

C03/1037 SUB2
NRM13

21 June 2003

P O Box 742
WODONGA Vic. 3689

The Committee Manager
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Enclosed is my private Submission to the above Committee.

I am a retired Weed Consultant, having worked in the agricultural chemical industry for over 40 years, with the last 20 years specialising in the field of invasive weeds. I retired from industry 10 years ago and have since maintained an interest as a ChemCert Trainer (Farm Chemical Users Course), an Assessor of Rural Trainees, and as a member of the Implementation Committee of the North East (Vic.) Catchment Management Authority, where I specialise in both weed and salinity activities.

My interest in this Committee is that most of my training is in Southern New South Wales, over which I travel extensively.

Thank you for the opportunity to have my say.

Yours sincerely



DON MATTHEWS

email: heathdon@hotmail.net.au

Private Submission

Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management

This Submission addresses References C, D & E.

Reference C:

It should amaze us all that we consider an excess of water an environmental problem in Australia. The fact that the water is salty is surely only a challenge to develop through genetic engineering, plants that will tolerate this saline water. Because land is so cheap and all of the mitigating activities are so expensive, it is unlikely that asking farmers to plant more trees, so diminishing their productive area, is ever going to succeed as a strategy. How do you make money from planting trees?

I propose that a major portion of the funding available through the National Action Plan on Salinity should in fact be expended on developing salt-tolerant varieties of Lucerne and if possible, the perennial grasses Cocksfoot and Phalaris. If these plants were available to farmers, saline waters would become an asset that they can use to produce income. We know the salt-tolerant gene, so let's use it and stop wasting money on salaries for Extension Personnel and the unproven planting of trees in recharge areas.

Reference D:

The most effective way to develop GM varieties is to have CSIRO funded for effective research and development, so that we as Australians, own the technology, not a "for profit" organisation.

Reference E:

Because of economic rationalism, we are witnessing an alteration to our natural resources, through the reduction in control of weeds. If the natural resources of NSW are not valued enough that adequate funding for weed control is provided to Government land managers, then we will see a significant degradation of that resource.

Invasive weeds modify landscapes. Individuals and Governments do not have an interest in fighting invasive weeds out of any respect for nature or fear for the future of the human race, but rather out of a sense that the landscape ought to remain in a particular state. Australia has a highly distinctive landscape that is worth preserving. I believe that there is a strong connection between the Australian landscape and national identity. If we are to maintain our landscape, then we must minimise ecosystem transformation.

I am therefore very concerned that when decisions are made, particularly to preserve an area, that one consequence is that any invasive plant in that area is then left to proliferate. This is particularly important if the weed's biology predisposes it to predominate, which is the case with Bracken Fern and Blackberry.

One of the major problems with Bracken Fern is that it is perceived to be a native. All ferns are considered good. Bracken has characteristics which modify the landscape and increase the area of land on which it will dominate. Because it is a fern, it is valued by some people, in ignorance, and its perceived value is an example of the way it plays upon common perceptions of what is natural and what is unnatural.

If any area that contains Bracken Fern, particularly National Parks, is isolated it will gradually be taken over, changing for ever the perceived "naturalness" and if there is any valuable flora involved, then this would be under extreme danger from this invasive weed.

Bracken Fern *Pteridium aquilinum* var. *esculentum* has an extensive underground rhizome system, which is an effective storage of water, enabling it to survive even the worst of drought conditions. It is one of a very few number of plants that can shutdown its respiration and not die. After fire, the first plant out of the ground will be Bracken Fern, because of this effective water storage system. Any drive through the High Country of Victoria that was burnt in the recent fires will effectively prove this point.

As the new fronds emerge they contain a highly carcinogenic compound which makes this plant the most carcinogenic one known. No native or introduced animal will eat it and survive. Any Veterinarian in cattle country will know all about Bracken poisoning. Bracken is also allelopathic, which means that it exudes a compound which minimises seed germination of most other plants; the most important one is eucalypts.

Kevin Tolhurst of the old Victorian Department of C.F.L. found that Bracken "is a major competitor to eucalypt regeneration" and that fire in spring changed the density of Bracken from one frond per square metre, to two, and an autumn burn from one frond to 3.5. No mechanical damage will affect its growth, rather it accelerates its dominance. The first disturbance of the locked up area, usually bushfire, will significantly increase the population with the end result being a slow change from native species to Bracken Fern.

Bracken Fern and Blackberry are perennial weeds with biennial foliage, ie the first year's growth is lush vegetation, in the second year the leaves becomes hardened and highly flammable, they then die and if anything, becomes more flammable. In a normal, undisturbed state in the bush you will have fresh green growth, hardened second year growth, and dead leaves on the same plant. As the years go on, the amount of dead material on the ground increases, which contributes significantly to the intensity of fires.

If Bracken Fern and Blackberry are left unchecked, they will slowly transform our flora. Fire will increase their dominance.

Bracken Fern and Blackberry are easily controlled with herbicides, which can be environmentally friendly if used correctly. Any area that is to be isolated for any reason, must have a weed control management program to ensure that landscape modification does not take place and our natural resources are maintained. If Government leads, then enforcement of weed law can be exercised to private land managers. Under the present regime, one can point to any number of examples of neglect, so as to minimise court outcomes.

Don Matthews
P O Box 742, WODONGA Vic. 3689
Phone: 0500 527 874
email: heathdon@hotmail.net.au