

Community implementation of biological control of weeds across south-eastern Australia

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Encouraging community participation can be an effective way to speed up the delivery of weed biological control programs. A program aimed at engaging farmers, community groups, schools, and government agencies was implemented across four States in south eastern Australia. Eight different invertebrates and two plant pathogens were released at hundreds of sites infested by the Weeds of National Significance blackberry, gorse, salvinia, boneseed, bridal creeper, and bitou bush, and the highly invasive weeds English broom and cape broom. The program recognised the benefits of researchers engaging with existing weed management, land management, and community networks to (i) facilitate the release, establishment and assessment of biological control agents, (ii) ensure biological control is integrated with local and regional weed management strategies, and (iii) promote biological control in the community. Many participants in the program are now able to identify weed infestations suitable for biological control, rear or collect their own agents, conduct releases, and implement an appropriate monitoring program. However there were also limitations in delivering a program to a diverse mix of scientists, land management officers, teachers, volunteers, and school children. An important consideration is the ability to deliver and support biological control efforts within relatively short funding cycles. Despite these challenges, a large, coordinated biological control program, with a carefully planned engagement strategy can reduce duplication of effort across jurisdictions, deliver a sound return on investment, and provide a strong basis for future collaboration.

