

Bushland & Bush Regeneration Issues discussed in emails to "Bush Regeneration" Listserver, 20 April - 4 May 2006

V'n May 06

ISSUES: come from the above emails, transcribed here by AABR. Hence, the information below does not necessarily reflect AABR's position on particular issues.

Senders included the full spectrum of "the industry", including bush regenerators, bush regen contractors & consultants, clients (Council bushland staff), TAFE bush regen (now Conservation & Land Management) staff, volunteer Bushcarers and AABR committee people.

NEGATIVES & DISCUSSION: come from listserver emails and the AABR committee.

SOLUTIONS: come from listserver emails and the AABR committee. Solutions are worded so as to be (for the most part) achievable. It is recognised that the solutions are only part of the picture in resolving the issues, eg. the lack of appreciation for bushland by sections of the community is a tough one to resolve!

POSSIBLE ACTION BY: suggests who might take on each solution. In the interests of achievability, the list of who's "responsible" is limited to those indicated.

WHEN: Solutions are only likely to be achieved as fast as those "responsible" participate. Some of the easiest solutions to achieve still haven't happened, despite the issue / solution being known for years. It largely comes down to a time / money issue.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

1. Email membership@aabr.org.au if you want to help with any of the solutions (quote the Issue No.s), even just to comment on a draft prepared by others.
2. Become an AABR member or a subscriber to our newsletter - the \$25/\$20 annual fee helps AABR progress issues.
3. If you're a member, list your business on AABR's website – again the annual fee helps.

AABR will: coordinate achieving solutions, eg. put people in touch with each other and collate and distribute information, drafts, completed material, etc.

KEY:

"BR" = Bush Regeneration

"BRers" = Bush Regenerators

"Bushland" = all natural areas, however modified

"Clients" = Those employing BR Contractors. Mostly Councils, also: state government departments, utilities, etc.

"Contractors" = BR Contractors

No.	Issue	Negatives [examples]	Discussion	Solutions [Email enquiries@aabr.org.au if you would like to assist in progressing any of these, have comments on solutions below, or would like to add more]	Possible Action by [limited to: AABR; BR contractors, consultants and employees; BR training providers; BR client bushland staff]
1	Landowners / managers, government, the community: Lack of appreciation of bushland	1) Lack of adequate funding to manage bushland. 2) Poor un/intentional decision making by landholders / managers, government. 3) Greater land use impacts. HENCE: 1) Short term BR contracts. 2) Low Contractor charge out rates.	Environmentalism / Conservation is still relatively new. Understanding is slowly growing. The level of appreciation seems a bit more fickle, depending on the media, etc. - flavour of the week.	Think, develop, act and promote "best practice".	Everyone
2	Landowners / managers: Lack of resources to manage bushland	1) Bushland degradation and loss. 2) Species extinction.	There will never be enough resources for all landowners / managers to manage all bushland. Nevertheless, there is plenty of room for improvement.	Develop & promote policy that all landholders / managers should undertake a detailed assessment of, and develop a Plan of Management for, all bushland in their ownership / care and control, including: what's there (i.e. species and communities present); the conservation status of the species & communities (eg. listing under Acts); the threats posed (actual & potential); and the actions needed to conserve all species and communities and address all threats. If inadequate resources are available to undertake all actions identified above, they should be prioritised to receive funding based on: a) Quality of bushland (eg. size, condition, edge-to-area ratio, threatened or rare items, b) Degree of individual threats (eg. particular weeds, erosion, run-off, inappropriate access). Resources must be directed to address a) &/or b) above, so that the condition of (prioritised) bushland improves (at least gradually) in the long-term.	Everyone
3	Landowners / managers: Lack of ONGOING funding for weed treatment	Bushland degradation - Temporary resourcing of weed treatment may (and often will) lead to an increase in the long-term rate of bushland degradation (i.e. more persistent weeds invade).	Only organisations with a legally binding charter, etc. (eg. Australian Bush Heritage Fund) can promise to commit funding forever (even then they might go broke), due to economic, social and environmental variables (eg. changes in law, environmental "disasters", balancing other priorities).	Develop & promote policy that weed treatments should not commence without "ONGOING" funding. [It is recognised that funding will always be needed, if only to treat weeds at bushland margins, however appropriate programs can involve treatment of specific areas until indigenous vegetation can establish without being hindered by non-indigenous vegetation.] The length of time for ongoing funding depends entirely on site conditions. Where funds have become available but for shorter periods than required, these should be given to sites previously treated so that, in effect, weeds are being treated relatively continuously.	Everyone
4	Landowners / managers: Bushland managers without adequate experience	1) Bushland degradation & loss. 2) Resources wasted.	This may be becoming more of an issue because more landowners / managers ARE starting to manage bushland, but bushland management is peripheral to their other land management purposes. It is largely dependent on: 1) The organisation - what type of position they create, 2) The recruitment people and process, 3) Luck (who applies for the job).	Develop relevant Position Description/s and promote these to Councils, CMAs, State Gov't Dep'ts, etc.	AABR, Training providers, Employees, Clients

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5	Clients: Lack of adequate contract supervision by clients / Contractors: Poor performance	1) Wasted client resources. 2) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.	Reasons may be TEMPORARY (eg. client staff on leave) or ONGOING (client staff not experienced, disorganised, over-loaded with work.	Develop and promote performance-based assessment of contracts and contractors to assist clients.	AABR, Training providers, Contractors, Clients
6	Contractors: Site supervisors without adequate experience	1) Bushland degradation & loss. 2) Decreased business efficiency. 3) Low employee morale.	Shouldn't happen but does. Reasons may be TEMPORARY eg: 1) Experienced staff on leave. 2) Experienced staff resign; OR ONGOING, eg. employer accepts lack of experience (there are many reasons, though maybe best unuttered).	1) Develop and promote relevant Position Description. 2) Ensure supervisor positions advertised on AABR website conform to this PD.	1) AABR, Training providers, Employees, Contractors & Consultants. 2) AABR, Contractors & Consultants.
7	Contractors: Employees' pay low / entitlements few	1) Affects employee standard of living, eg. can't get home loan. 2) Difficult to be a carer. 3) Low employee morale. 4) High employee turn-over - brain drain - workforce remains relatively inexperienced. HENCE 1) Decrease business efficiency / profitability (low morale, recruitment costs). 2) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.	Pay issues include: hourly rate, casual loading, tool & equipment transport costs, travel time, work cancelled (eg. due to rain), weekend loading, tick allowance, overtime loading, etc. Entitlements issues include: sick leave, holiday leave, carer leave, etc. Numerous reasons, eg: 1) Low Contractor charge out rate, 2) Expenses of running a business, 3) Contractors putting profit ahead of employee wages.	1) Determine what can be achieved to improve conditions under new IR laws. 2) If possible, pursue an Industrial Award for BRers. 3) Develop and promote a code of conduct for AABR members, which includes minimum working conditions, eg. minimum as per (now lapsed) National Trust Award of Aust. BRers Award, at least in relation to the items it addresses. 4) Develop & promote Position Descriptions for various levels in the industry. 5) Ensure AABR website Bush Jobs facility set up to accurately reflect PDs. 6) Pursue business efficiencies. 7) Calculate benefits of increasing pay and entitlements.	1)-3) AABR, Employees, Contractors & Consultants. 4) AABR, Training providers, Employees, Contractors & Consultants. 5) AABR, Contractors & Consultants. 6)&7) Contractors & Consultants.
8	Clients: late with invoice payments	1) Business less efficient.	Reasons may be TEMPORARY (eg. client staff on leave) or ONGOING (client staff disorganised, over-loaded with work, money-saving exercise).	1) Be financially organised - keep sending reminders to clients. 2) Make chronic late payers known.	1) Contractors. 2) ?
9	Contractors: Lack of permanent BRer positions	1) Affects employee standard of living, eg. can't get home loan. 2) Low employee morale. 3) High employee turn-over - brain drain - workforce remains relatively inexperienced. 4) Decrease business efficiency / profitability (low morale, recruitment costs). 5) Wasted client resources. 6) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.	Reasons numerous, mainly short contract period (usually 1 year). NSW law states people employed as casual for 6 months must be offered a permanent position?	1) Promote multi-year contracts to Councils, CMAs, relevant government departments, etc. 2) Ensure positions advertised on AABR website state whether position is permanent, casual or temporary.	1) Everyone. 2) AABR, Contractors & Consultants.
10	Landowners / managers, Contractors: Lack of BRer career path	1) Low employee morale. 2) High employee turn-over - brain drain - workforce remains relatively inexperienced.	Industry still relatively young.	1) Develop & promote Position Descriptions for various levels in the industry.	AABR, Training providers, Employees, Contractors & Consultants.

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11	Contractors: Offer fluctuating hours of casual work	1) Affects employee standard of living, eg. difficult to budget. 2) Low employee morale. 3) High employee turn-over. 4) Decrease business efficiency / profitability (low morale, recruitment costs). 5) Wasted client resources. 6) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.	Reasons numerous, mainly: 1) Short contract period (usually 1 year). 2) Difficult for smaller businesses. 3) Poor rostering.	1) Promote multi-year contracts to Councils, CMAs, relevant government departments, etc. 2) Ensure positions advertised on AABR website make it clear what hours can be expected. 3) Improve rostering over the year to minimise fluctuations in employee hours per week.	1) Everyone. 2) AABR, Contractors & Consultants. 3) Contractors.
12	Employees: Poor performance	1) Loss of contracts. 2) Low employee morale. 3) High employee turn-over. 4) Decrease business efficiency / profitability (low morale, recruitment costs). 5) Wasted client resources. 6) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.	Reasons: 1) Attitude / personality. 2) Poor pay & conditions.	1) Monitor work. 2) Discuss poor performance with Contractor and request change of contractor staff, if necessary. 3) Monitor employees. 4) Take necessary actions, eg. training, counseling.	1)&2) Clients. 3)&4) Contractors.
13	Contractors: Lack of adequate OH&S system	1) Employee accident / illness. 2) Higher insurance premiums.	Lack of due diligence.	Develop and promote rigorous OH&S systems for the industry.	AABR, Employees, Contractors & Consultants
14	Clients: Contractors asked to prepare work plans for free as part of tenders	1) Decrease business profitability.	Contractors should be paid consultancy rates or a consultant should be engaged prior to inviting tenders for the work.	Develop and promote policy regarding what might be expected during tender process.	AABR, Contractors & Clients
15	Contractors: Loss of income from tendering process (whether contract won or not)	1) Decrease business profitability.	Preparation of details work plans aside, this is part of the business.		
16	Contractors: Some "profiteering"	SHORTER-TERM: 1) Poor employee conditions. 2) Low employee morale. 3) High employee turn-over. 4) Decrease business efficiency / profitability (low morale, recruitment costs). 5) Wasted client resources. 6) Poor or negative environmental outcomes. LONGER-TERM: 1) Loss of contracts.		Make chronic profiteers known?	?
17	Contractors: Low charge out rate	1) Poor employee pay & conditions. 2) Low employee morale. 3) High employee turn-over. 4) Decrease business efficiency / profitability (low morale, recruitment costs). 5) Wasted client resources. 6) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.	Reasons: 1) BR still under-valued by clients and wider society. 2) In general, smaller businesses, government-subsidised organisations & co-ops in a position to be able to charge out less than larger private businesses. 3) Lack of client performance-based assessment with payment tied to meeting certain criteria over an extended period of time.	1) Consultation with / between Contractors regarding hourly rates advertised on AABR's "Schedule of Rates" so that they reflect real operating costs (increase to eg. \$45 in short-term, eg. \$60 in long-term), including provision for improved employee pay and conditions. 2) If relevant, adjust "Schedule of Rates" accordingly.	1) AABR, Contractors. 2) AABR.

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18	Contractors: High operating costs	1) Low business profitability. 2) Poor employee pay & conditions (hence...).	Costs include: 1) Workers Compensation Insurance. 2) Public liability insurance. 3) Tools & equipment. 4) Training: chemical, chainsaw, etc. 5) Travel. 6) Wages. 7) Payroll tax. 8) Professional indemnity insurance. 9) OH&S plans. 10) Environmental management plans. 11) Site induction. 12) Tender preparation. 13) Superannuation.	1) Workers Compensation Insurance: Pursue review of WorkCover review on classification from "Services to Forestry" to something more accurate (and cheaper). 2) Public Liability Insurance: Look into cheaper insurance (eg. broker in Victoria). 3) Develop & post list of Tools & Equipment suppliers on AABR website. 4) Post list of training providers on AABR website. 5) Pursue efficiencies in administration, etc.	1)-3) AABR & Contractors. 4) AABR & Training providers. 5) Contractors.
19	Contractors: Employing staff as sub-contractors	? 1) All legal requirements may not be being followed. 2) Insurances may be invalid. 3) Employees may not be covered for loss. 4) Inappropriate under-cutting of charge-out rates may be occurring.	? Sub-contract / employees must: 1) Pay their own: PAYG or income tax, super, public liability and personal workers comp or income insurance; 2) Submit a quarterly BAS to ATO; 3) Have their own ABN.	Pursue the legal aspects of this and promote awareness of relevant information.	?
20	Contractors: Some don't have adequate tools (type, quantity)	1) Work inefficient. 2) Wasted client resources.	Client contract supervisors need to inspect works adequately.	Client should request list tools & equipment on hand before employing contractors. Client supervisors to inspect sites to ensure work being undertaken efficiently, request details of tools and, if necessary, negotiate alternative methods / tools be used.	Clients & Contractors
21	Councils: Volunteer Bushcare used to replace paid BRers, inc. sometimes unsupervised / often not qualified and/or experienced (beyond the site they work at).	Likely higher proportion of inexperienced people working in bushland. HENCE: 1) Wasted client resources. 2) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.	Volunteers are not required to turn up (no pay incentive, inclement weather, long-term burn out), HENCE 1) Difficult to pace advancement of work on site according to resources (i.e. difficult to avoid over-clearing of weeds). 2) No guarantee of long-term continuation of group.	Develop and promote policy relating to appropriate supervision, sites, activities and training for Bushcare. Include benefits of Bushcare.	Everyone
22	TAFE: quality of Natural Area Restoration courses may have decreased	Untrained people managing bushland.		?	?
23	TAFE: Natural Area Restoration courses not available in many parts of Australia	Untrained people managing bushland.		?	?
24	Employees: Effect of tick bites	Lyme's disease and other ailments	Some Councils manage sites so the work in tick infested areas can be minimised during high tick season.	1) Develop & promote guidelines to manage sites where ticks are known or are likely to be present so that work in particular areas can be scaled back during tick season. Emphasis needs to be placed on how weeds are to be controlled as the tick season usually coincides with peak weed growth, i.e. during the warmer months. 2) Develop and promote guidelines for appropriate PPE and how to avoid, treat and manage tick bites, including exposure to multiple bites over time.	Everyone
25	Contractors: Supply of adequate Personal Protective Equipment for Employees and ensuring that it is worn	1) Employee sick or injured. 2) Insurances might not be valid.		Ensure adequate training, induction, wearing and supervision re. PPE.	Contractors & Clients

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26	Landowners / managers, Contractors: Legal herbicide applicator	Possible legal action.		Identify "legal" herbicide applicator/s.	Contractors
27	Clients: Accepting work (surveys, assessment, plans of management) prepared by inexperienced consultants' employees	1) Poor or negative environmental outcomes. 2) Wasted client resources.		Develop and promote Position Description for various consultant services.	AABR, Employees, Training providers, Consultants
28	Everyone: Lack of motivation to: read and adopt findings in published articles; adopt new skills and methods	1) Not maximising potential environmental outcomes. 2) Wasted resources.	1) Published papers can be difficult to locate and may cost money. 2) Contractors can be reluctant to share information which gives them a competitive advantage.	1) Develop a list of sources of published material on AABR website. 2) Where possible, provide relevant information directly, eg. via AABR newsletter or website. 3) Hold workshops demonstrating new methods.	1)&2) Everyone. 3) AABR.
29	Training providers: Deregulation of what institutions can teach courses means that you can get a Diploma in education, then "register yourself as an institute and go for it".	1) Possibly inexperienced trainers teaching Natural Area Restoration. 2) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.		?	?
30	Training providers: Small class sizes mean teachers risk lower standards to the lowest common denominator so that no one drops out	1) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.		Promote appropriate courses, including targeting Councils and CMAs.	Everyone
31	Training providers: ANTA sets no entry requirements for students to Cert III, IV or the Diploma	1) Poor or negative environmental outcomes.		?	?