

Response to: Possible questions for the Weed Management Branch, Northern Territory Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport

1. Is *Acacia mangium* currently being examined as a potential weed in the Northern Territory? If so, when is a decision as to the weed status of *A. mangium* in the Northern Territory likely?

Acacia mangium was one of 80 plant species assessed for potential weed risk using the Northern Territory Government's Weed Risk Management System during development of that system.

That assessment identified that *A. mangium* has a very high weed risk, but that there is also a high feasibility of controlling the species.

The weed risk assessment is only one of the tools used by the Department to make recommendations to the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage on future control requirements for a particular plant species.

The results of weed risk assessments assist the Department in focusing and prioritising its research and management efforts – with those species with high or very high weed risk given greater priority and effort than those species with lower weed risk scores.

Where a plant species has a known economic benefit, it is the policy of the Department to undertake a cost:benefit analysis for the species. The results of the cost:benefit analysis, in conjunction with the weed risk and feasibility of control information, is used to make a recommendation to the Minister on future management.

Preliminary steps are currently being undertaken by the Department to identify sources of data and information relevant to a cost:benefit analysis for *A. mangium*, and to obtain that data and information.

The cost:benefit analysis is expected to take at least 12 months to complete. No recommendations will be made to the Minister prior to the completion of the analysis.

2. How is a plant nominated for consideration as a potential weed?

There are a number of species already being considered for assessment of their weed risk potential. These include:

- (a) Species which are currently declared as a weed under section 7 of the *Weeds Management Act* (NT) but have not previously undergone a weed risk assessment;
- (b) Species which have been declared in another Australian jurisdiction and which have potential distribution in the Northern Territory;
- (c) Species which are present on an alert list and which have potential distribution in the Northern Territory;

- (d) Species for which declaration is preferred in order to assist with national consistency, control, containment or eradication programs;
- (e) Species with a known weed risk in another Australian or international jurisdiction which are not known to be present in the Northern Territory, or which have only limited distribution in the Northern Territory, but which are sought to be planted and grown commercially.

The Department may request a weed risk assessment, or the Weed Risk Technical Committee, which undertakes weed risk assessments on behalf of the Department, may itself identify species to be assessed.

Any other person or group can also request a weed risk assessment in writing to the Department.

The priority given to any assessment is dependent on a number of factors including:

- (a) whether the species is considered a weed in a similar environment elsewhere;
- (b) whether the species is in early stages of invasion of the Northern Territory or an imminent threat of invasion into the Northern Territory;
- (c) the extent to which the species is known to invade intact habitats;
- (d) whether the species is likely to have environmental, social, cultural or economic impacts; and
- (e) the extent to which the species is a 'conflict' species (that is, whether the species has both environmental impacts and economic, social, cultural or environmental benefits).

3. What process, and what information, is used to determine whether a potential weed should be a declared weed?

A range of information on a plant's biology and ecology and how this interacts with the Northern Territory environment is used to undertake the weed risk assessment. Additional information on the costs of managing the species and its current distribution is then used in conjunction with biological and ecological information, to identify the feasibility of controlling the species in its current environment.

The results of the weed risk assessment, feasibility of control assessment and cost:benefit analysis (if appropriate) are used to make recommendations to the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage for declaration of a species as a weed or potential weed under section 7 of the *Weeds Management Act*. The Minister is required to consult with the Minister for Parks and Wildlife prior to making a decision on a weed declaration.

Species which the Minister determines should be declared as weeds or potential are notified in the Government Gazette.

4. The committee understands there are different classes of weed under the Northern Territory system. What features determine whether a declared weed should be Class A, B or C? What are the implications of the different categories?

There are three weed classes for declared weeds in the Northern Territory:

- Class A: to be eradicated;
- Class B: growth and spread to be controlled;
- Class C: not to be introduced.

Classifications can apply to all or part of the Northern Territory.

The classification of a weed species is dependant on an assessment of:

- the weed risk of the species;
- the feasibility of controlling the species; and
- the current and potential distribution of the relevant species.

The different weed classifications identify the level of management response required by land holders and land managers to manage the species.

The Minister may also declare weed management plans for a number of reasons, including specifying the management actions required to manage or eradicate a particular weed.

As an alternative to a weed declaration, a species may be declared as a potential weed for the purposes of managing the plant in all or part of the Northern Territory.

5. Is the Department able to comment on what class *A. mangium* would be likely to come under, were it to be declared a weed?

It is not appropriate to make comment on potential classifications at this time. The Department does not have all of the information to enable it to make a recommendation to the Minister; and it is inappropriate for the Department to preempt the Minister's decision in this matter.

6. Once declared, what steps are taken to address a plant's weed status?

Once declared as a weed or potential weed, land holders and land managers are required to undertake steps to manage the weed in accordance with its declaration status.

Weed Management Plans are developed for high and very high weed risk species to assist land holders and land managers to manage those species. Control programs may also be introduced for specific species.

Weed Officers may undertake compliance and inspection programs to ensure land holders and land managers are undertaken weed management actions.

7. What implications, if any, would declaration of *A. mangium* as a weed have for the forestry plantations on the Tiwi Islands?

The implications for forestry plantations on the Tiwi Islands following the declaration of *A. mangium* as a weed or potential weed is entirely dependent on the nature of the declaration and classifications. Such declarations may or may not apply to the Tiwi Islands.

8. Are you aware of any examples in the Northern Territory where a declared weed is also a commercial crop, such as plantation timber? If so, does this require special management of the commercial crop?

Andropogon gayanus (gamba grass) is an example of a declared weed which is also used for commercial (pastoral) purposes. The declaration of gamba grass, and the proposed Management Plan, allow for continued use of the grass by pastoralists, subject to increased management requirements to ensure the grass is not spread from individual properties.

Similarly, *Hymenachne amplexicaulis* (Olive hymenachne) is allowed continued use by pastoralists, subject to management requirements.

9. If *A. mangium* were to be a declared weed, would this change the environmental approvals required by the NT Government of the plantations on the Tiwi Islands?

Under the *Weeds Management Act*, land holders and land managers who wish to use or manage a declared weed other than in accordance with the weed declaration or a Weed Management Plan may apply for a permit from the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage. Permits are subject to the conditions determined by the Minister.