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To whom it may concern,

SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO BUFFEL GRASS

Letters for Environment Central Australia is a grassroots group in central Australia which has been investigating and advocating for buffel grass weed management for several years. We are writing to share three resources which would be applicable in South Australia. We also offer some additional comments.

1. Health impacts need to be included in the scope of buffel grass's impacts

The impacts on human health need far greater attention given their extent, especially amongst vulnerable populations, and the cost of these impacts. It is vital that the impacts of buffel grass are included in the scope of any review of buffel grass.

RESOURCE 1: Buffel grass impacts on human health provides a scoping review of these impacts.

2. Need for technical analysis of dubious and unexamined arguments for buffel Grass

The three main argument in defence of buffel grass are ***highly dubious and unexamined.*** These are around:

1). Efficacy in soil stabilisation and erosion control,
2). nutritional value, and
3). Enabling the economic contribution of the cattle industry to regional economies.

We address each below.

2.1 Buffel is bad for soil stabilisation and erosion control*:* claims of soil stabilisation are not supported from an ecosystem science perspective or by experience. In central Australia we are witness to ongoing damage to soils, loss of tree cover, sheet erosion, persisting dust storms (especially in droughts and after increasingly enormous fires), and degradation of riparian areas (including loss woody vegetation, change in channel shape and flows and infilling of waterholes) in areas infested by buffel.

Please see RESOURCE 2: Presentation on how buffel alters soils and causes erosion which outlines our concerns.

We also urge you to obtain an independent technical review on buffel grass's impacts on soils and erosion and to NOT accept the myths of buffel proponents about its value in soil stabilisation.

2.2 Poor nutritional value The South Australian government's own report highlights buffel grass's low nutritional value. It reports buffel grass has 'Inadequate protein and energy to maintain adult dry stock. The high NDF would restrict intake to 1.6% of live weight.'

https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/landscape/docs/saal/20180117_nutritional_grasses_fs.pdf

2.3 Economic contribution is overstated

The recent report prepared for the Northern Territory Government highlights the extreme cost of further buffel grass spread in the Northern Territory (60 times its benefit). https://researchers.cdu.edu.au/en/publications/economic-impact-assessment-of-buffel-grass-in-the-northern-territ/.

Furthermore claims about the contribution of buffel via pastoralism to the regional economy are frequently overstated. We urge you to look at actual regional economic data. Our experience in Central Australia is that although the extent of buffel grass spread is large, the economic contribution of the cattle industry to the regional economy is very small (just a few percent of the regional economy). It also comes at a major cost to other sectors plus non-monetised costs.

Governance

Buffel grass governance needs to be evidence based and in the public interest, grounded in laws not relying on collaboration and not outsourced from Government to profit for purpose organisations.

We are concerned that that the recent National Established Weeds Assessment Report[1] regarding nominations of weeds for Weeds of National Significance status appears to be contemplating an approach which manages the politics rather than being effective. It states 'the treatment of Buffel grass within the NEWP framework needs to be carefully considered to ensure it does not adversely impact grazing systems where it is highly valued'.

Such an approach using words like 'valued' appears defers to subjective opinion/power dynamics rather than evidence, limits the potential for effective biological controls and will create endless demand for herbicides, including introducing herbicides into areas where they are not wanted. Failing to address the source of buffel grass and instead focusing on herbicides will lead to herbicide resistance, deflate the efforts of those trying to manage buffel, cause environmental harm and risks introduction of new buffel grass cultivars.

We are concerned that this 'Sisyphean keep planting and poisoning approach' may actually benefit those with a vested interest in herbicide sales and may be being propagated by those with complex relationships with both agricultural and environmental sectors such as the Biosecurity Collective (refer RESOURCE 3 Biosecurity arrangements in Australia from p 11).

For effective governance it is imperative that the existing Federal Threat Abatement Advice and actions is implemented. These are well-designed, evidence based and commendable. It is also imperative that the current nomination for buffel grass as a standalone Key Environmental Threatening Process under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity and Conservation act* is upheld and that this leads to a binding Threat Abatement Plan being prepared. This will provide the necessary legislative teeth for effective management of buffel grass at a National Level and pave the way for better financial support to the states and territories.

Thank you for your consideration.

Adrian Tomlinson
Co-administrator, Letters for the Environment Central Australia
Written with respect on unceded Central Arrernte lands

[1] https://weeds.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/NEWP-Assessment-Report-260826-FINAL.pdf

Attachments

- Resource 1: https://www.lettersfortheenvironment.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Buffel-Grass-Invasion-in-Central-Australia-Impacts-on-Human-Health.pdf
- Resource 2: Presentation on buffel grass and soil erosion: https://www.lettersfortheenvironment.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Buffel-Grass-and-Soil-Erosion-with-references-2.pdf
- Resource 3: https://www.lettersfortheenvironment.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/What-is-Biosecurity.pdf