

Issues and options: alignment of Greater Sydney regional weed committees

Responses from Sydney Weeds Committees (SWC) in red font below

Purpose

To identify options to improve alignment of the Greater Sydney Regional Weed Committee with subregional committees, and optimise efficiency in regional weed management including coordination, planning and reporting by:

- Removing or reducing duplication in administration and staff resources,
- Minimising costs, and
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities

Background

The Greater Sydney Regional Weed Committee (RWC) was established in 2016 as part of the NSW Government's response to implementing the recommendations of the Natural Resources Commission review of weed management in NSW.

Recommendation 3b

The NSW Government should replace the existing 14 regional weed advisory committees with 11 statutory regional weed committees comprising LCAs, public and private landholders, and community members (similar to the Bush Fire Management Committee model) as subcommittees to LLS, and aligned with LLS borders.

Final Report Review of weed management in NSW, May 2014

Prior to 2016, coordination of weed management across greater Sydney (excluding Central Coast) was left to the Sydney Weed Committees Incorporated (SWC Inc.).

Formed in 2010 as an incorporated association, the SWC Inc. is a member based organisation with an elected board comprised of 8 members representing weed committees from the four sub-regions, Sydney North, Sydney Central, Sydney West/Blue Mountains and Sydney South West.

The SWC Inc. is currently funded via memberships fees (\$1500 p.a.), employs a part-time Executive Officer, maintains a website (www.sydneyweeds.org.au), and has the stated objectives of

- co-ordinate weed management across all land tenures in the Greater Sydney region, and
- facilitate collaboration, resource and information sharing and efficiencies in weed management and education across the region (see attachment 1)

Most functions previously performed by the SWC Inc. are now the responsibility of the RWC.

Response: Before the establishment of the RWC, a number of things were done by the SWC at the request of DPI or GS LLS, usually in collaboration with them. SWC does not propret to be responsible for any of the functions of the RWC and is, as it has always been, happy to assist RWC in carrying out its responsibilities.

Examples of past collaboration:

- initial 5 mandadory documents
- First cut of weeds to go into Appendix 1 of the GRSWMP 2017-2022

Current situation

The Greater Sydney RWC is the regional weed committee for the Greater Sydney LLS region, and is established as a subcommittee of the Greater Sydney Local Land Services (GS LLS) Board. Its objectives are outlined in Part 2 of the Terms of Reference (attachment 2) and include:

- (8) To promote effective and efficient collaboration and co-ordination of weed programs, and promote resources and information sharing between member organisations.

Local Control Authorities (LCA's) are integral to weed management and it is therefore essential that they are represented on the RWC. However, with 34 local councils and 1 county council in the Greater Sydney region, it is impractical to have all LCA's represented on the RWC. Currently, the chairs of each of the four subregional weed committees are members of the RWC, along with representatives from Hawkesbury River County Council (HRCC), Central Coast Council and Blue Mountains Council.

The SWC Inc. employs a part-time Executive Officer (0.4 FTE) to provide administrative support including organising meetings. The SWC Executive Officer is also invited to attend RWC meetings, bringing total LCA/subregional representation to 8 persons.

GS LLS employs a Regional Weed Coordinator (0.6 FTE) to act as the Executive Officer for the RWC and undertake strategic planning activities.

The Greater Sydney Weeds Action Program (GS WAP) project is administered by HRCC under agreement with GS LLS. Under the agreement, HRCC employs a second Regional Weed Coordinator (0.6 FTE) to administer all aspects of the project. The roles of the both Regional Weed Coordinators include:

- Reporting to the RWC on weed matters within the region, and
- Liaising with partners and stakeholders to promote effective cross jurisdictional arrangements.

Issues (real or perceived)

Confusion as to roles and responsibilities

The Greater Sydney RWC is the regional weed committee for the Greater Sydney LLS region. The existence of the SWC Inc. alongside the RWC creates confusion as to responsibilities for strategic weed planning and coordination in the region.

The existence of the SWC Executive Officer alongside two Regional Weed Coordinators also creates confusion as to responsibility for coordination and reporting of weed issues in the region, particularly if the SWC Inc. continues to be portrayed as a peak body for regional weed coordination.

In addition, the SWC Inc. has traditionally performed a role in developing education and advisory material for use by LCA's, enabling consistent messaging and resource sharing across the region. NSW DPI, GS LLS, RWC, LCA's and the Regional Weed Coordinators also provide education and advisory services. The role of each organisation needs to be clarified to ensure they complement rather than duplicate each other.

Response: The role of the Executive Officer of the SWC is to run the association and assist members. If any member of the association, or the public for that matter, report a suspected new weed incursion, the EO sends that information to the relevant people immediately. Rather than this being seen as a confusion, it could be seen as an added mechanism for getting important information to those who are charged with

dealing with it.

As a member-driven association, SWC responds foremost to its member needs. If our members request particular types of educational material, we always try to provide them.

The SWC is a grass roots support association rather than a peak advisory service.

Governance and risk

As an incorporated association, the SWC Inc. is a member-based organisation. Apart from the board which is elected from its membership, the SWC Inc. has no direct oversight from state or local government and the only reporting obligations are to NSW Fair Trading.

This scenario creates risk to implementing the agreed strategic weed priorities for the region.

Response: What risk? Implementing the agreed strategic weed priorities for the region, is the responsibility of each LCA based on the GRSWMP. We just support our members in their execution of this.

For example, the SWC Inc. has been developing subregional plans and local priority weed lists independently of the RWC. Although the development of subregional weed plans has been replaced by local weed policy templates, the SWC Inc. continues to facilitate subregional lists of local priority weeds without a clear role or purpose for the lists.

Response: It is incorrect to suggest that SWC started to develop subregional plans independently of the RWC. Jill (recent past president of SWC) raised the idea of producing the Local Priority Weed Plans at RWC Meeting No 13 in Oct 2018. The RWC were not interested in being involved, but were happy for the SWC to pursue this idea (pers comm. Rod Ensbey).

The local priority weeds spreadsheets we developed (based on Appendix 2 of the plan – so not really independent of the RWC) are not lists as such and are not intended to be used in conflict with the agreed strategic priorities for the region. Their purpose is to capture some information on what each of our member organisations are doing, or want to do, about their local priority weeds. They are simply a management tool to help prioritise our efforts to assist our members. Admittedly, their usefulness became apparent out of the initial development of the subregional plans, but it is disingenuous to suggest that they are in anyway conflicting with the strategic priorities of the region.

These spreadsheets have already proved to be very useful and not only to the Board of the SWC. For example, at the RWC meeting no. 14, Graham Wilson requested some ideas for widespread weed funding (offered via Landcare). As a result of having these spreadsheets, we were able to provide some information on the two most prevalent worked on widespread species and the two least noted species that might be able to be tightly controlled (or eradicated) even though they are Appendix 2 species.

As stated above, SWC are willing, as we always have been to working with the RWC.

The weed policy template was developed to assist our members develop their Weed Biosecurity Policies, which covers both state, regional and local priority weeds.

The State Weed Committee has expressed concerns over the creation of weed lists beyond those contained in the RSWMP's. See attachment 3 extract from State Weed Committee Meeting 10 Outcomes.

Administration efficiency

Significant efficiencies could be gained through the consolidation of administration and support services which are currently provided by three separate organisations. As an incorporated association, the SWC Inc. must

- Establish a committee (board) to manage its affairs,
- Establish objects and a constitution
- Appoint a public officer
- Hold an annual general meeting
- Keep records that correctly record and explain their financial transactions and position
- Prepare financial statements in accordance with Australian Accounting standards
- Arrange for an audit of financial statements
- Lodge an annual summary of financial affairs and lodgement fee to NSW Fair Trading

These activities would not be necessary if the SWC Inc ceased to exist and the functions performed by the SWC executive officer were transferred to GS LLS.

Efficiency of meetings

Efficiencies can be found by reducing the number of meetings and/or reducing the number of people required to attend meetings.

The Greater Sydney RWC meets four times per year, or approximately every three months. Each subregional committee is scheduled to meet ~~four~~ (correction three) times per year. The SWC Inc. board also meets four times per year prior to the RWC meeting, presumably to identify, discuss and align on issues to raise at the RWC meeting. In addition, as an incorporated association, the SWC Inc. is required to hold an annual general meeting (AGM), although in the past the AGM has replaced a round of four subregional meetings.

There is considerable duplication and inefficiency in having so many meetings. For example, up to four individuals (SWC subregional chair, SWC Executive Officer and 2 x Regional Weed Coordinators) attend both the subregional meetings and the RWC meeting. The need for the SWC Inc. board to meet prior to RWC meetings is also in question and would not be necessary if the subregional committees were supported by Greater Sydney LLS.

Online resources

Resources to assist with coordinated weed management are currently held across numerous websites.

- NSW DPI maintains “NSW WeedWise” which includes information on weed profiles, control measures and biosecurity duty for over 300 species.
- NSW DPI also maintains the “Weeds Extranet”, a members only resource for communication amongst weeds professionals across NSW.
- NSW recently launched the WIDX interface, which via a login ID and password, enable the user to access Weed Risk Assessments, NSW WeedWise, the Weeds Extranet and other DPI weeds pages from one central access point.
- Greater Sydney LLS currently hosts information about NSW weed reforms, including Regional Strategic Weed Management Plans for all eleven LLS regions.

- HRCC is the only single purpose weed control authority in the Greater Sydney LLS region. HRCC maintains a website that includes information about priority weeds, weed inspections, and the WAP project.
- The SWC Inc website includes a significant amount of weeds information and resources specific to the Greater Sydney region. The target audience appears to be local government and communities, including land managers. The website also contains a “members only” area.
- It is presumed that each of the 34 local councils in the GS LLS regional also maintain their own websites. The level of information specifically related to weeds varies from council to council.

Purpose of subregional committees/forums

Several regions currently have weed committees that operate on a subregional basis. These committees often serve as a networking forum for on-ground practitioners and facilitate coordination of operational planning. Where these groups are currently effective, they should be encouraged to continue to operate in this capacity, and facilitate implementation of the regional plans. However, their roles and responsibilities relative to the regional weed committee should be clear.

P31, Final Report Review of weed management in NSW, May 2014

There is clearly a place for sub-regional weed forums in the Greater Sydney region. Firstly, it is impractical to have all Local Control Authorities/Councils represented on the RWC. Having representation from the four existing sub-regions provides a practical solution.

Secondly, the strength of the subregional committees has always been in networking, collaboration, information sharing and planning at an operation level. This is reflected by representation being largely LCA weed officer/operational staff. In contrast, the focus of the RWC is overwhelmingly strategic, and includes planning and coordination at the regional scale.

The role of subregional committees needs to be clarified particularly now that the Greater Sydney RWC is responsible for strategic planning and coordination at the regional level.

Do we need subregional committees to replicate functions of the RWC albeit at a subregional level, or do we need networking forums for on-ground practitioners and to facilitate coordination of operational planning?

Funding for regional weed coordination

Funding for the RWC is currently met by Greater Sydney LLS. Funding for WAP administration is met by NSW DPI (via the WAP grant). Together these organisations currently contribute approximately \$200,000 p.a. towards regional weed coordination.

Sydney Weeds Committees members (mostly Councils) contribute approximately \$50,000 p.a.

No increase in local government contributions is proposed. However, an ideal partnership arrangement for regional coordination would see funding met through equal contributions (ie 33.3%) from DPI, LLS and collective local government organisations.

Options for alignment of subregional committees and RWC

Option 1 – Full alignment

- Subregional committees become subcommittees of the RWC with executive and administrative functions managed and provided by GS LLS. GS LLS provides the executive support for the RWC and subregional committees.
- Agenda and business papers for subregional committees would be consistent across the 4 subregions, with standing items RWC report/correspondence, new incursions (in subregion), and proposed amendments to RSWMP.
- The opportunity for less formal discussion/networking amongst weed professionals can be retained through standing agenda items “round table update/discussion” and “other business”.
- Until a broader review of RWC membership is completed, subregional committees continue to nominate a representative to the RWC giving consideration to minimising duplication where there is an existing representative (eg HRCC, Central Coast, Blue Mountains).
- Minutes of subregional committee meetings document decisions and actions and are included in RWC meeting business papers. Likewise, minutes of RWC meetings are included in the subregional committee meeting business papers.
- Meeting dates for subregional committees are set to occur in between (approx. 6 weeks before/after) the RWC meetings.
- Member organisations continue to contribute \$1500 p.a. (ie no increase) towards administration of committees. This needs further discussion around whether just local government organisations contribute or attempts are made to gain contributions from all members. Note that it may be a disincentive for some organisations (eg Farmers, Nursery & Garden, Landcare, state agencies) to participate in the RWC.
- Under this option, it is an expectation that all LCA’s agree to pay an annual contribution directly to GS LLS. These contributions will form part of the overall regional weed coordination budget, to which GS LLS and NSW DPI (via the WAP) currently contribute \$200,000.
- All budgets and expenditure, including WAP, would be overseen by a RWC finance/expenditure subcommittee (based on current WAP steering group).
- GS LLS investigates options to enable WAP grant funds to be quarantined and any unallocated funds carried forward from one financial year to the next.

Response:

- It was suggested that the existing subregional committees under the RWC would not be well aligned because the RWC is not an operational/technical committee, they don’t delve into the many aspects that are involved in Council weed/bushcare programs. The aims of the RWC and the SWC are different.
- A lot of weed management work gets carried out by Councils as part of their Bushcare activities. These avenues of weed management don’t seem to get recognised by the RWC as it is more focused on inspections and Biosecurity directions.
- It could be argued that there is a mis-match between Councils and LLS, in that LLS tends to be more focused on rural land managers and Councils do more Bushcare on public and Crown lands.
- Blue Mountains Council as an example, do a lot of community education about the weeds that are relevant to their LGA. This would not be done or supported by the RWC as they are focused on State and Regional priority weeds

- Because of the nature of annual Council budgeting, an agreement for paying annual membership fees (or admin fees as would be the case after amalgamation) would not be possible.
- If there is a change in circumstances – for example, a change in government, or a shift back to Catchment Management Authorities, we might lose our subcommittees. If we stay as an association, we can get stronger and build our capacity irrespective of the prevailing political wind.

Option 2 – Subregional networks

- Subregional committees cease to exist as committees and instead operate simply as networking forums for on-ground practitioners with an operational focus.
 - The SWC Board felt that the newly-named SWC would remain essentially the same supporting its members in any way it can.
 - The relationships that are built between weed officer (and officers that have many other responsibilities) is the biggest strength of SWC.
 - The newly-named SWC would be happy to continue to support the RWC (and any other agency or group with weed management responsibilities) in its strategic weed management activities.
- Executive officer/administrative support for the subregions continues to be provided independently of Greater Sydney RWC/LLS and funded by member fees or some other means independently of GS LLS or NSW DPI.
 - The SWC Board was unsure why this dot point was included as the funding of the EO has always been funded solely by SWC. SWC has never received any support for administration from GS LLS or NSW DPI.
- The incorporated association governance model could be retained, however a name change (eg. Greater Sydney Weed Officer Network) would be necessary to accurately reflect the role of the subregional forums.
 - The SWC Board has been considering a name change for a while because it recognises that it has different goals than the RWC and wanted to reduce the risk of confusion about roles.
 - The SWC Board felt that a name change would not impact of the governance model of the association.
- If the incorporated association governance model is retained, the organisation's constitution would need to be revised to accurately reflect its role.
 - Again, the SWC Board was unsure why this dot point was included. Our incorporated status only reflects a very small part of our role.
 - Our constitution would have to change as far as names are concerned. The aim statement in the constitution will probably be the same or very similar. That is:

2.0 AIM OF THE ASSOCIATION

(1) The aim of the association known as the Sydney Weeds Committees Incorporated is to promote and facilitate a strategic and cooperative approach to weed management across the Greater Sydney region through its four sub-regional weeds committees.

- Please note that SWC Constitution was reviewed in 2017 with the assistance of Rob Adam (GS LLS and Deputy Chair of the RWC at the time), who provided very helpful comments before it was put to members for adoption.
- Subregional or operational issues can continue to be raised via membership of the RWC.
- Each of the subregions continues to be represented on the RWC until a broader review of RWC membership is completed.
 - The SWC Board took these last two dot points to mean that if SWC changes its name it will still be able to represent its members until RWC reviews its membership.
- A review of online resources is conducted by the RWC or GS LLS with a view to streamline the hosting of region specific resources.
 - The RWC and GSLLS do not have a reviewing role regarding the SWC website. Our website was developed predominantly for our members and also serves the general

public. We don't claim that it is an authoritative site. SWC has been and will continue to be happy to promote weed information, events and activities for other groups and agencies.

- If SWC changes its name, the SWC Board would alter the parts of the website as required.

In addition to the above, a review of online resources will be conducted by the RWC or GS LLS with a view to streamline the hosting of region specific resources.

Attachment 1 - Extract from sydneyweeds.org.au (28 February 2019)

About Sydney Weeds Committees Inc.

Sydney Weeds Committees, formed in 2010, is a not-for-profit incorporated association of organisations, primarily local councils, working together to co-ordinate weed management across all land tenures in the Greater Sydney region. It is made up of four sub-regional weed committees: North, South West, Central and West Blue Mountains, comprising of members from local councils and other land managers responsible for controlling weeds. An elected Board comprised of the Chair and Deputy Chair of each sub-regional committee provides the executive of the Sydney Weeds Committees promote the coordination of the four committees to facilitate collaboration, resource and information sharing and efficiencies in weed management and education across the region.

We aim to coordinate weed control actions and resources to prevent further spread of weeds, and to protect the most important assets that we have – our endangered ecosystems, waterways, agricultural land and critical habitat corridors.

Much of the material for this website has been supplied by members of the Sydney Weeds Committees to help increase community knowledge of weeds, their impact and the techniques for control that make weeding a lot easier.

Special thanks go to the many members who have supplied photographs. These include weeds officers and others who have worked with member agencies. Particular thanks go to Rob Gleeson, Adam Burrowes, Sue Stevens and Terry Inkson (of Great Lakes Council) whose photographs are used extensively in weed identification resources. Acknowledged also is the format of the 'Garden Escapees booklet', originally a publication by Great Lakes Council in association with the Mid North Coast Weeds Advisory Committee. We relied heavily on the format and content of that booklet for the Sydney version.

Disclaimer: The information on this website is a guide only. Sydney Weeds Committees does not accept liability for any loss and/or damage, including financial loss, resulting from the reliance upon any information, advice or recommendations accessed via this website. Content on this site should not necessarily be taken to represent the views of the participating organisations. The most appropriate control methods and management of invasive species should always be checked with the Local Control Authority (local council). Herbicides should always be used according to the specific product label and safety precautions.

Attachment 2 – Extract from Greater Sydney RWC Terms of Reference

PART 2 – OBJECTIVES

- (1) The objectives of the Greater Sydney RWC include but are not limited to the goals of the NSW Invasive Species Plan 2015 – 2022.
 - i) Exclude – prevent the establishment of new invasive species.
 - ii) Eradicate or contain - eliminate, or prevent the spread of new invasive species.
 - iii) Effectively manage – reduce the impacts of widespread invasive species.
 - iv) Capacity Building – ensure NSW has the ability and commitment to manage invasive species; **and** to promote awareness of invasive weed species within the community.
- (2) To develop and implement regional weed management plans that are based on best available local knowledge, research and technology.
- (3) To advise the NSW State Weed Committee on weed matters relating to declaration, control and promotion for the Region.
- (4) To prioritise target weed species and to recommend weed policy, declaration, control and promotion to member organisations.
- (5) To facilitate the measurement and evaluation of progress in the control of invasive weed species..
- (6) To facilitate education, training and the encouragement of persons and organisations in weed management.
- (7) To develop a communication, education and awareness program based on local and/or regional priority weeds and issues.
- (8) To promote effective and efficient collaboration and co-ordination of weed programs, and promote resources and information sharing between member organisations.
- (9) Liaise, where necessary, with other Greater Sydney RWC to develop and deliver weed management plans.
- (10) Identify synergies and capitalise on opportunities for sourcing investment and delivery of priority projects. Identify information and research needs and appropriate collaborative actions.
- (11) To monitor, evaluate and report on outcomes of the Greater Sydney RWC collaborative planning and delivery processes.

Attachment 3 - Extract from State Weed Committee Meeting 10 Outcomes – 18 July 2018

Local weed lists

The Committee also discussed the issue that some LCAs have prepared additional weed lists specifically for their LCA areas; in addition to the priority weeds in the RSWMPs. The Committee acknowledged that as an autonomous Control Authority under the Biosecurity Act, Councils had the discretion to develop their own inspection programs and it is logical that each council will have a policy or work instruction for how they would apply the GBD in the absence of clear guidance in the RSWMPs.

However, some members expressed concern that some of these LCA specific lists emphasised only a subset of the RSWMP and that these lists might not be subject to appropriate risk assessment, consultation and agreement by a broad range of land managers - something that is critical to ensure the tenure neutral element of the Biosecurity Act. Furthermore, this lack of consultation would likely lead to people contesting the reasonably practicably nature of the lists which could undermine the Regional list.

The Committee agreed to give clarity around the following points:

- The Government response to the NSW Weed Review is clear that ‘weed declarations’ should be at the regional scale.
- It is preferable that weed lists are true ‘priority’ lists in terms of resource allocation and for communication effectiveness.
- Additional lists should not become ‘de facto’ weed lists because locally important weeds did not get included on the RSWMP. The Committee agreed that it is preferable that RSWMPs are reviewed periodically and that new weeds, or weeds critical to an individual LCA’s weed program be re-assessed and recognised on the RSWMP – if appropriate.
- Priority weeds are those listed in Appendix 1 of the RSWMPs and then transferred into NSW WeedWise. Local plans and policies are to complement the RSWMPs.
- It is important that there is a common message about weed priorities. If there are weeds that are specifically important to an LCA, the council can still put effort into educating the community or coordinating effort. These weeds do not necessarily require regulatory action in most circumstances and this approach may be considered unreasonable if the LCA cannot justify the risk posed by the weed.