



Greens set plan to eradicate Gamba grass in the Northern Territory

Gamba grass is one of the most destructive and invasive weeds in the Northern Territory. With rapid expansion rates, gamba currently infests around 1.5 million hectares of the NT. It has the potential to invade all savannas in northern Australia which is at least 38 million hectares.

This escaped pasture weed can take over in under five years, as areas of gamba grass can transition from individual clumps to medium and high-level cover within two to five years. As it decimates biodiversity, increases intensity of wildfires, and is a serious threat to property and life, its spread must be rapidly curtailed. There is an urgent need for intensified efforts and further adequate funding to stop its spread.

Priority:

1. **Urgently ensure full eradication of current spot infestations in the Eradication Zone** including Kakadu, Nitmiluk, Katherine region, Mataranka, Wadeye, Tiwi Islands and Arnhem Land. This requires phasing out permits granted to three Katherine region pastoral properties (in the eradication zone).
2. **Push back in Control Zone to stop further spread:**
 - **Eradicate along transport routes.** Roads are one of the primary pathways for gamba grass spread. Records along roads have doubled since 2015 in both the Control and Eradication zones. Although roads represent only a small proportion of land area and gamba infestation, they play a major role in its spread to new locations, particularly in the Eradication Zone.
 - **Eradicate in high human use areas,** such as national parks and reserves, picnic and recreation areas and places where people visit.

Further:

- Incrementally increase the eradication buffers adjacent to Kakadu, Nitmiluk National Parks and Fish River Gorge Block.
- In the Control Zone, identify areas with no and very low gamba rates, and ensure they become/remains islands free of infestation, pushing back the nearby infestations to expand them. The current zoning is too coarse and with lax effort it is becoming all infested. In Cape York there are more zones and more complexity to the zoning, this might be worth doing.
- Identify areas of particular conservation value and accelerate efforts to restrain gamba infestations.
- Implement widespread on the ground efforts in conjunction with survey efforts, though it is vital control efforts aren't curtailed by focusing efforts on studying the expansion.
- Adequately support landholders to manage their infestations. Fund a program to educate the public and engage them in weed management.
- Ensure all land tenures have urgent management plans

Management and coordination

Insufficient resourcing of weed control efforts now costs the Northern Territory tens of millions of dollars annually, most significantly in fire management and weed control, but also in lost opportunity from the growing carbon sector. These costs will continue to increase if gamba grass expands further across the Territory, with a growing number of infestations that will become increasingly difficult and costly to contain.

The Greens would apply existing organisational structures to manage Gamba grass, with a Weeds Branch lead collaboration between agencies:

Northern Territory Government Parks and Reserves

Employ dedicated trained staff in focused weed management teams to improve upon and act upon weed management plans, to ensure eradication and then continued monitoring.

Employ additional community engagement officers to amongst other activities, establish and oversee localised weed management groups in public reserve, such as in the Casuarina area, with an "Adopt a patch" policy and community education through established networks, such as school groups, cycling and walking groups and local residents.

The establishment of these positions and greater community engagement will boost wildlife awareness amongst the greater community and understanding of why invasive weeds are so detrimental to biodiversity.

Fund "Land for Wildlife" Education programs for Landholders, which was a successful community engagement program previously funded through NT Parks and Wildlife, but then no longer funded by the current government. The program focuses on rural block holders, assisting them to learn more about native species, land management and engage in citizen science. It funds extension officers to assist landholders.

NTFRS and Bush Fires NT

In response to the intensity of gamba grass fires, the daily cost of equipment required to be on standby to respond to fires has increased by 30 times from 2007- 2010 and has continued to increase in absolute terms.

Indigenous land managers and Ranger groups

Funding will be allocated to indigenous ranger groups who will be central to remote eradication of Gamba grass.

Defense

Resources already being deployed in training exercises will be diverted to include mandatory weed management of Gamba grass. The defense environmental officer will actively collaborate with on-ground training managers to incorporate a weed management plan with mapping and onground management of the weeds by the forces training in the north.

Pastoralists

Spread via vehicles and contaminated hay needs to be addressed. Hay from clean sources should be sought to prevent accidental introduction. Prevention Eradication Intensive control Asset protection flower seed spray Mechanical manual burn Roadsides should be monitored in growing season to detect any new outbreaks.

Lands and Planning

Introduce a policy of a "High priority weed check" when any property is subdivided or sold as part of a survey.

Local Government

Urgently allocate sufficient resources to ensure statutory obligations for the control and eradication of gamba grass are being met. In particular, resources are vital for early eradication of small and/or strategic infestations and to ensure the control of larger infestations. Prioritising and providing sufficient funding for the eradication of smaller infestations in the eradication zones of the Gamba Grass Weed Management Plan (2018) is an essential and cost-effective measure that will save significant resources in the long term.