

27 November 2023

Hon Kate Worden MLA
Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water Security
Parliament House, Darwin NT 0800
GPO Box 3146, Darwin NT 0801
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Listing Buffel Grass as a weed in the Northern Territory

Dear Minister

We write to you about the serious threat posed by buffel grass to the Northern Territory environment, First Nations culture and the safety of remote territory communities. I urge you to declare buffel grass under the NT Weeds Management Act for all land tenure in the Northern Territory. This decision is an opportunity to demonstrate that the NT government takes environmental protection, First Nations interests, and climate change seriously, as buffel grass impacts on all of these increasingly high-profile issues.

As you would be aware, there is a decision due on 30 November whether to list buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*, *C. penisformis*) as a class A/B weed under territory legislation. Buffel grass is widely recognised as one of the greatest invasive species threats to the environment and culture in Central and Northern Australia. Buffel grass has already spread into most states and is listed as a weed in South Australia, and a key threatening process in NSW, with the species identified as a major threat to biodiversity in regional strategies including South Australia's Arid Lands, Western Australian Rangelands, and Queensland Fitzroy regions.

Buffel grass has been spreading through northern Australia, creating monoculture environments by pushing out native Australian grasses, reducing the food supply for our wildlife, and creating unprecedented bushfire risk. The fires seen around Alice Springs this year are testament to the impact that uncontrolled buffel grass has on our ability to protect landscapes and remote communities, with increasingly hot and devastating fire regimes. The tragic and catastrophic fires in Maui, Hawaii were also worsened by the presence of this noxious weed.

Listing buffel grass as a weed is a long overdue action that will enable the territory to start to address the impacts of this invasive plant. The technical working group has been preparing comprehensive advice on how best to reduce or eliminate the impacts of buffel grass in the NT, objectives which we support, and it will recommend declaring buffel grass or not as a weed under the NT Weeds Management Act.


In 2014, the federal government's Threatened Species Scientific Commission provided threat abatement advice encouraging all states and territories to declare buffel grass a weed. In 2015, buffel grass was declared a weed in South Australia.

This letter comes to you with urgency. As fires destroy much of Central Australia and the MacDonalld Ranges it has become even more apparent the need to control buffel grass. It jeopardises efforts to save native species, impacts on tourism and the safety of remote communities.

Buffel grass is also an issue of justice for First Nations people in the territory and Australia as a whole. It prevents traditional food gathering, impacts on sacred sites and prevents cultural use of the land. Buffel grass has been described as 'killing culture', which then affects health outcomes and exacerbates social challenges.

Therefore we call upon you as the Minister for the Environment to declare this weed under the NT Weeds Management Act for all land tenure in the Northern Territory. This declaration is the first step to achieve coordinated and long term management of the grass. The negative impacts of this weed cannot be understated, and affects us all.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Cox', with a stylized, flowing script.

Andrew Cox, CEO

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