

Natural Resources Committee Inquiry on the Management of Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris* and *Cenchrus pennisetiformis*) in South Australia

October 2026



The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) is the voice of Australian farmers.

The NFF was established in 1979 as the national peak body representing farmers and more broadly, agriculture across Australia. The NFF's membership comprises all of Australia's major agricultural commodities across the breadth and the length of the supply chain.

Operating under a federated structure, individual farmers join their respective state farm organisation and/or national commodity council. These organisations form the NFF.

The NFF represents Australian agriculture on national and foreign policy issues including workplace relations, trade, and natural resource management. Our members complement this work through the delivery of direct 'grass roots' member services as well as state-based policy and commodity-specific interests.

NFF Member Organisations



09 October 2026

Parliamentary Officer
Natural Resources Committee
GPO Box 572
Adelaide SA 5001

Via Email: NRC.Assembly@parliament.sa.gov.au

Dear Sir / Madam,

**RE: Natural Resources Committee Inquiry on the Management of Buffel Grass
(*Cenchrus ciliaris* and *Cenchrus pennisetiformis*) in South Australia**

The *National Farmers' Federation* (NFF) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the *Natural Resources Committee Inquiry on the Management of Buffel Grass (Cenchrus ciliaris and Cenchrus pennisetiformis) in South Australia* (Inquiry).

The NFF is very concerned that Buffel grass is once again being targeted for greater regulatory control despite the overwhelming evidence that Buffel grass is a 'Feed of National Significance' and not a Weed of National Significance (WoNS). This is particularly true in South Australia where there is a growing number of truly invasive and destructive plants (example: Onion weed (*Asphodelus fistulosus*)) that are being left almost untreated while one of Australian agriculture's most important plants is being targeted and given greater attention and priority. Given the limited amount of time and resources, it is absolutely essential that all levels of Governments target weeds before they get out of control and not wait until it is too late.

Buffel grass has been in Australia since 1870 and has been widely used throughout the nation to improve the Cattle industry's natural capital. Focussing on Buffel grass's negative impacts largely ignores the significant impact the Australian cattle industry has made to rural and remote Australia. Buffel grass directly adds over \$5.0 billion to our economy making it one of the most important plants to the sector and has many indirect benefits including an effective way to reduce Australia's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.

Buffel grass is a productive agricultural plant species of significant value and criticality to livestock producers especially across arid and semi-arid regional areas. It is a high-yielding, reliable, and drought-resistant livestock feed resource that also provides important complementary land management benefits including land rehabilitation and soil erosion mitigation (due to its ability to quickly revegetate highly disturbed areas). These attributes make Buffel grass an important productive asset for pastoral businesses and the regional and remote communities that they support. It is therefore clear that the impacts of Buffel grass are extremely complex despite what some non-food producer stakeholders claim.

This complexity is also relevant when assessing its invasiveness and potential spread. Buffel grass is commonly observed along roadsides and other disturbed areas where vegetation clearing for road maintenance activity, increased water availability from runoff, and limited to no grazing pressure can create favourable conditions for establishment. However, given the lack of disturbance away from roadsides, Buffel grass can in many instances struggle to spread into undisturbed areas, unlike other plants such as Onion

weed. We therefore caution against using observations from highly disturbed environments as a proxy for likely spread across all landscapes.

While NFF recognises that Buffel grass can present environmental challenges in certain landscapes, any consideration of its future management must assess the plant in its full context and give proper weight to both its positive and negative attributes including its contribution to regional economies and food and fibre production.

Productive Value

Buffel grass is an established and important component of grazing systems that contributes to the productive use of land in some of Australia's most variable climatic conditions. Its value is particularly significant across arid and semi-arid production regions where pasture options can be limited, and seasonal conditions are highly variable. Its importance to livestock production and its critical role as a feed resource for the beef industry has also been expressly recognised in discussions underpinning the *National Established Weed Priorities (NEWP) Framework*, including most recently in Brisbane some weeks ago.

Given this role, management decisions affecting Buffel grass can have material economic consequences for pastoral production. Measures that diminish productive use can have significant detrimental impacts on livestock enterprises, carrying capacity, business resilience, and the communities and supply chains supported by pastoral production.

National Established Weed Priorities (NEWP) Framework

This Inquiry is occurring against the background of more than two-years of national consideration of the next WoNS of which Buffel grass was nominated and ultimately no consensus was achieved. For context, the *NEWP Framework and Implementation Plan* was endorsed by the *Environment and Invasives Committee* in June 2023, and the *National Biosecurity Committee* subsequently agreed to a phased implementation process focussed initially on determining new national weed priorities. The process involved *Expressions of Interest*, nominations, detailed assessment, and then consideration through the *Environment and Invasives Committee* and *National Biosecurity Committee*. NFF has been an active contributor throughout the entirety of that process including through representation on the *NEWP Steering Group*.

Throughout, NFF repeatedly raised concerns about how contentious productive plants (i.e., Buffel grass) would be assessed and cautioned against an 'environmental threat only' approach. Where a plant has significant positive attributes, that must be properly weighed against its impacts. Failure to do so in the context of Buffel risked creating perverse outcomes for agriculture.

NFF also raised concerns during the NEWP process about the assessment of Buffel grass's potential distribution and the extent to which climatic suitability was relied upon as an indicator of possible spread. Actual distribution can also be influenced by factors including landscape disturbance, existing vegetation, soil and site characteristics, rainfall, grazing pressure, seed availability, and land management practice.

NFF therefore considers that assessments of current and projected spread must clearly distinguish between areas that may be climatically suitable for Buffel grass and areas where establishment and significant spread are reasonably likely in practice. This is particularly important where such modelling may subsequently be relied upon to justify regulatory intervention or the allocation of finite weed-management resources.

The national process ultimately reflected a lack of consensus. Fifteen nominations were found to meet the criteria for consideration as National Established Weed Priorities. In July 2026, the *National Biosecurity Committee* agreed to 14 of those priorities. Buffel grass was the only one of the 15 nominations for which consensus was not reached.

In recognition of this national decision, NFF questions the rationale for progressing another process that may lead toward broader treatment or restriction of Buffel grass in South Australia. Any recommendations arising from this Inquiry must recognise productive and economic value and not pre-empt or circumvent the established national position. Where Buffel grass provides significant productive value to pastoral enterprises, that use should be recognised and protected. Where otherwise undesirable, coordinated control in cropping landscapes can proceed alongside protection of established pastoral value in accordance with a broader successor State Strategy developed in partnership with primary production, pastoral managers, and other affected stakeholders.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact Warwick Ragg, General Manager, Natural Resource Management, via e-mail: WRagg@nff.org.au in the first instance to progress this discussion.



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