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Andrew Barr
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Dear Chief Minister Barr

RE DEMISE OF BUSH-FRIENDLY GARDEN AT FLORIADE & REALLOCATION OF EDUCATION FUNDING

I am writing to express our surprise at the rather sudden withdrawal of ACT government support for the Bush-Friendly Garden at this year's Floriade. It is of some concern to ANPS that the educative value on environmental weeds will no longer be present at this important event, and that information on native plant alternatives to some commonly cultivated environmental weeds will no longer be available.

From what we were advised, a prime reason appeared to be that the support was withdrawn because the BFG was being supported to the tune of \$30,000, and only 50% of the attendances at Floriade were ACT citizens. We acknowledge that other questions were being asked about the BFG, including:

- effectiveness of the BFG (and the associated Weed Swap scheme);
- whether weed education could be more efficient;
- reviewing target audience(s);
- sleeper weeds;
- funding for ongoing weed management in the ACT, and
- plant nurseries role in retailing environmental weed species.

In February of this year, a meeting of government personnel was apparently held to look at better utilising the funds currently allocated to the BFG to promote weed education more directly to the ACT community. The ANPS is currently uncertain if this includes funding for the Weed Swap scheme as well. Some 16 proposals were discussed on possibly more effective ways of getting the weed message through to the community.

It is the view of ANPS that education on environmental weeds is always valuable, but we agree that is extremely difficult to assess its effectiveness. Only those who wish to accept the educative messages will respond. While ANPS will always support educative programs in relation to weeds, ANPS is more concerned about ensuring the ACT remains on top of weed management.

The ANPS has previously been in contact with various departmental officers and ACT government ministers in support of current weed programs. The two primary ACT Weed officers have been involved in developing and overseeing extremely effective weed mapping and management programs, ensuring maximum effect under current weed management allocations. After our member's experiences and contributions to weed issues over many years, and those of many other community groups and individuals, we recognise that the ACT Government should consider the following educative uses for the funding previously used for the BFG.

1) Legislative enforcement

ANPS acknowledges that this always sounds aggressive, and is not a popular option for any government. However, it is the one realistic method of ensuring that already prohibited plant species do not continue to contribute to environmental and noxious weed spread. It can also be undertaken in cooperation with the nursery industry, which is already well aware of their responsibilities in weed dissemination – there are just unfortunately some lapses in the species they stock.

Some 20 years ago, the ACT government and the Conservation Council ACT Region (CC) undertook twice yearly random visits which covered every plant retail outlet in the ACT. An ACT Weed officer and the CC weed officer undertook these visits. Prior to initiating the visits, correspondence explaining the proposed visits together with a list of prohibited species and other species of concern were sent to the nurseries. On the first visit to each of the nurseries, these two representatives introduced themselves to the manager/owner of each retail outlet, and further explained their purpose and what they were trying to achieve. A very good rapport was built up between the representatives and nursery managers over a couple of years. The scheme was very successful, with a major media event occurring when two major plant retailers publicly acknowledged the importance of eliminating weeds from supply chains. This scheme worked well for about 4 years, when the ACT Weed Officer had to withdraw as resources were not sufficient to continue the visits. The objective of not supplying weed species was achieved and continued for some time after the visits ceased, but various community groups and members are now noticing an increase in prohibited species being sold in the ACT.

ANPS strongly recommends that a scheme based on random nursery visits be resumed, and suggest that a cooperative arrangement between government and a community environmental group worked well, and is likely to work well again.

2) Citizen Involvement

ANPS does not need to remind you of the contribution of citizen science and involvement in environmental issues and how they have contributed to benefit the ACT. Community contributions to the Canberra Nature Map (CNM) are already having considerable impact on recording the biodiversity of the ACT and nearby region, including weeds. Weed data is accumulating at a considerable rate, with a number of highly invasive species being located and subsequently managed. CNM could be adapted to the further benefit of locating and managing weeds, and recently ANPS offered a \$2,000 donation so the adaption of software could be undertaken to this end. Continued ACT government support for CNM is greatly appreciated by the community.

However, there is a further contribution community could make, which is not covered by CNM. This is reporting the presence of prohibited species in retail outlets and other sources

e.g. fetes. ANPS would appreciate some advice from you about where to report such occurrences. Are there government personnel to whom prohibited plants being offered for sale can be reported, so action can be taken to have them removed from sale? If so, perhaps the government could fund advertising by the variety of means available to it to let the community know of such reporting processes. A benefit would be that if retail outlets knew that they could be reported if retailing prohibited species, then they would take the extra care required when ordering stock.

3) On-going Weed Funding

While there are always calls from all sectors of the community for more funding, ANPS has heard that the current level of funding is just adequate to continue current weed management programs. However, the budget must be maintained according to inflation and with allowance for urgent management action (e.g. Fireweed in Gungahlin), as well as covering areas that may be added to the public estate in the future.

If, as suggested, the money used on the BFG at Floriade is to be redirected to enhance weed education and management, ANPS suggests that items 1 and 2 above would yield a very significant benefit in both the short and long terms.

Yours sincerely

Lucinda Royston
President
20 October 2017