

CASE CARD

Buffel Grass - Federal Response

THE ISSUE

The Federal government is failing to fulfil its roles and responsibilities in relation to buffel grass invasion.

BACKGROUND

*"Buffel grass is arguably the greatest invasive species threat to biodiversity across the Australian arid zone. It transforms ecosystems, forming dense monocultures, displacing native plants, altering habitat structure and diminishing resources that support arid zone fauna. Buffel grass invasion negatively impacts upon Aboriginal culture and increases the frequency and intensity of bushfires."*¹

We need our representatives in the Federal Government to step up and lead the response to this threat at a National level.

WHAT IS NEEDED FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Stronger Protection under Federal laws and regulation

Listing as standalone Key Threatening Process (KTP) under the EPBC Act

Buffel grass is currently listed under the Federal *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC) as a key threatening process under the overarching process 'novel biota and their impact on biodiversity'². This listing is extremely broad and covers a very wide range of established and potential invasive species³.

Separate listing gives formal recognition that buffel grass invasion is a key threat to biodiversity at the national level, it raises awareness of how buffel grass threats to biodiversity are operating across Australia and assists with understanding and prioritising research, planning and managing these threats^{4,5}. This listing is the pathway to developing a legislated threat abatement plan.

Listing as a Weed of National Significance (WoNS)

WoNS is a list of the most problematic plant species in Australia as determined by the federal government. The list is based on invasiveness, impacts, potential for spread, and socioeconomic and environmental values⁶.

WoNS have individual national strategic management plans. These plans define responsibilities and identify strategies and actions to control the weed species. They facilitate coordinated action from all stakeholders at a national level and improve linkages between research and ongoing control⁶.

Buffel grass needs to be recognised as a WoNS given the current and potential scale, impact of the threat and complexity of management.

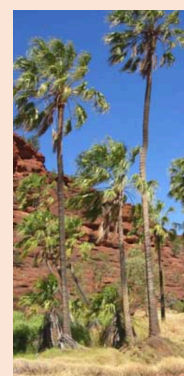
Implementation of Federal Threat Abatement Advice

In 2012 the Federal government published threat abatement advice which aims to provide information and guidance to abate the threat of ecosystem degradation, habitat loss and species decline in arid and semi-arid Australia due to the invasion of buffel grass².

The Federal government must fulfil its roles and responsibilities and provide coordination, communication, funding and policy development for the actions described in the advice.



Buffel grass has a very high fuel load and results in more frequent, more intense fires.



Buffel grass is recognised as a key threat to native flora and fauna, including iconic threatened species such as the Red Cabbage Palm and Slater's skink^{7,8}.

Much of Central Australia and Australia is still buffel free, however it is suitable for buffel grass invasion⁹.

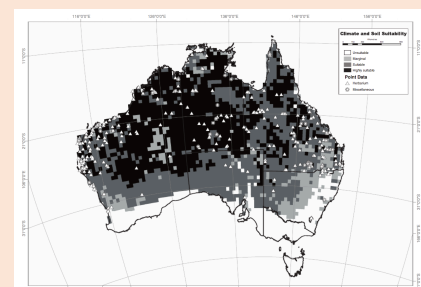


Figure 4. The predicted potential distribution of buffel grass in Australia based on climate and soils model showing herbarium and miscellaneous specimen records for Australia.





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ACTION REQUEST

Call on Government representatives to commit to providing:

1. National leadership on buffel management
2. Stronger protection under federal laws and regulation by listing buffel grass as a specific, standalone 'Key Threatening Process' and 'Weed of National Significance'
3. Federal financial funding at a scale commensurate with the problem
4. Pressure on Federal and NT governments to implement Federal Threat Abatement Advice in full.

REFERENCES

1. Ross Meffin, Ellen Ryan-Colton, John L. Read, Troy Bowman and Michaela Heinson
Buffel grass in South Australia: Progress and future directions 21st Australasian Weeds Conference <http://caws.org.nz/old-site/awc/2018/awc201810911.pdf>
2. Australian Government **Australian Government Ecosystem degradation, habitat loss and species decline in arid and semi-arid Australia due to the invasion of buffel grass (Cenchrus ciliaris and C. pennisetiformis)** <https://www.awe.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/threat-abatement-advice/buffel-grass-introduction>
3. Australian Government **Novel Biota and their Impact on Biodiversity** <https://www.awe.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/key-threatening-processes/novel-biota-impact-on-biodiversity>
4. Australian Government **Frequently asked questions - Key Threatening Processes and Threat Abatement Plans** <https://www.awe.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/key-threatening-processes>
5. Australian Government **Key threatening processes under the EPBC Act** <https://www.awe.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/key-threatening-processes>
6. Australian Government **Australian Weeds Strategy 2017-2017** <https://www.awe.gov.au/sites/default/files/sitecollectiondocuments/pes-ts-diseases-weeds/consultation/aws-final.pdf>
7. NTG Slaters Skink https://nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/206457/slaters-skink
8. NTG Alice Springs Desert Park Red Cabbage Palm <https://alicespringsdesertpark.com.au/connect-with-nature/plants/plants/red-cabbage-palm>
9. Lawson, Ben & Bryant, Mark & Franks, Andrew. (2004). **Assessing the potential distribution of buffel grass (Cenchrus ciliaris L.) in Australia using a climate-soil model.** Plant Protection Quarterly. 19. 155-163. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/230996057_Assessing_the_potential_distribution_of_buffel_grass_Cenchrus_ciliaris_L_in_Australia_using_a_climate-soil_model
10. Christine Schlesinger, Ellen Ryan-Colton, Jennifer Firn, John Read **The Buffel Kerfuffle: How One Species Quietly Destroys Native Wildlife and Cultural Sites in arid Australia** <https://theconversation.com/the-buffel-kerfuffle-how-one-species-quietly-destroys-native-wildlife-and-cultural-sites-in-arid-australia-149456>

Good neighbours - South Australia

South Australia has implemented Federal Threat Abatement Advice and declared buffel grass a weed under its legislation

It is working hard to stop the spread.

https://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds/controlling-weeds/buffel_grass



Buffel vs Gamba grass

Gamba grass is the Top End's buffel - it causes acute fire risks and damages ecosystems.

The risks from buffel are no less severe and we should be doing as least as much.

Regulatory Comparison of gamba grass and buffel grass

Regulatory Commitments	Buffel	Gamba
Listed as a Specific Invasive Taxa Key Threatening Process (Cth)	✗	✓
Listed under the EPBC Act under the overarching Key Threatening Process 'novel biota and their impact on biodiversity' (Cth)	✓	-
Threat Abatement Advice (Cth)	✓	✓
Threat Abatement Plan (Cth)	✗	✓
Listed as a Weed of National Significance (Cth)	✗	✓
Weed of National Significance Strategic Plan (Cth)	✗	½ *
Weed of National Significance Coordinator (Cth)	✗	½ *
Federal Government Funding for management (Cth)	✗	✓
National coordination between Commonwealth and Territory Government (Cth)	✗	✓
National Taskforce (Cth)	✗	✗
Declared Weed in the Northern Territory (NT)	✗	✓
Management Plan (NT)	✗	✓
Annual reporting on management plan implementation (NT)	✗	✓
NT Fire Mitigation Compliance Policy (NT)	✗	✓
Comprehensive mapping and monitoring programs (NT)	✗	✓
Management Guide (NT)	✓	✓
Community education, awareness and support programs (NT)	✗	✓
Targeted NT Government Funding for management (NT)	✗	✓

* Outdated or no longer functional



LETTER WRITING TIPS

Buffel Grass - Federal Response

WRITE TO

Minister for the Environment

Tanya Plibersek
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House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Minister.Plibersek@dcceew.gov.au
Telephone: +61 2 6277 4404

Member for Lingjari

Marion Scrymgour
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Alice Springs
NT 0870
lingjari@australianlabor.com.au

Follow the QR code to link to an electronic letter



Your name
Address

Recipient Address

Date

Dear

Introduce yourself

e.g. I am a resident of Alice Springs.

Identify the issue you are concerned about (you can use the issue from the case card)

e.g. I am concerned that the Federal Government is not playing its part to control buffel grass invasion.

Include some facts (you can use the information from the case card)

e.g. Buffel grass threatens our biodiversity and culture. It poses a huge fire risk. We must act now - much of Central Australia and Australia is still buffel free, however it is suitable for buffel grass invasion.

Explain in your own words why this issue is a concern

e.g. Buffel grass is destroying what I value most about Central Australia. I am really scared of the fires that may result from buffel grass.

Tell the Minister what you want them to do (you can use the 'requests' from the case card)

e.g. I respectfully call on you to provide:

- *Stronger protection under federal laws and regulations by listing buffel as a specific 'Key Threatening Process' and 'Weed of National Significance'*
- *National leadership on buffel management*
- *Federal financial funding at a scale that matches the problem*
- *Pressure Federal and NT Governments to implement the Federal Buffel Grass Threat Abatement Advice in full*

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns. I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Your Name