

## **40-50% cut to environmental weeds management irresponsible**

### **2015 Budget**

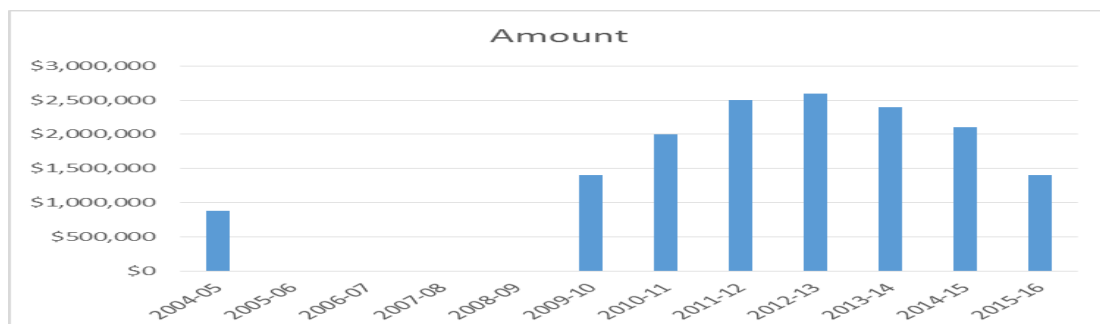
The ACT 2015-2016 Budget does not include any provision for additional weed management as was the case under the "Enhanced Biodiversity Initiative". The net result is a cut of 53% to discretionary funding and 43% of overall spending. This will have significant impacts on the nationally significant biodiversity of our "Bush Capital".

### **Why this is irresponsible and short-sighted**

There are four key reasons why this decision is irresponsible and extraordinarily short-sighted:

- 1) weeds are arguably one of the greatest threats to biodiversity, agricultural and landscape values.
- 2) stop/start management of both environmental/agricultural weeds and feral animals simply does not work. In the case of the ACT Priority Weed Program, it is essentially a waste of the previous five years of investment in weed management. The decision to cut this year's weed budget by some \$700,000 undermines the only just appropriate funding levels of the last five years. Unless weed/feral animal infestations are managed under a consistent program they will exponentially increase again over the short term (two to three years), thus completely undermining management activities and the monetary investment to date. Follow-up management is vital to ensure that, in future years', significant outlays will not be required on a catch-up program.
- 3) the decision to cut the weed budget is not based on any scientific or other evidence that environmental weed infestations are under control; if this were the case, reduced funding might be adequate to retain weeds at their current levels. Unfortunately, the evidence points to the fact that despite continued management, environmental weed infestations are not yet under control. This is not helped by a past history of insecure and inconsistent funding and other resources. There is ample evidence conducted by various areas of government, however, to show that the Priority Weed Program is working, and that if the program continues, the results may well be that the priority weeds will be under greater levels of control.
- 4) a significant component of weed management in the ACT is undertaken by volunteer Parkcarers – in the order of 5,000 hours a year. Their efforts are seriously undermined by this significant cut in funding, and the support provided by them is likely to be seriously affected, knowing that their efforts are not backed up adequately by government programs.

### **Historical funding on environmental weeds**



Note: the figure for 2015-16 is based on the budget allocation of \$1.4 M)

While it is acknowledged that there is a tight fiscal environment in the ACT, the Government has allocated \$7.754 million over the next four years to improve Canberra's urban amenity – *"More mowing and more cleaning"*. This is almost certainly occurring at the expense of protecting the biodiversity and amenity of our nature reserves and open space. We accept urban amenity management is important – indeed many of the weeds that threaten our natural and agricultural environments arise from the urban areas – however maintaining urban amenity should not be at the expense of our nature reserves and protecting the biodiversity values present in the ACT. Weed control within the urban area should complement that occurring in reserves and other priority conservation areas.

### **Transparency**

The massive reduction to the environmental weeds budget was not subject to any stakeholder consultation, nor is information on the weeds management budget fully transparent. For instance:

- there are no copies of the last two years Annual Weeds Operational Plans (WOP) [publicly available](#). The website currently says: "The 2013-14 Environmental Weeds Annual Report will be available on this page soon." (review of website 5 June 2015)
- the 2012-2013 report is available by an obscure [link](#).
- according to Hansard, at one stage the 2011-2012 WOP was available, with ACT Greens MLA, Shane Rattenbury stating on 28 June 2011: "*One thing that has happened this year is that the operational plans for both weeds and vertebrate pest management have been made public. For the first time since I have been in this place, I can tell you that the ACT proposed to spend \$177,000 on the management of pest species and \$1.2 million on the management of weeds.*"
- it is unclear how much weed management expenditure is derived [or should be derived] from environmental offsets allocations – i.e. in 2012-2013 24% of the environmental weed budget was for weed control at Molonglo River Park. This funding should be additional.
- The Weeds Advisory Group, established under the Weeds Strategy 2009-2019, was not consulted, nor informed of any changes to the 2015-16 budget allocation. The group's role is to provide advice to Government on weed control matters. All non-Government members of this group attend as volunteers, despite being professionals in their field. We believe this lack of consultation is discourteous and poor process.

### **Next steps**

The Conservation Council asks that the ACT Government:

- provides the additional funding of \$0.7 million in 2015-16 for the management of environmental weeds to bring it back to levels to achieve similar control levels this financial year;
- commits to maintain ongoing adequate funding of weed control. We are not asking for an increase in environment weed management funding at this stage, rather a long-term commitment with consistent funding based on an evidence based approach;
- makes publically available the Annual Environmental Weeds Operations Plan for 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 as soon as possible;
- consults with key stakeholders on the Annual Environmental Weeds Operational Plan for 2015-2016;
- supports a strategic monitoring program to track the effectiveness of weed control
- facilitates a meeting with the Weeds Advisory Group as a matter of urgency to seek their advice on this matter.

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