



# Nature Conservation Council

The voice for nature in NSW

## BIOSECURITY POLICY 2016

*As endorsed on October 23, 2016 at the Nature Conservation Council Annual Conference.*

### **Purpose**

To equip the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC) to work on biosecurity and invasive species issues in a way that increases environmental outcomes for NSW. This policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant NCC policies.

### **Policy**

The Nature Conservation Council of NSW:

1. Understands that invasive species are one of the greatest threats to the natural environment of NSW and that strong biosecurity is essential to the state's environmental health;
2. Maintains that protection and stewardship of the natural environment, including biodiversity and ecosystem processes, must be an integral part of NSW biosecurity policy and practice;
3. Notes that prevention of new invasions is by far the most effective biosecurity measure, and so prevention must be the strongest component of this state's biosecurity system;
4. Promotes strong surveillance programs to detect any invasive species that evade prevention;
5. Urges rapid action to eradicate and/or to contain invasive species that evade prevention, and the development of contingency plans in readiness for the arrival of high-risk invasive species;
6. Encourages consistent, transparent science-based risk assessments of all invasive species (at all taxonomic levels);
7. Encourages regular independent reporting on biosecurity risks and performance and the identification of future risks (foresighting and horizon scanning), such as through a regular state of biosecurity report;

8. Supports application of a “white list” approach to all invasive species, listing those that are safe to bring into and trade within NSW, not just those that are (so far) known to be *unsafe*, with safe species and taxon being those assessed as having a low risk of establishing in the wild;
9. Advocates use of the precautionary principle in regard to the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems from the threat of invasive species;
10. Calls for strong governance of the state’s biosecurity system including adequate independent oversight, and the inclusion of environmental interests and experts in all biosecurity decision-making processes that pertain to protection of the natural environment;
11. Urges the environment department and minister to have a central role in administering invasive species laws and developing policy and primary decision-making authority on invasive species impacting on the environment;
12. Urges that where there are conflicts of interest between agricultural and environmental goals, these conflicts should be made explicit and a process applied to determine what is in the public interest and the best way to minimise environmental impacts;
13. Supports the concept of shared responsibility for protecting the environment from the impacts of invasive species, noting in this context that government holds a particular responsibility for delivering public good environmental outcomes on behalf of their represented community;
14. Encourages adoption of a general biosecurity duty in legislation but holds that a general biosecurity duty should not be a substitute for prohibiting certain high risk activities and such a duty must be accompanied by an active awareness-raising program clearly outlined expectations and a strong compliance program;
15. Supports a regional approach to preventing and controlling invasive species, supported by similar efforts at the state and national level, with prevention and containment measures implemented at the appropriate scale;
16. Urges provision of funds for an adequate rapid-response to new incursions of invasive species, and on-going targeted effort to reduce the impacts of widespread invasive species on biodiversity and ecosystems to a minimum;
17. Opposes recreational hunting and bounties as pest animal control solutions;
18. Promotes strategic planning for biosecurity action including:  
measureable biophysical targets and milestones aimed at reducing the

impacts of invasive species on the environment to a minimum; clear roles and responsibilities for achieving those targets; and independent evaluation of performance against targets;

19. Supports a tenure-neutral approach to the management of invasive species' impacts on the natural environment;
20. Holds that strong public accountability and review mechanisms must be included in the biosecurity system to enable people to see and understand the degree to which the system is delivering public good environmental outcomes;
21. Supports public education about biosecurity, and community involvement in invasive species policy development and implementation;
22. Urges NSW to take a leadership role in promoting effective environmental biosecurity in the national arena;
23. Supports control of invasive fauna by lethal means (e.g. culling) where proven necessary to protect biodiversity or native ecosystems provided that controls are undertaken within the appropriate legal frameworks, are humane, necessary and designed to be effective and lasting;
24. Supports investment in and coordination of research on biosecurity and invasive species including to develop and refine effective control methods;
25. Supports mandatory domestic controls on hull fouling and ballast water with high biodiversity standards, to minimise the introduction and movement of invasive species that may damage marine, coastal and estuarine environments;
26. Supports the development of strategies to limit the exacerbation of invasive species impacts under climate change.

## **BACKGROUND**

Attitudes and approaches to invasive species have evolved since European settlement from active introduction of foreign species, to their regulation to protect agricultural interests, to today's somewhat more comprehensive approach to protecting the environment, economy and human health from invasive species' impacts – often referred to as biosecurity. Overall however, policy approaches are still weighted heavily towards protecting trade, agricultural, human health, and economic interests, compared to environmental interests.

The NSW State of the Environment Report 2015 found that: *“Invasive species, including pest animals and weeds are widespread across NSW and have significant impacts on native species, ecosystems and agriculture. Many invasive species are listed as key threatening processes in NSW, with pest animals and weeds identified as a threat to over 70% of all threatened species. Pathogens and diseases are an emerging threat to both biodiversity and agriculture and are becoming increasingly prevalent.*

The impacts of invasive species on native species and ecosystems include competition, predation, hybridization, disease, changes to vegetation structure and floristics, soil erosion and compaction, and altered fire regimes. A related issue is the overabundance of some native species within their natural range through human-induced causes. While this does not comprise invasion per se the impacts can be similar”.

The spread of invasive species is not only driven by historic practices such as “acclimatisation” (deliberate establishment of exotic species) but by recent accidental or deliberate introductions through trade, travel and illegal means. Trade pathways include agricultural and horticultural industries (including introductions of new invasive varieties of species already in Australia) and domestic pet and aquarium industries. Some species are spread by hunters (e.g. pigs, deer, foxes). Marine organisms are introduced mainly through ballast water and hull fouling.

Policy and management responses to invasive species that solely impact on the environment, such as feral cats, have not been as strong as those that impact on agriculture. Too often responses reflect particular stakeholder interests rather than reflecting a true science-based risk assessment of the likely impacts of a given species. For example, deer species are protected as game for hunters in NSW, whereas feral pigs are declared pests.

In a similar vein, recreational hunting is often promoted as a pest animal control solution, whereas even the use of carefully selected and highly skilled volunteer shooters will only be effective in a limited number of closely supervised circumstances.

Once an invasive species is widely established in an area it becomes very costly to manage its impacts and often impossible to eradicate. Prevention of the initial invasion is by far the most effective and least costly approach to biosecurity.

Where a species evades prevention, rapid eradication becomes the most effective option. This depends on strong surveillance, contingency planning and early-response systems. Containment of a species’ spread may be part of an eradication program or be the next-best management approach where eradication is no longer feasible.

This continuum, from the most cost-effective prevention methods, through eradication to containment and failing that to expensive on-going management of the impacts of established invasive species, is an important framework for constructing biosecurity policies and programs.

Over recent years, policy debates in some states and at national level have begun to reflect this thinking, and to make greater reference to the importance of protecting the natural environment and the fact that environmental invaders constitute the majority of problematic species. For example, the Natural Resources Commission has suggested that feral deer be declared a pest species in NSW instead of being protected as a resource for hunters.

The scale of impacts from invasive species and the risk of future new invasions suggests a need for continued policy reform and program investment to protect the lands, waters, flora and fauna of NSW from the impacts of invasive species.

## DEFINITIONS

**Biosecurity** is the protection of the environment, economy and public health from negative impacts associated with the entry, establishment or spread of invasive pests, diseases and weeds.

**Containment** aims to limit the spread of an invasive species that is not considered eradicable.

**Eradication** aims to detect and completely remove an invasive species from the State or part of it before it can establish a self-sustaining population. This is also very cost-effective, and is best done as a rapid response in the early stages of an invasive species incursion.

**Invasive species** are animals, plants and other organisms (exotic or native) that are introduced by human agency, directly or indirectly, to places outside their natural range where they reproduce and spread, often threatening indigenous species and compromising ecosystem functions.

**Prevention** aims at stopping invasive species from entering new areas. This is the most cost-effective approach to biosecurity.

## SELECTED REFERENCES

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<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/terrestrial-assessment/index.html>

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*Invasive Species Council 2010, Stopping NSW's Creeping Weed Peril,* <https://invasives.org.au/publications/stopping-nsws-creeping-peril/>

*Invasive Species Council 2012, Exposure Draft of the Biosecurity Bill 2012 A submission from Environment NGOs,* <https://invasives.org.au/publications/exposure-draft-biosecurity-bill-2012/>

*Invasive Species Council 2014, Submission to proposed framework for a NSW Biosecurity Act,* <https://invasives.org.au/publications/submission-proposed-framework-nsw-biosecurity-act-jun-2014/>

*National Land and Water Resources Audit 2002, Australian Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment 2002,* Canberra.

*Natural Resources Commission Inquiry into pest animal management, Draft Report: Shared Problems, Shared Solutions,* <http://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/pest-animal-management>

*NSW State of the Environment 2015, Summary,* <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/soe/160186-soe-summary.pdf>

*State of the Environment 2011 Committee. Australia state of the environment 2011. Independent report to the Australian Government Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Canberra: DSEWPaC, 2011.*

*Invasive Species Council 2010, How many invaders are there?, in Feral Herald, Newsletter of the Invasive Species Council, Issue 25, September 2010,* <https://invasives.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/feralherald25.pdf>