



## Nursery & Garden Industry **INVASIVE PLANTS POLICY POSITION**

The Nursery and Garden Industry is looking for:

- 1** A fairer approach to the invasive plant issue
- 2** A set of agreed lists used at each level to identify invasive plants
- 3** One consistent, reliable and independent weed risk assessment process used at all levels
- 4** Recognition of the industry's initiatives and role in managing environmental issues such as invasive plants
- 5** A commitment to industry based communications and awareness programs when targeting our businesses and our consumers
- 6** A secure and sustainable future for our businesses

## **1. CONSIDERATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS – a fairer approach for gardens and the nursery and garden industry**

- The current situation is the result of historically low levels of awareness of weed risks combined with changes to natural systems which have decreased resilience of native ecosystems.
- The nursery and garden industry is only one of a range of stakeholders including governments, utilities, public authorities, public and private landholders, and the broader community - each with a responsibility to address this important issue.
- It is counter-productive and misleading to 'blame' the industry. This also limits our ability to fulfill an important role as part of the solution.
- Invasive garden plants are only one part of the wider invasive plants problem – efforts, attention and regulations should be based on evidence of problem or risk, not expediency or 'shock value'.
- Regulation and management responsibilities need to affect all parties more equitably with less concentration on the nursery industry and an increased commitment to addressing all weed pathways and the landscape changes that contribute to invasiveness. At present the industry strongly feels that we are being unfairly treated.

## **2. CLARITY AND CERTAINTY FOR INDUSTRY AND BUSINESSES – A set of agreed lists for each level used to identify target plants**

- There is a clear and urgent need for the development of an agreed set of lists for use at the national and state levels. The current situation, with multiple lists of unclear status, is unsustainable and makes it impossible for industry to develop a coordinated response. This should be the priority of the national weeds effort in order to support effective and coordinated management and policy decisions.
- This set of lists should be developed using a nationally agreed and scientifically based weed risk assessment process and should be created by governments in a transparent and accountable manner.
- Regulation of plant sales or other management obligations on industry need to be based on such easily identified and agreed lists.
- Plants on all lists should be specified to the variety level, recognising there can be great differences in invasiveness between varieties.
- Commercially bred varieties and hybrids should not be included on lists without evidence that they in particular are invasive, based on weed risk assessment. These hybrids are the result of years of development and investment, and many are bred to be sterile.
- Industry should be given time to consult widely regarding the impact of including ornamental species on invasive lists. It should also have access to research and evidence used to support such listings.
- Decisions to ban ornamental species should not be undertaken without full industry consultation and a suitable period of notice (relative to the production cycle of the species involved) to allow industry to adjust. Bans should not be introduced in a way which leaves businesses with large quantities of un-sellable stock.
- At the local and regional level a multi-stakeholder, cooperative approach should be used to develop environmental weeds 'advice' lists. These lists should be given a clear status as awareness and management documents, rather than regulatory or policy documents.
- Management responses to garden plants on these regional and local lists should focus on promoting alternatives and engaging the industry and community in a positive way.
- The 'Grow Me Instead' program provides an excellent model for addressing invasive garden species at the regional level in a manner which positively engages the nursery and garden industry and provides positive guidance to the community.



### **3. RELIABILITY AND INDEPENDENCE IN HOW PLANTS ARE IDENTIFIED AND ASSESSED FOR INVASIVENESS – Consistent weed risk assessment process used to identify invasive plants at all levels**

- Plants already within Australia should not be treated as guilty until proven innocent. While the industry supports the concept that 'prevention is better than cure', this does not remove the responsibility of government and other weed stakeholders to undertake proper risk assessment and research in order to provide evidence for listing a plant or other management decisions.
- There is a clear and urgent need for the development of a nationally agreed and adopted weed risk assessment process to be used at all levels. Without such a process weed lists lack credibility and rigour, the process of identifying invasive plants lacks transparency and accountability, and the resulting confusion detracts from the value of lists as management tools.
- Any assessment process should be open to public scrutiny, available to the industry for review and should include a process by which assessments can be independently reviewed in the case of a disagreement in results.
- Regulation, policy and management decisions should not be undertaken without appropriate weed risk assessments.

### **4. INDUSTRY INITIATIVES IN ADDRESSING INVASIVE PLANTS – the role of government in recognising industry's efforts**

- Plants that are currently traded within the nursery and garden industry have been legally imported and produced, and those invasive plants that were historically traded by the NGI were traded completely legally at the time.
- The banning of plants from trade and industry awareness alone will not address the invasive plant problem in Australia. More effort is needed to address all weed sources and reduce the spread of existing weeds. This includes a focus on improved land management practices by all land holders.
- Government policy and build on program should support the industry's own best practice measures including accreditation. It should also recognise the industry's commitment to and investment in related areas such as; plant pest and disease management, quarantine and biosecurity protocols, and the development of industry EMS programs.
- The industry invests considerable resources into the development and trialing of new varieties of ornamental species including sterile or low invasive risk varieties of potentially invasive plants. The inclusion of these 'new' varieties with 'parent' invasive species in lists discourages such industry investment.
- As with other agriculture and horticulture the nursery and garden industry also incurs costs managing weeds that affect production and are subject to the impacts of poor weed and land management decisions by adjoining land holders.
- The nursery and garden industry recognises the importance of correct naming and labeling of plants, including the use of full species names, and will work towards developing a national labeling policy to address this issue.

### **5. INDUSTRY BASED EDUCATION AND AWARENESS – Support for our commitment to promote responsible plant choices and appropriate gardening practices to our customers**

- The industry is committed to being a community leader in environment and sustainability in gardens and gardening practices.
- Education and awareness programs developed to target our businesses or our customers are best initiated, implemented and driven in partnership with the industry itself.
- Public and consumer psyche matters – awareness campaigns need to deliver a vital, bold and positive community message.



- Emphasise education for long term shifts in behavior not short term 'scare campaigns' – other areas such as health and household recycling demonstrate the effectiveness of positive change messages to shift social norms and enlist community support and commitment.
- The nursery and garden industry does not support the use of mandatory plant labeling with 'invasiveness warnings'. As a negative rather than a positive campaign it will be hard to get industry commitment, and such labeling approaches are difficult to set up, costly to industry and government to implement and enforce, and do not address the management of plants already in the community.
- The alternative to such an approach is to build on 'Grow me Instead' to engage gardeners as friends of the environment and enlist their support and commitment to reduce the spread of invasive plants.
- This can be achieved by working with industry to educate the public about making responsible plant choices and managing the plants that they already have to reduce potential weed spread e.g. managing garden waste. The industry has the expertise and are seen by the community as a credible source of information in this area.
- Work with industry to increase public awareness of the issues and promote real behavioural change. The industry speaks to the target group (householders) on a daily basis, at the time when they are making decisions about their garden. Enlist the industry as the 'shop front' of the invasive plants issue.
- Promote the industry as a source of advice and expertise and develop and run programs in partnership with the industry. Develop models based on existing and highly successful programs in water e.g. Waterwise Accredited Garden Centres (WA).

## **6. SUPPORT FOR A VALUABLE AND THRIVING INDUSTRY– A secure and sustainable future for our businesses**

- Nursery & Garden is a valuable industry with estimated close to 20,000 small to medium sized businesses, 60,000 employees in metropolitan and regional Australia, and annual retail sales over \$5.5 billion.
- Changes in invasive plant policy have significant impacts on the sustainability of the industry. Industry needs to be consulted effectively and have real opportunities to participate at all levels.
- The industry supports the investigation of options for an industry registration/ plant handlers scheme to better identify and manage the range of businesses and individuals involved in growing, transporting and selling plants. This would also support our Biosecurity obligations.
- Support for industry investment in R&D and extension activities that aim to deliver better plant management practices and outcomes such as best practice guidelines, training and accreditation programs
- The industry has shown a willingness to be an active participant in consultative processes relating to invasive plant management e.g. National Weeds Advisory Group, State and Regional Weeds committees, and participation in national, state and regional weed strategy development workshops.

