environment or industries, and whose eradication is feasible and cost-effective. It should also include introduced invasive plant species of national importance, which are garden plants that are yet to escape and are subject to national early warning surveillance action.

National Control List: Comprised of invasive species of national importance that are naturalised and generally widespread, are having a major impact on the environment or industry, and whose containment or control will assist protect the values of areas of national environmental significance. A starting point is the Weeds of National Significance list, those invasive species that are listed as a Key Threatening Process under the EPBC Act, and those marine pests that are subject to a national action plan (ie. Northern Pacific Seastar).

Recommendation 2

8.15 The Committee recommends that as part of developing a list of invasive plant species of national importance, the Commonwealth, States and Territories develop an agreed national Alert List.

EPBC Act section 301A regulations

8.16 The ongoing trade in Australia of invasive plants is a complex issue that must be resolved if the problem of invasive plants is to be effectively addressed. Discussion of issues relating to the trade in invasive plants is provided in Chapter 5.

8.17 The problem is primarily that there is a lack of national consistency in legislation to control the trading and planting of invasive plants. This is best demonstrated through the failure of all States and Territories to prohibit trade in the 20 WONS, despite being declared in 1999 and agreement to do so in 2001. Although the EPBC Act could be utilised to address this issue the Committee heard that the Commonwealth Government is hesitant to invoke its powers due to funding, monitoring and compliance concerns.

8.18 There is a Catch 22 situation. The Commonwealth Government does not currently wish to implement Section 301A of the EPBC Act because its view is that the States and Territories are primarily responsible for managing non-native species. But the States and Territories have failed to act for their own reasons – with the outcome that the sale of WONS continues to the detriment of the Australian environment. Many Alert List weeds and a NAQS target weed are also available for sale.

Recommendation 3

8.19 **The Committee recommends that those States and Territories that have failed to legislate a prohibition on the sale of WONS within their jurisdictions should act to do so as a matter of priority.**

Recommendation 4

8.20 **The Committee recommends that the species listed on the WONS list be reviewed and that other significant threatening species be included as part of a new national control list of invasive plant species.**

Recommendation 5

8.21 **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth, States and Territories provide funding to enable the Australian Weeds Committee to engage the CRC for Australian Weed Management to produce a scientifically credible and robust national list of invasive plant species.**

Recommendation 6

8.22 **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth, in consultation with the States and Territories, promulgate regulations under section 301A of the EPBC to prohibit the trade in invasive plant species of national importance, combined with State and Territory commitment to prohibit these same species under their respective laws.**

Recommendation 7

8.23 **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth, in consultation with the States and Territories, produce a list in legislation of taxa that prevents their sale and spread for each state or region. Nominations for each taxon on a**

state or regional basis can be developed in consultation with natural resource management agencies, state herbaria and members of the general public.

8.24 The Committee believes that the financial burden of managing invasive weeds should be borne by those who are responsible for the importation and sale of plants known to be weedy.

Recommendation 8

8.25 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government investigate the imposition of a 'polluter pays' principle where importers pay for the cost of control and repair should a plant become a weed.

8.26 The Committee suggests that the national plan, which will recognise regional differences, should act as the basis for the continuing self-regulation of the nursery and garden industry. Should experience suggest that voluntary observance is inadequate once clear lists of invasive weeds are produced, governments may have to give consideration to a more regulatory approach.

Sleeper weeds

8.27 The Committee heard that sleeper weeds - weed species that are already in Australia but have not yet become widely established - pose a significant potential threat. In Chapter 5 it is noted that resources are allocated to manage widely established weeds rather than directed at eradicating small outbreaks of sleeper weeds before they become a major problem, despite the evidence that the earlier the response, the more cost effective.

8.28 Management of weed species is also adversely affected by the emphasis on weeds with agricultural impacts ahead of those with primarily environmental or social impacts. While this is understandable in pure economic benefit-cost terms, the Committee believes that a more strategic approach would focus on prioritising species and habitats according to the potential for damage to indigenous biodiversity and the likely effectiveness of effort.

Recommendation 9

8.29 The Committee recommends that the National Weeds Strategy better clarify responsibility for funding eradication of 'sleeper weeds' with purely an environmental or social impact.

Recommendation 10

8.30 The Committee recommends that investment in early warning systems be increased for the detection and eradication of sleeper weeds.

Vertebrate pests

8.31 The need for a national blueprint for invasive species abatement is addressed above. But the absence of a national strategy specifically for vertebrate pests – comparable in concept to the National Weeds Strategy - means that vertebrate pest issues are not being strategically addressed. Consequently there are greater inconsistencies across jurisdictions due to the absence of an appropriate forum at which national strategies and consistent approaches can be agreed and progressed. The establishment of a national strategy will assist in the development and implementation of a coordinated national approach to reduce the damage to the natural environment and primary production that is caused by vertebrate pests. A national strategy will also enable funds to be applied more strategically so that improved long term results can be achieved.

Recommendation 11

8.32 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government place on the agenda of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, as a matter of urgency, the issue of progressing development of a National Strategy for Vertebrate Pests.

Marine pests

8.33 As discussed in Chapter 6, Australia has taken a leading role in developing responses to marine invasive species. This is highlighted by the prominent role that it took to coordinate international action in relation to ballast water with the International Maritime Organisation. Australia's action has resulted in significantly reducing the threat posed from translocation of species in ballast water.

8.34 Submitters argued that Australia should take a proactive approach to invasive species that includes looking overseas and learning about species that have already become invasive elsewhere. This is exemplified by Australia's response to the Black-striped mussel outbreak in Darwin in 1999, a case study of which is provided in Chapter 4. Such action would improve Australia's preparedness to manage new incursions and are more likely to be successful as prevention and early control are the cheapest and most effective approaches to managing invasive species.

8.35 It was also submitted that improving our trading partners' capacity to respond to invasive species and reducing the risk of species reaching trading partners' ports has a flow-on effect for Australia as it reduces the chances of invasive species being picked up in ballast water or through bio-fouling and translocation to Australian waters.

8.36 The management of invasive marine species within Australia's waters is also compounded by the lack of a national strategy to address these issues. As discussed in Chapter 6, some progress has been made towards the development of a national strategy. However, progress has been slow and delays increase the likelihood of new incursions. Two areas which pose a significant risk to Australia are bio-fouling and

mariculture. Yet, to date, they have not received the level of attention warranted by the level of risk they present.

Recommendation 12

8.37 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government take a lead role in Ministerial Councils and other appropriate forums to accelerate progress on the development, implementation and funding of a national system to deal with marine invasive species.

Recommendation 13

8.38 The Committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the Commonwealth Government should develop programs to minimise the threat of invasive marine species entering Australia's waters via hull fouling or as a result of the mariculture industries.

Recommendation 14

8.39 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government should provide long-term funding for research aimed at identifying and combating marine invasive species, particularly those which may threaten marine parks such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and those that are in the ports of Australia's trading partners and could be translocated to Australia.

Key threatening processes

8.40 As discussed in Chapter 5, currently key threatening processes are only listed under section 183 of the EPBC Act when the process threatens, or may threaten, the survival, abundance or evolutionary development of a native species or ecological community. Listing is done at a late stage of the species survival even though it is recognised that to save the species at that point would be costly or ineffective. Evidence argues for the need for early intervention in addressing invasive species and threatening processes.

Recommendation 15

8.41 The Committee recommends that the Threat Abatement Process (TAP) be reviewed to enable threatening processes to be listed prior to threatened species reaching a critical stage.

Review of the Quarantine Proclamation 1998

8.42 The Committee acknowledges the work undertaken by AQIS and Biosecurity Australia since 1997 to review the listing of the more than 2,000 genera in Schedule 5 of the Quarantine Proclamation 1998. It commends the fact that the review, once completed, will list plants at species level, not genus and will lead to the removal of

species not present in Australia from the list, pending WRA.² The Committee heard that:

Looking forward, we believe that in 12 to 14 months time we will be able to have a honed permitted list and nothing could then join that list until such time as it had gone through a comprehensive risk assessment.³

8.43 While commending the work that has been undertaken, the Committee expresses its concern over the time being taken to finalise the review. Every live plant that inadvertently enters Australia in the interim may end up costing the country dearly in the long-term. Speed is of the essence.

Recommendation 16

8.44 **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government act urgently to ensure that:**

- **all listings on Schedule 5 of the *Quarantine Proclamation 1998* are made by species, not genera;**
- **a mechanism be developed to ensure that species identified as weeds of national significance are automatically removed from Schedule 5; and**
- **all listings and applications for the import of plants and seeds be standardised using the scientific names of species.**

Import risk analysis

8.45 Discussion in Chapter 6 highlighted some deficiencies in the import risk analysis (IRA) process, the greatest of which was the lack of independence in the conduct of the IRA process. The current system allows the proponent to directly select and fund the analyst, leading to suggestions of a conflict of interest. This lack of independence brings the integrity of Australia's quarantine system into question. This is a key issue. One wrong import risk assessment could have significant consequences. In the Committee's opinion a better system would see a closer involvement of Biosecurity Australia in the process of conducting import risk analyses, either by conducting them itself on a cost recovery basis, or by co-ordinating their production by a panel of approved providers, again with the cost of the assessment being borne by the proponent.

Recommendation 17

8.46 **The Committee recommends that the import risk analysis process be modified to guarantee greater independence in their preparation.**

2 Department of Environment and Heritage and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, *Submission 74*, p. 3.

3 Mr Bernard Wonder, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2004, p. 59.

Emergency response plans

8.47 The Committee is reassured at the adequacy of the emergency arrangements for dealing with incursions that might adversely affect primary industries. It notes, however, that incursions which have an environmental impact seem to have no equivalent mechanisms. Timely action against environmental pest incursions is equally important.

Recommendation 18

8.48 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth place on the agenda of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council the need for arrangements to be implemented for environmental pest incursions in parallel with those currently in place for threats to primary industries.

International cooperation

8.49 Australia's ability to prevent invasive species from entering its territorial waters and terrestrial land has a regional and international dimension. As discussed in Chapter 6, it is unacceptable that international trade rules overrule environmental considerations. No country, Australia included, can expect to succeed in addressing its invasive species problems until it has the capacity to protect its borders from further unwelcome incursions.

8.50 Australia can take a leadership role in:

- identifying the limitations and strengths of existing international agreements and develop a program of work to further strengthen them;
- sponsoring technical assistance workshops in other countries;
- establishing an ongoing process to consider the risks of invasive species during the development of trade agreements;
- developing strategies and support materials to encourage and assist other countries with development of coordinated policies and programs on invasive species; and
- fostering and formalising international cooperation aimed at kerbing the sale of invasive species via the Internet.

Recommendation 19

8.51 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government take a leading role in relevant international forums to seek better recognition of the environmental consequences of invasive species, particularly in relation to current trade rules.

Research

8.52 A comprehensive research program should underpin all aspects of the fight against invasive species. Complementary research projects, ranging from basic investigations with broad application to highly targeted applied efforts are required. Research outcomes should be transferred to Commonwealth, State, Territory, local government and private stakeholders for application. To assist in achieving this:

- research programs should be adequately funded and co-ordinated;
- greater support should be provided for research into pests that have not yet become established; and
- Australia should establish and coordinate a long- and short-term research capacity that encompasses the range from basic to applied research for invasive species and should build on existing efforts that reflect a range of perspectives and program approaches.

8.53 Research should not be motivated by economic rationalist considerations alone. As discussed in Chapter 4 some invasive species have a negligible economic cost but a significant environmental cost. The Committee supports research that will reduce the economic impact of invasive species but it also considers that there is a need for non-economically motivated research; research that will assist in preserving Australia's cultural and environmental heritage. This need was encapsulated by Mr McAlister when he told the Committee that:

Having post-graduate students and post-doctoral fellows employed by the appropriate C.R.C.'s to undertake both applied and, what is euphemistically called, "blue-sky" research is of paramount importance.⁴

8.54 'Blue-sky' research has been defined as research that is not directed towards any immediate or definite commercial goal.⁵ Research being conducted by CSIRO into cane toads is a prime example of blue sky research – after 70 years of presence in Australia they are generally regarded as localised, but their eradication is still seen as a positive for the country's biodiversity.

8.55 To ensure that research delivers the highest return on investment there is a need for improved coordination of R&D units and improved planning and coordination across agencies involved in delivering outcomes.

8.56 The lines of communication between difference research organisations are not clear. There is no national invasive species research body, instead it is distributed across a number of CRC and CSIRO sites. Research bodies could benefit from greater cross-fertilisation of ideas.

4 Mr Edward McAlister, *Submission 75*, p. 5.

5 *Oxford Reference Online*, accessed 3 September 2004.

Research funding

8.57 To ensure that invasive species can be successfully addressed the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments need to commit to adequate funding of research activities. The Committee heard that it can take more than 10 years for a biological control method to be developed from inception to implementation. Long-term commitment to funding is essential especially for programs that are seeking to develop biological control responses to invasive species. Central to being able to plan and implement such a research activity is the need for a guaranteed commitment to funding.

Recommendation 20

8.58 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government provide certainty of funding to research institutions, such as CSIRO and CRCs, to enable them to undertake long-term research projects.

Education

8.59 There was a persuasive weight of evidence that there is a general lack of awareness in most sectors of the community of the impacts of invasive species. As was discussed in Chapter 5, invasive species are recognised as an issue by farmers, but do not have a high profile within the political arena or wider community. The Committee members themselves – all urban dwellers - have gone through their own Epiphany, having initially been largely unaware of the scale of the invasive species problem and now fully seized with the notion that it is a matter of some considerable priority.

8.60 This lack of awareness often simply arises from the lack of priority given to the issues. One only needs to review the experiences in Brisbane in relation to the fire ants incursion – the subject of a case study in Chapter 5 - to see what can be achieved once the public is alerted to the adverse economic, environmental and social impacts of the threat within their midst. They can be mobilised and committed. The challenge is to achieve a recognition that, while the likes of mice and locust plagues energise the public consciousness from time-to-time, the invasive species threat is substantial and ever-present.

8.61 This general lack of awareness amongst the community of the invasive species threat can be likened to the salinity or land clearing issues which in recent years have been the subject of significant media attention and, where appropriate, substantial funding. It has been acknowledged that the seriousness of both issues were appreciated by scientists for many years before general public awareness and concern emerged. Only then did a political consensus develop to devote substantial resources to tackle the problem.⁶

6 P Martin, *Killing us softly – Australia's green stalkers*, CRC for Australian Weed Management 2002, Canberra, p. 22.

8.62 Invasive species cannot be successfully combated by researchers and scientists without general community support. Support from the public is essential, especially where it relates to methods of eradication such as biological control, gene technology or culling, that may otherwise be negatively perceived. Awareness campaigns are an absolute necessity to gain support and acceptance of such actions. The Committee heard argument that increased awareness and recognition of the impact of invasive species can result in taxpayers being more willing to spend money and politicians being more willing to allocate money to the issue.⁷

8.63 Public education programs are the key to addressing the imbalance between the public's perception of the seriousness of the issue of invasive species and the actual level of threat. Education programs should be targeted on a number of levels: formal, community and industry.

8.64 Education programs directed at school-aged children are a proven way of raising environmental and scientific awareness across the community. Just ask any parent who brushes their teeth with the taps running, or who tries to throw a soft drink can in the general garbage. Information should be presented not simply as science, but in a social, economic and political context. This enables students to better understand the complex circumstances within which decisions about invasive species management are made.

8.65 Investment in education campaigns provide very high cost-benefit-ratios. As discussed in Chapter 4, a 2003 review of the national awareness and education campaign, *Weed Buster Weed*, which started in Queensland indicated that it had a cost-benefit ratio of 43 to 1.⁸

8.66 As awareness of invasive species has grown, the field of teaching on invasive species has also expanded, especially in the tertiary arena. Evidence indicated that there was a need for education programs on invasive species to be holistic and not to solely focus on pest species that primarily have significant economic impact. As demonstrated in the case study on Project Eden that is provided in Chapter 5, invasive species cannot be managed in isolation of the wider environment and their study should be understood within the framework of the broader environmental perspective.

8.67 How invasive species are viewed is influenced by wider societal values and improved prevention and control of invasive species will require a change in how the issue is perceived by the wider community. A wide variety of education, outreach, and training programs are needed. Programs could include:

- identifying and evaluating existing public surveys of attitudes on invasive species issues;

7 Mr Tim Low, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 14 April 2004, p. 49.

8 Queensland Government, *Submission 43*, p. 15.

- compiling a comprehensive assessment of current invasive species communications, education and outreach programs;
- coordinating development and implementation of a national public awareness campaign, emphasising public and private partnerships;
- developing a model public awareness program that incorporates national, state/territory and local level invasive species public education activities;
- developing and co-hosting a series of international workshops on invasive species in different regions for policy makers; and
- educating landowners on weed and pest animal identification.

8.68 Commitment to raising community awareness is demonstrated through the grant to the CRC for Australian Weed Management under NHT 2 for three-year funding to create an easy-to-use web-based system to deliver weed information to schools and communities. This project will assist in disseminating standard information to people at the grassroots level to assist them in weed identification and weed management. The Committee commends this project.

8.69 Volunteers and environment groups can also make vital contributions by playing a word-of-mouth role in educating their immediate communities. However, the better the educative instruments at their disposal, the more effectively they can carry the invasive species message.

8.70 The Commonwealth has the capacity to provide a national framework for the delivery of an education campaign on invasive species, similar to that which has been developed for the highly successful *Quarantine Matters* campaign for the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service.

Recommendation 21

8.71 The Committee recommends that, under the National Heritage Trust, the Commonwealth Government initiate, develop and deliver national community education campaigns on invasive species.

Recommendation 22

8.72 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government provide the relevant curriculum materials to enable invasive species to be included in relevant schools program across Australia.

Recommendation 23

8.73 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government continue to provide support through the NHT and Envirofund to community groups that deliver education and awareness campaigns.

Governments demonstrating leadership

8.74 Governments have been as guilty in the past as private citizens of planting invasive plants in formal displays or as screening, simply because they were attractive or cheap. It is an important part of the educative process for governments to demonstrate that they are prepared to show leadership by their actions, not just rhetoric.

Recommendation 24

8.75 The Committee recommends that all tiers of government immediately commit to an eradication program for all WONS and all locally significant invasive species within their formal plantings.

Labelling on plants

8.76 Mandatory labelling of plants to warn and educate consumers about their invasive qualities, similar to warning advices on water usage levels for washing machines, has been suggested. Such a system would raise awareness of the characteristics of the species and assist the public in making informed decisions. The Committee commends the matter to the industry - it would also be a relatively cheaper option for the nursery and gardening industry than mandatory regulation, which the Committee is resisting at this stage simply because of the relatively small size of many of its players.

Recommendation 25

8.77 The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth, States and Territories, the Nursery and Garden Industry Association and other stakeholders, including conservation NGOs, establish a process under the proposed National Weeds Action Plan to examine the merits of a mandatory labelling scheme on invasive garden plants.

Recommendation 26

8.78 The Committee recommends that the nursery and gardening industry give consideration to labelling of all invasive plants which, while able to be sold legally, may have invasive characteristics and should be managed responsibly.

Media responsibility

8.79 The Committee received evidence of gardening and lifestyle programs and magazines that have encouraged the use of invasive plants. It should not be necessary for the Committee to condemn such irresponsible behaviour. The Committee takes this opportunity to commend the recent edition of the *Gardening Show* on ABC Television which dedicated an entire program to the issue of invasive weeds.

Recommendation 27

8.80 The Committee recommends that gardening and lifestyle programs should be encouraged to include warnings about the appropriateness of the plants suggested on their shows. Such warnings could require an indication of the country of origin of the plant, the areas it is indigenous to, and whether it has proven invasive elsewhere.

Conclusion

Public money should be focused on protecting those non-commercial species because they have no industries to protect them.⁹

8.81 One of the key aims of managing invasive species is to minimise their adverse economic, environmental and social impacts and to preserve Australia's unique biodiversity. Invasive species not only pose a significant threat to Australia's agricultural sector but also to native plants and animals. The Committee has found considerable governmental effort directed at the former and very little by comparison at the latter.

8.82 The Committee expresses its hope that this report will assist in raising public awareness of the impact of invasive species and influence the taking of the necessary political decisions, across all tiers of government, to effectively address the issue. The Committee believes that the evidence provided in this report will assist in changing Australia's response to invasive species from a narrow, reactive approach based primarily on economic considerations to a broadly based one directed at remediation and protection of Australia's unique environment.

8.83 Some environmental issues turn on competing interpretations of scientific data – often with more heat than light in the debates. But the case for taking remedial action against invasive species is real and provable – we all bear witness to their impact in our daily lives. Action must be taken for the benefit of future generations. It may take decades, even centuries, to turn back the tide of environmental degradation of the past 200 years – but now is a good time to make a determined start.

9 Marine and Coastal Community Network (MCCN), *NRM and NHT – A Brief, Wet History*, NSW Regional Ripples E-Bulletin, Number 9, September 2004.