

Weed Management Review

SUBMISSION

April 2014



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Centroc's Mission is to be recognised as the lead organisation advocating on agreed regional positions and priorities for Central NSW whilst providing a forum for facilitating regional co-operation and sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources; effectively nurturing sustainable investment and infrastructure development.

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4 April 2014

Dr John Keniry AM
Chair
Weeds Management Review
Natural Resources Commission
GPO Box 4206
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Dr Keniry,

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the "Weeds Time to get Serious" review by the Natural Resources Commission.

Central NSW Councils (Centroc) represents over 220,000 people covering an area of more than 64,000sq kms comprising the Local Government Areas of Bathurst, Blayney, Boorowa, Cabonne, Cowra, Forbes, Lachlan, Lithgow, Oberon, Orange, Parkes, Upper Lachlan, Weddin, Young and Central Tablelands Water.

Centroc's vision is to be recognised as vital to the sustainable future of NSW and Australia.

Its mission is to be recognised as the lead organisation advocating on agreed regional positions and priorities for Central NSW whilst providing a forum for facilitating regional cooperation and sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources.

Centroc has two objectives:

Regional Sustainability - Encourage and nurture suitable investment and infrastructure development throughout the region and support members in their action to seek from Governments financial assistance, legislative and/or policy changes and additional resources required by the Region.

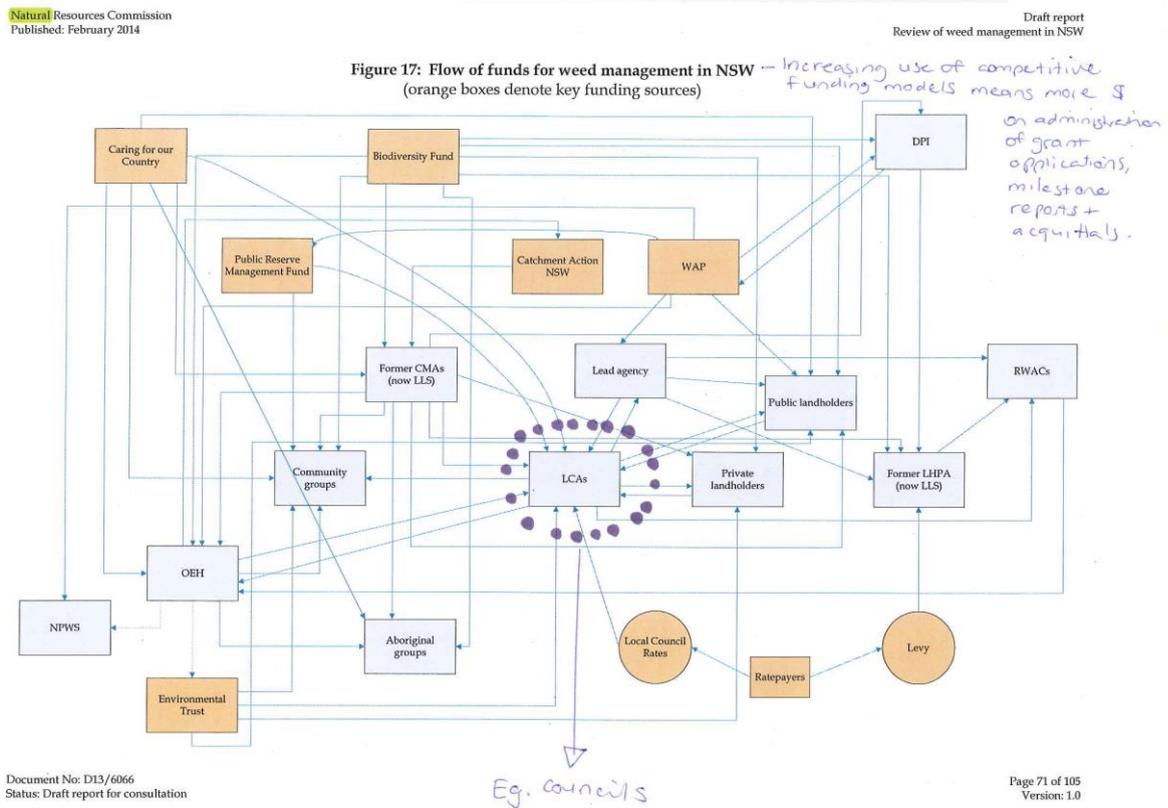
Regional Cooperation and Resource Sharing – Contribute to measurable improvement in the operational efficiency and effectiveness of Member Councils through facilitation of the sharing of knowledge, expertise and resources and, where appropriate, the aggregation of demand and buying power.

The Centroc Board is made up of the 30 Mayors and General Managers of its member Local Government Authorities who determine priority for the region. These priorities are then progressed via sponsoring Councils.

For more advice on Centroc programming and priorities, please go to our website and download our annual report at <http://www.centroc.com.au/resources/centroc-publications/>
Weeds management is core business for our members.

Our region agrees that “ultimately, it is the action and cooperation of people that will deliver improved weed management. Real change must occur at all levels to more effectively tackle weeds, through building capacity and working together towards integrated and sustained land management practices. The good news is that there is a wealth of committed, passionate people at all scales in the public, private, and community sectors, eager to improve weed management outcomes.”¹

Unfortunately, the complexity of the existing system with the added activity suggested by the recommendations from the NRC will only further disaffect communities and waste resource. See for example the current funding formwork in the figure below.



Page 71 of the "Weeds Time to get Serious" review by the Natural Resources Commission clearly encapsulates the problem as Centroc members see it.

Where page 70 of the same document provides advice that funding programs are increasingly competitive, it is clearly a very complex funding framework where LCAs, including member Councils of Centroc, are funded by up to nine different entities. Given that this funding is increasingly competitive in this complex framework, it is easy to see that:

- Increased resource will need to be grown to manage the funding framework;
- Turnover of staff throughout the network will ensure ongoing constant knowledge loss and confusion;
- The solution to the growing complexity will be increased use of process, adding the need for more resource at every level;

¹ Natural Resources Commission "Weeds Time to get Serious" February 2014

- More process and complexity disengages communities who really see things as simply as “weeds should be eradicated, get the spray out and get on with it;” and
- The more complex and competitive the system, the more it will benefit “those able to navigate it” rather than “those with the biggest weeds problems.”

It is the view of the Centroc Board that the recommendations suggested in the "Weeds Time to get Serious" review will only add to the problem. Page 7 of the document, at Figure 1: Proposed roles and responsibilities for weed management outlines more activity by existing entities, rather than less.

In recent times, Local Land Services (LLS's) have been given the responsibility for biosecurity where weeds will be part of this. While it is not clear at this stage how this will be implemented, at the very least this is another level of activity adding complexity. While important, it will in effect add another factor into the mix. Though the developments of biosecurity legislation and plans, and LLS's can be seen as an opportunity for better weeds management, “plugging” them into the existing framework without taking the serious but necessary step of reviewing and simplifying the framework will ultimately lead to wasted resources, disengaged communities and more weeds.

Some of the suggestions regarding role, strategic work and funding are mismatched. For example, to suggest that there will be mandatory regional weeds plans without identified funding streams is a recipe for unfunded mandates at the local level.

Further, care would need to be undertaken when using the RFS as a model for structure, strategy and/or funding. This region's Councils have significant concerns that they receive untimely advice from the RFS on escalating requirements for funding, the requests for funding are well over the rate cap and expose Council's statutory obligations for transparency and accountability to their communities. The RFS advise that their administrative costs are at 43%, which clearly a big number. In some instances, funding from Councils has in part ceased and the relationships between stakeholders have soured.

The Centroc Board therefore recommends that the NRC make recommendations to the NSW Government that:

1. Rework, with a view to simplifying, the strategic, funding and implementation framework for weeds.
2. In this simplification:
 - a. more realistic funding streams be suggested;
 - b. a risk management approach be used that matches funding with a priority order of weeds to be managed; and
 - c. that this approach identify what can be eradicated , controlled, and ultimately “let go” on the basis of risk and resourcing.
3. There be a “red tape” review that enables easy and fair enforcement.

For further advice in regards to this submission please contact the Executive Officer Ms Jenny Bennett on 0428 690 935 or jenny.bennett@centroc.com.au

Yours sincerely,



Cr Ken Keith
Chair
 Central NSW Councils (Centroc)