

Royalties for Regions

Boosting Biosecurity Defences:  
*Agricultural Weed Surveillance in the South West to Protect Industry Profitability* sub-project

**Outcome Report**

**Executive summary**

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3 Baron-Hay Court, South Perth WA 6151  
Tel: +61 (0)8 9368 3333  
Email: [enquiries@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@agric.wa.gov.au)  
[agric.wa.gov.au](http://www.agric.wa.gov.au)

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Executive summary

The outcome of the Agricultural Weed Surveillance (AWS) project is to increase stakeholder surveillance for significant agricultural declared plants in the state’s south-west, in order to support pest management and market access.

The project’s two key products to date are the WeedSpotter online weed identification training package, and the MyWeedWatcher online database for reporting and mapping weed detections. MyWeedWatcher is available as an app and as an interacting website.

The project has also conducted a drone trial that has demonstrated how innovative methods and new technologies can harness community involvement in weed surveillance.

Surveillance requires awareness of the weed and how to look for it, and an ability to report observations. The AWS project obtained input from stakeholders and technical specialists to determine a list priority weed surveillance targets for the South-West Land Division, and has publishing an agreed surveillance plan for these.

The project has also developed relevant information and resources on the target weeds in the form of declared pest information webpages, online weed identification training (via the WeedSpotter training package), and by linking the project’s resources to further information sources such as WAOL and webpages that provide weed control information.

Output 1 of the AWS project is that groups are engaged in collecting surveillance data following an agreed surveillance plan. The original objective was that members of 5-8 stakeholder groups would be engaged in collecting surveillance data, following the agreed surveillance plan. To date, three biosecurity groups have expressed interest in managing priority weeds in the South-West Land Division. Training enrolments and weed observations are being made by a large number of individuals belonging to several different stakeholder groups, suggesting this objective has been met.

The project has established the means and avenues for engaging individuals and groups in surveillance. MyWeedWatcher has received a sizeable amount of social media attention from a variety of community groups and individuals, while print media and radio interviews have contributed to raising awareness of MyWeedWatcher and surveillance target weeds.

Surveillance is an activity that is difficult to measure and evaluate. Most observations reported to date have been of weeds that are known to be present in WA, with a few records of high priority surveillance targets for the South-West Land Division. As the project’s primary goal is to increase early detection of weed incursions, this result is aligned with the project’s expectations.

The impact of effort expended by the project has been analysed to show the level of communications for each weed and the extent to which resources and tools developed by the project (namely MyWeedWatcher, WeedSpotter and information webpages) are being used.

Awareness of target weeds species and the use of tools and resources developed by the project resources vary considerably between weeds. This is due to a number of factors, including media attention from outside the project, seasonality and visibility of the weeds, or whether a weed is of particular interest to a community group or industry program.

Generally, weeds of community interest are receiving high level of communications and engagement from community groups. This translates to better outcomes for these weeds, and results in higher webpage visitation, more enrolments and more observations. The project aims to maintain these strong relationships with community groups, leveraging on their audiences and encouraging groups to spread messages to their members. The project will also focus its own communication efforts on the lesser-known, high priority surveillance targets.

The project’s Output 2 concerns developing interactive, customised databases that are accessible through the department’s external website. This has been achieved by releasing the MyWeedWatcher online database, which is available through an app for smart devices and through a web browser. MyWeedWatcher has been available since April 2016 and is being continually evaluated and updated, with a major update (version 2) currently in development.

The project has been developed with valued input from stakeholders such as biosecurity groups, industry groups, natural resource management groups, and state and local governments. Consultation and engagement have resulted in the development of weed surveillance resources and tools that are relevant and useful to the community. Communication and engagement with stakeholders have underpinned the delivery of the project.

A wide range of media and communication channels have been used to promote WeedSpotter and MyWeedWatcher, to highlight priority surveillance targets, and to encourage the community to search for and report priority weeds.

The MyWeedWatcher app is already proving to be useful to community weed management groups and DAFWA weed-related activities. DAFWA acts on reports of Category 1 and Category 2 declared weed that it receives via MyWeedWatcher, and is using MyWeedWatcher observations of cacti to inform its invasive species management programs and make decisions on how to raise awareness of cacti as priority weeds. DAFWA is also conducting online searches for sales of declared weeds and taking action by contacting the sellers or the relevant state/territory or federal officers.

Early indications are that the community is using the resources and tools developed by this project. Metrics such as webpage views, observations made and online training enrolments are steadily increasing. Continual, strategic and responsive communications will help spread awareness of the project and MyWeedWatcher, resulting in increased usage.

The project is now considering cost-effective and sustainable solutions that will enable the community to continue high levels of engagement with surveillance in the long term and continued use of MyWeedWatcher.