Letter Writing Tips
BUFFEL GRASS – NT Weed Declaration

THE ISSUE

Buffel grass has not been declared a weed in the NT under the Weed Management Act 2001 despite Federal threat abatement advice and government recognition that its invasion results in increased risk of fire and flooding, widespread ecosystem degradation, habitat loss and species decline in arid and semi-arid areas.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction to the NT

Buffel grass is native to parts of Africa and Asia.

At scale, buffel grass was deliberately planted by pastoral lease holders, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and NT government from the 1950's as a pasture grass for cattle dust suppressant to restore lands that had been seriously degraded by overstocking and other poor land management practices.

Buffel grass seed is still being traded in the NT.

Impacts

Buffel grass quickly covers the ground layer, displacing many native grasses and other small plants.

It's rapid regrowth and high fuel load increases the intensity, frequency and extent of fires which destroys top layer shrubs and trees.

Growth in waterholes, rivers and floodplains changes surface water flow, damages aquatic ecosystems[8], and can increase the risk of flooding[2,6].

Buffel grass adversely affects population numbers, habitat quality and geographic distribution of listed threatened species and ecological communities[3].

Buffel grass is a major threat to human populations and the economy – it negatively impacts culture[9], health and wellbeing and industries such as art and tourism.

Threat recognition

Buffel grass invasion was nationally recognised as a key threatening process under the *Federal Environment and Protection Act* in 2014[4].

The NT government recognises that buffel grass is highly invasive and has devastating impacts on biodiversity[6]. However, it is prized by many pastoralists, some of whom continue to plant it (*note NT pastoralism contributes less than 1.4% to the NT GDP*[7]).

Weed Declaration

The Federal *Threated Species Scientific Committee* has advised all States and Territories to declare buffel grass a weed[3] as a key threat mitigation action, but so far only South Australia has done so.

Spiral planting of buffel grass in central Australia c1970

Buffel grass invading Ntaripe (Heavitree Gap)

Rangers at the 2022 Indigenous Desert Alliance conference

ACTION REQUEST ACHIEVED

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In the NT weeds are declared by the Minister for Environment under the Weeds Management Act 2001.

A declaration may classify a plant according to any of the following purposes:

(a) it is necessary to eradicate the plant;
(b) it is necessary to prevent the growing and spreading of the plant;
(c) it is necessary to prevent the introduction of the plant into the Territory or a part of the Territory;
(d) it is necessary to prevent the plant being spread by the actions of persons.

Gamba grass in the Top End is classified as A/B. Buffel grass needs the same strong classification to be properly managed:

Class A – to areas of particular ecological or cultural significance or areas with little or no buffel grass

Class B – to apply to areas with significant established populations of buffel grass

Class B would create some basic rules for management across all types of land tenures. Obligations would be negotiated during the development of a buffel grass management plan which includes consultations with all stakeholders.

ACTION REQUEST

Declare Cenchrus ciliaris, C. pennisetiformis and any new varieties or strains of buffel grass class A/B weed under the NT Weeds Management Act 2001

NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

As in force at 9 January 2023

WEEDS MANAGEMENT ACT 2001

An Act to protect the Territory's economy, community, industry and environment from the adverse impact of weeds

3. Purpose

The purpose of this Act is:

(a) to prevent the spread of weeds in, into and out of the Territory; and

(ab) to minimise the impact of weeds in the Territory; and

(ac) to ensure that the management of the spread of weeds is an integral component of land management; and

(ad) to ensure that the management of the impact of weeds is an integral component of land management; and

(b) to ensure there is community consultation in the creation of weed management plans; and

(c) to ensure that there is community responsibility in implementing weed management plans.

ACTION REQUEST ACHIEVED

REFERENCES

1. Ninti One Buffel Grass: both friend and foe https://www.nintione.com.au/resources/nol/buffel-grass-both-friend-and-foe/
2. Australian Government, Department of Environment, Key Threatening Process Nomination - Buffel Grass Invasion, 2012 https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/87ef6ac7-da62-4a45-90ec-0d473863f3e6/files/nomination-buffel-grass-invasion.pdf
3. Australian Government, Department of Environment, Threat abatement advice for ecosystem degradation, habitat loss and species decline in arid and semi-arid Australia due to the invasion of Buffel Grass' https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/19e6108c-d6a4-489f-9ac9-9f0754788080/files/threat-abatement-advice-buffel-grass_1.pdf
4. Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, https://www.environment.gov.au/epbc
5. NT Government, Declared Weeds in the Northern Territory, https://nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/252133/declared-weeds-in-the-nt.pdf
6. NT Government, Buffel Grass, https://nt.gov.au/environment/weeds/weeds-in-the-nt/A-Z-list-of-weeds-in-the-NT/buffel-grass
7. NT Government, Department of Primary Industry and Resources Overview and Outlook, 2017 https://dpir.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/505637/Outlook-Overview-2017.pdf
8. Restoring cultural environment communities at sacred water sites, 2021, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13241583.2021.1888854?forwardService=showFullText&tokenAccess=TUPJDDNVATFUEXPU9I8P&tokenDomain=eprint&doi=10.1080%2F13241583.2021.1888854&doi=10.1080%2F13241583.2021.1888854&doi=10.1080%2F13241583.2021.1888854&target=10.1080%2F13241583.2021.1888854&journalCode=twar20
9. Read, JL, Firn, J, Grice, AC, Murphy, R, Ryan-Colton, E, Schlesinger, CA. Ranking buffel: Comparative risk and mitigation costs of key environmental and socio-cultural threats in central Australia. *Ecol Evol*. 2020; 10: 12745– 12763.

Images

Spiral planting of buffel grass https://www.robertonfray.com/2021/11/05/a-tale-of-two-grasses/
"Buffel is killing Culture' poster Presentated at IDA Conference 2022

Letter Writing Tips
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Write to The Minister for Environment

Tell the Minister to declare buffel grass a weed.

Hon. Kate Worden
GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801
Minister.worden@nt.gov.au

Your name
Address

Hon. Kate Worden
Minister for the Environment
GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801

Date

Dear Minister Worden,

Introduce yourself
Example - I live in Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

Identify the issue you are concerned about
Example - Buffel grass is spreading and the government is not using all its powers to reduce the threat.

Include some facts
Example - Buffel grass is increasing the frequency and intensity of fires. It increases the risk of flooding. It is wiping out native plants and animals.

Explain in your own words how this issue affects you
Example - The loss and suffering that comes with buffel grass is heartbreaking.

Tell the Ministers what you want them to do
Example - Declare buffel grass a Class A/B weed on all land tenures.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this letter.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours Sincerely,

Your Name

ACTION REQUEST ACHIEVED