



Feral Herald

Newsletter of the Invasive Species Council, Australia

working to stop further invasions

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Views expressed in this news-
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Tramp Ants: Our Worst Pests?

The worrying discovery of electric ants (also called little fire ants) in Cairns in May adds to fears that exotic ants are on their way to becoming a major presence in Australia. Various 'tramp ants' are spreading widely around the world with commerce.



red imported fire ants

Tramp ants have the capacity to overwhelm ecosystems and to push many species on to endangered lists. They could become as serious in Australia as foxes and rabbits - our very worst invaders.

Four ants that seriously threaten biodiversity are on the move in Australia (see article, page 6). All of them appear on the World Conservation Union's list of the World's 100 Worst Alien Species:

- red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*)
- yellow crazy ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*)
- African big-headed ant (*Pheidole megacephala*)
- little fire ant or electric ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*)

Each of these tramp ants has the capacity to form vast multi-queen colonies extending over vast areas, sometimes hundreds of hectares. To quote from B. Holldober and E.O. Wilson (the famed conservationist), writing about the little fire ant, it "*is capable under some circumstances of wiping out entire ant faunas over large areas ... forming in many places a living blanket of ants that kill and eat nearly all other ants in their path*".

These ants profoundly alter ecosystems by becoming the dominant small predators. The numbers of insect-feeding mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians falls away, either because they have little to eat, or because they are stung or preyed upon.

The federal Department of Environment and Heritage recognises the threat these ants pose, and in July released a *Threat Abatement Plan To Reduce the Impacts of Tramp Ants on Biodiversity in Australia and its Territories*. (available, along with a background report, at

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/trampants/index.html>)

[continued page 2](#)

The document outlines six goals to be met to secure Australia against foreign ants (see box, page 7). They include increased surveillance, better education, and an enhanced emergency response. A national survey to produce an up-to-date status of tramp ants in Australia is rated “*a very high priority longer-term action that could be initiated in the near term*”.

The plan targets six ants in particular: the four mentioned here plus the Argentine ant (*Linepithema humile*) and tropical fire ant (*Solenopsis geminata*), both of which have also colonised Australia.

The Threat Abatement Plan establishes a sound policy platform, but substantial funding will be needed to put it into effect. The government has not yet committed any funding to the process and there is no guarantee that enough will be provided.

Also, a high level of co-operation between the federal government and the states will be required. The plan recognises that “*Action to coordinate such a complex issue in invasive species management is a major challenge.*”

ISC will monitor progress to ensure the threat abatement plan is put into effect in a timely and well-resourced manner.

The need for a national framework is very evident in Queensland where the state government is committed to eradicating fire ants, crazy ants and electric ants. The fire ant operation, because it receives federal and interstate funding, is a major operation that entails surveillance over large areas.

The crazy ant eradication efforts, by contrast, have been lean operations targeting individual outbreaks but not including systematic surveys outside the target areas.

The Queensland Government claims to know where red imported fire ants are and where they are not, but it has no such knowledge about crazy ant and electric ant infestations. The need to act against these ants could not be more urgent, because ants have a great potential to multiply beyond control.

[See page 6 for descriptions of the various types of tramp ants.](#)

Annual General Meeting 2006

6.30pm - Thursday 7 September 2006
Space 39

Level 2, 39 Little Collins Street, Melbourne

Speaker: Dr Michael Douglas
co-winner of last years Froggatt Award

*Invasions in the North - Gamba Grass and other
Savannah Destroyers*

Dr Michael Douglas is a prominent researcher of, and advocate against, invasive grasses in Northern Australia. Michael is an excellent speaker who will talk about their ongoing fight to stop the deliberate and accidental spread of noxious grasses in Northern Australia.

Remember to renew your membership before (or at) the AGM!

Vacancies on ISC Board

ISC members are invited to nominate for the ISC Board. Further Details and Nomination Forms have been mailed to all members.

The ISC Board would love to have some new committed and skilled people nominating for Board positions at the next AGM.

Some of the current Board have put in several years work and are moving on and we need to ensure a good succession sequence with new people.

If you are possibly interested please call or drop an email to Barry Trail to discuss the possibilities.

Remember to renew your membership before, or at, the AGM.

In this issue...

This issue focuses on the growing threat to Australia of the various exotic 'tramp ants', and the government's recent Threat Abatement Plan. ([page 1](#))

On [page 4](#), outgoing ISC Director Jason Doyle presents a final report, summing up his twelve months as ISC's inaugural Director.

This year's winner of the ISC Biosecure Australia Award is Tasmanian Dr. Andrew Hingston, for his research and advocacy on the bumblebee threat. ([page 5](#))

On [page 6](#) there's more on tramp ants, describing the four main species of threat to Australia.

Elsewhere, we highlight how the current interest in Biofuels is bringing pressure from this industry to import known weeds. ([page 8](#))

Tim Low keeps us up to date on the bumblebee issue on [page 9](#). Thanks to all ISC members who responded to our warning in the last *Feral Herald* and wrote to the government on this issue.

Other reports cover Sika Deer; the creation of America's first genetically-engineered weed; and an update on cecropia ([page 10](#)).

Finally, all members should take note of our Annual General Meeting in early September. For those who haven't made it along before, this is a great chance to have a drink and a chat with others concerned with invasives issues. ([page 2](#))

From the President...

I was fortunate last month in going on two trips to Cape York Peninsula - one of the great wilderness areas on our planet. One of the first bits of excitement was looking at great swards of *Themeda* - what I thought was native Kangaroo Grass along the roadsides. Unfortunately for my happiness at this we were travelling with two better botanists. They pointed out it was *Themeda* - an African *Themeda* - a noxious weed called Grader Grass.

Even on Cape York the invasives have made big inroads, including some 'new' ones in recent years. In the southern more accessible areas on the Cape many weeds such as Rubber Vine and Grader Grass were rampant. But further north, in more isolated areas, isolation had worked its wonder - and many areas remain completely weed free.

This of course is the pattern throughout our lands and seas. And like all of Australia the Cape needs a plan to keep new invasives completely at bay, and to stop existing weeds and feral animals from moving into new districts.

As detailed in the newsletter we've had several wins this last (financial) year - and we hope to have more from our work this year. One piece of work which Jason Doyle, Tim Low and this year's Biosecure Australia award winner Andrew Hingston have all contributed greatly to is campaigning against the deliberate introduction of European Bumblebees.

Fingers crossed that the Federal Environment Minister understands the issue well and decides shortly to keep Bumblebees out of mainland Australia.

I hope you can continue to be part of this work by re-joining the Invasive Species Council for the current year - you should have just received your renewal in the mail. The ISC can't work without a strong membership.

Also, we are keen to hear from any members who could be interested in joining the ISC Board. If you have the time and interest to go on the Board we'd love to hear from you.

Lastly, I'd like to thank outgoing Board members for their excellent efforts over the last few years, and thanks to Jason Doyle for his excellent efforts over the last year as ISC Director. Your combined works have made a difference.

Hope to see you all (or at least the Victorian members) at our AGM on the 7th September.

Regards,

Barry

Dr. Barry Traill, President, Invasives Species Council

Director's Report to the Members

Jason Doyle, Director 2005/6

It has been a privilege to serve as ISC's inaugural Director. It has been a difficult task, being a part-time and sole employee for a national organisation attempting to make an impact on an important continental scourge, but I've been buoyed by the support received from both the board and members.

It's apparent that the general public's understanding of invasives is minute, and that this must change if inadequate government actions are to be transformed. Even a good number of those people working hard to eradicate existing out-of-control weeds are probably only dimly aware of the fact that new invasives are being given too great a chance to establish themselves – and become rampant weeds they'll have to battle in the future. ISC determined that there are opportunities to make a difference on this front through media and other awareness activities.

In some ways, invasives is a 'new' campaign. That is, of the many non-government environment groups, only WWF Australia has made an effort to be involved in this issue - hence the need for ISC. However, it is in other ways a mature issue - weeds and feral animals have been the focus of government attention for many years, and there is a substantial bureaucracy and many field workers labouring on their control. This effort is, of course, inadequate in most regards, but breaking into that world and making a difference was, and remains, a difficult assignment.

Therefore, we looked to position ISC in a different way. We would not try to enmesh ourselves with the Australian Weeds Committee or other government processes, but rather we would be an 'outside player' - a community activist organisation agitating for change by motivating interested individuals and groups to lobby the Australian government, as it has the most capacity to rapidly change the way invasives are dealt with across the continent.

In an attempt to win over some potential supporter groups, a CD-ROM was created to introduce both the issue and ISC itself. Collingwood Football Club coach Mick Malthouse launched the CD-ROM at the Fitzroy Gardens.

The 'kit' (CD, cover letter and a suggested newsletter article) has been mailed or otherwise distributed to over 500 landcare/environment/'friends'/bushwalking groups across the country. A copy was provided to each of the dedicated tree planters and weeders attending the annual Mallee Landcare weekend this year. A number have been left with VNPA staff for ad hoc distribution over the next year.

Tim Low and I worked up a story for the Queensland press regarding under-resourcing their weed assessment office, which we managed to get in the Brisbane *Courier Mail*, and possibly *Queensland Country Life*.

Still in Queensland, the possibility of a known weed being the basis of a new biofuel industry was also the subject of an ISC media run in that state. Tim Low followed up by writing an ISC letter to the government on this matter, an example of how ISC can act quickly to influence a specific government decision.

The 2005 annual ISC Froggatt Award provided another media opportunity. I wrote and distributed a media release, announcing to the world the winners and why they had won, including a brief explanation of why invasives are such a problem. I succeeded in getting two 'top end' radio interviews.

I've spoken on numerous occasions to the environment reporters at the *Herald Sun* and *Daily Telegraph*, about running a piece on weeds being sold at nurseries. I did some background work for each, identifying a group of invasive garden plants that I could prove were advertised for sale in each state.

Bumblebees were the focus for most of the last two months. ISC produced a major submission to the Department of Environment and Heritage rebutting the Australian Hydroponics and Greenhouse Association (AHGA) proposal. Our effort to beat the bees was complemented by a newspaper article in Brisbane, and a report on ABC radio's 'AM' program.

Emails were also sent to members and other supporters urging them to lobby the minister, Ian Campbell. Articles were also provided to the NSW and Victorian National Parks Association journals.

[continued page 5](#)

These have been the major efforts. There have of course been other issues at various times, including contributing an invasives section to the 'election asks' (demands?) document of the combined Victorian enviro groups (VNPA, ACF, TWS, EV, FoE, and now ISC), and to another combined peak group called 'Victoria Naturally'.

I think some gains have been made, and believe the last twelve months provide a reasonable springboard for a positive future for the Invasive Species Council of Australia. I thank the board and members for the opportunity.

Jason Doyle

2006 ISC Award for Bumblebee Campaigner

The Invasive Species Council Australia (ISC) has announced its annual Biosecure Australia Award - to Dr. Andrew Hingston of the school of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania in Hobart.

The Biosecure Australia Award is presented annually in recognition of an outstanding contribution to the eradication, early warning, preventative action, awareness raising or management of an of invasive species in Australia.

Dr. Hingston has won the prize for his research on the invasion of the European Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*), its impacts, and also for his advocacy for a strong response from government.

An industry group is currently attempting to have the Australian government allow the legal importation of the bumblebee to mainland Australia, a move opposed by Dr. Hingston, ISC and others aware of the environmental damage the animal could cause.

In partnership with various colleagues, Dr. Hingston has spent years researching and documenting in refereed scientific papers the bumblebee's actual and potential impacts, following the illegal importation of bumblebees to the island state in 1992. There is now strong community interest in stopping bumblebees spreading to other states, in large part because of his work.

Bumblebees are a significant threat to the survival of the nationally endangered swift parrot, are implicated in the spread of some invasive weeds, and are known to be aggressive in defending territory - which can include domestic backyards.

ISC says that bumblebees should not be permitted to enter mainland Australia, and recently sent a submission to federal Minister for the Environment, Ian Campbell, rebutting the industry group's application to import the bees. Dr. Hingston contributed to that submission.

About the Biosecure Australia Award

The Biosecure Australia Award replaces the ISC Froggatt Award, of previous years. Despite the name change, the current Award upholds the same principles as the original, named after Walter W. Froggatt, a New South Wales Government Entomologist who campaigned against the original introduction of the Cane Toad in the 1930s.

The Cane Toad (*Bufo marinus*) was introduced into Australia at Edmonton in North Queensland in 1935 to control the Grey Backed Cane Beetle and the Frenchie Beetle which were devastating northern Australia's sugar cane industry. The Toad was introduced with no research or testing to see if it was specific to or suitable for control of these beetles.

As is so often the case, release of the Cane Toad was against the advice of some naturalists and scientists.

The Toad had minimal impact on the beetles and has since become a widespread pest in north east Australia having significant impacts on indigenous fauna and ecosystems.

To this day, research conducted, particularly into biological control, always meets the public question, "Will it become another Cane Toad?"

Four Mean Ants

Tramp ants have emerged as one of the worst scourges associated with growing world trade. Unlike most other ants, tramp ants have nests containing many queens, often more than a thousand. New nests are formed when a queen and cohort of workers crawls off to establish one. Supercolonies form by constant expansion as groups of workers and new queens spread outwards.

When a shipping container is placed on the ground close to a tramp ant colony, or a pile of timber, a queen and workers can move into any narrow spaces, and if they find a damp refuge, they can be carried about when the container or the timber is moved.

Red Imported Fire Ant

The red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) found in Brisbane several years ago, is subject to a massive eradication campaign which is not going as well as predicted.

Native to South America, fire ants are now a major economic, social and environmental disaster in North America. Attracted to electricity, they crawl into circuit boxes and trigger fires that burn down houses. They cause air conditioner units and computers to malfunction. They crawl in through windows and sting elderly people to death. They render parks and gardens uninhabitable, and rubber thongs unwearable. Ground dwelling animals are virtually eliminated over large areas.

These ants have been listed as 'a key threatening process' by the federal government. The Queensland Government rates them as our worst pest on a par with the rabbit. If they are not eradicated, the federal government estimates they will cost the Australian economy \$8.9 billion over 30 years.

Check out the following websites:

<http://www2.dpi.qld.gov.au/fireants/>
<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=77&fr=1&sts=sss>

Yellow Crazy Ants

Yellow crazy ants (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) have overrun Christmas Island. Supercolonies now dominate

much of the rainforest and its very structure has now changed (see photos on the first website listed below). The ants have killed 15-20 million (some say 30 million) of the island's unique giant red crabs.

Crazy ants - so named for their erratic walk - have recently been found at various sites in Queensland, and at Yamba in NSW, and there is a very large infestation near Gove in north-western Australia. No nests are built, the ants sheltering under leaf litter and debris. The NSW Government has decided to list invasion by this ant as a threatening process.

Relevant websites:

<http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/christmas/fauna/crazy.html>
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/news/releases/agriculture_news/2004/crazy_ants
http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/yellow_crazy_ant_ktp
<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=110&fr=1&sts=sss>

Little Fire Ant

The little fire ant or electric ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*) was found in a suburban precinct in Cairns, very close to Kuranda National Park, in May this year. This minute (1.5 mm) stinging ant has spread from Latin America to many parts of the world in recent decades and it is now well entrenched on many Pacific Islands close to Australia.

On New Caledonia it dominates vast areas of rainforest, replacing virtually all other invertebrates. On the Galapagos Islands baby turtles are killed. The ants often invade houses and render crops difficult to harvest. No nests are built, the ants sheltering under rocks and debris.

Relevant websites:

<http://www2.dpi.qld.gov.au/health/18498.html>
http://www.nrm.qld.gov.au/about/media/aug/04_electric_ants.html
<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=58&fr=1&sts=sss>

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African Big-headed Ants

African big-headed ants (*Pheidole megacephala*) invaded Kakadu National Park - although they have since been eradicated - and some Barrier Reef Islands. They too, form domineering colonies.

Relevant websites:

http://savanna.ntu.edu.au/text/internal/newsletters/ts1/ts69/bigheaded_ants_era.html

<http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=132&fr=1&sts=sss>

The six objectives of the Australian Tramp Ant Threat Abatement Plan are:

1. Increase science-based knowledge and expertise, incorporate indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, quantify impacts, and improve access to information for priority tramp ant species.
2. Prevent entry and spread of tramp ants by increasing diagnostic capacity, offshore surveillance, inspection, treatment, and national and state and territory surveillance
3. Prepare for rapid response to tramp ant incursions and spread through risk assessment of tramp ant species and pathways of introduction, and development of contingency plans.
4. Enhance emergency response to tramp ant incursions by improving reporting and response rates, and by developing tools for response and follow-up.
5. Build stewardship by engaging, educating, and informing the Australian community about the impacts of invasive tramp ants and effective means of response.
6. Coordinate Australian Government, state and territory government, and local management activities in Australia and the region.

Weird Monikers

You may think that the electric ant and crazy ant have odd names, but during research for this newsletter it came to light that many invasive ants in Florida have seriously weird names. All of the following, and many others, are listed in an article that appeared in the *Transactions of the American Entomological Society* in 2000, not a journal prone to playful language:

Lost acrobat ant
 Opaque moustache ant
 Little mouse rover ant
 Confused groove-headed ant
 Similar groove-headed ant
 Emery's sneaking ant
 Pharaoh's trailing ant
 Bare pygmy snapping ant
 Bow-jawed pygmy snapping ant
 Arboreal sneaking ant
 Pantropical nimrod ant
 Larger little fungus ant
 Spine-thighed grooved ant
 Mexican elongate twig ant

Is the 'confused groove-headed ant' confused by the 'similar groove-headed ant' or perhaps by the fungus ant that is both 'larger' and 'little', or is it just confused because it has a hole in its head?

Threatened Species in Australia which are thought to be placed at further risk by the Red Imported Fire Ant

(taken from the *Australian Tramp Ant Threat Abatement Plan*).

Buff-breasted button-quail
 Night parrot
 Golden-shouldered parrot

Gouldian finch
 Partridge Pigeon
 Plains-wanderer
 Malleefowl
 Mallee emu-wren
 Thick-billed grasswren
 Noisy scrubbird
 Western whipbird
 Bathurst copper butterfly

Biofuels: Not so Clean and Green

With uncertainty growing about global fuel supplies, biofuels are suddenly attracting much interest. These are oils extracted from crops which can be used in place of petroleum products. In some countries, for example India, many farmers already run tractors on fuels which they extract from crops they grow themselves.

But to be viable, such crops have to be very easy to grow and maintain. The plants in use are usually very hardy and vigorous, requiring no maintenance - that is, they are plants with a high weed potential.

Earlier this year an offer was made by one foreign entrepreneur to establish large plantations of castor oil beans (*Ricinis communis*) in Australia, but his proposal was doomed because castor oil beans, as serious weeds, are prohibited entry into Australia.

Of greater concern was the recent call by a Queensland company, the Australian Biodiesel Group (ABG), for growers to plant jatropha (*Jatropha curcas*) as a biofuel. ABG is building a production plant near Brisbane which they say will be the biggest in the southern hemisphere.

Several proposals to grow jatropha (also known as physic nut) in Western Australia have been blocked by the Western Australian Government because jatropha is a major world weed. A weed assessment conducted by Dr Rod Randall of the W.A. Department of Agriculture found that jatropha is weedy in India, Indonesia, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, El Salvador, Florida, Hawaii, the Galapagos Islands and Fiji. It is also a weed (although not widely established thus far) in Queensland.

According to Randall's report it is "*ranked a highly invasive shrub in tropical regions*", forming dense thickets. It is harvested for firewood in Third World countries, thus constraining its spread, but no such constraint can be expected in Australia.

In June, ISC and the Queensland Conservation Council wrote a combined letter to the Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Water, Henry Palaszczuk, urging him to declare jatropha a prohibited plant. Jatropha is best suited for growth in the northern half of Australia, and it is already prohibited in the

Northern Territory and a declared plant (P1 and P5) in W.A.

The cultivation of jatropha conflicts with the urgent goal of controlling bellyache bush (*Jatropha gossypifolia*), which is one of northern Australia's worst weeds of grazing lands. In the ranking system by which Australia's 20 worst weeds (WONS) were chosen, bellyache bush ranked 21st.

Bellyache bush is a candidate for biocontrol work, and any agent that attacked bellyache bush would be expected to target jatropha as well. Indeed, recent biocontrol work has explicitly targeted both weeds. A farmer growing jatropha would not want to see a jatropha-feeding insect unleashed and would oppose any such introduction.

New cultivars grown in India and South America produce seed more prolifically and throughout much of the year, unlike the forms already present in Queensland, and there is an urgent need to act before these cultivars are imported and grown.

ISC has received a reply to the letter from senior policy advisor Michael Tandy acknowledging the weed concerns and indicating that the department will submit the plant to a formal weed risk assessment process. Tandy acknowledged that physic nut is a 'weed species' and that the weed risk it poses could increase if plantations were allowed and new cultivars imported.

Plea from Argentina

Not long after our bumblebee submission was in, ISC received a request from an Argentinian University for a copy. An application has been made to import a North American bumblebee (*Bombus impatiens*) into Argentina (where five native bumblebee species occur) to pollinate tomato crops, raising environmental concerns there.

Because the North American species has been well studied, its requirements within a greenhouse setting are well known. South American bumblebees may prove equally suitable but less is known about them.

To Bumblebee, or Not to Bee

In the last issue of the Feral Herald we reported that the Australian Hydroponics and Greenhouse Association (AHGA) had again sought permission to import the European Bumblebee to the Australian mainland to pollinate greenhouse crops (also see Feral Herald 4).

ISC member Dr Andrew Hingston, assisted by ISC councillor Tim Low, prepared a very large report critiquing the AHGA submission. Director Jason Doyle helped process the report.

Andrew's submission was a massive undertaking, more than 50,000 words in length and containing more than 500 references. Andrew is Australia's leading expert on wild bumblebees, having studied their impacts in Tasmania, where they became established in 1992.

We believe the AHGA damaged their cause by submitting a report that was far from convincing. They stated in their conclusion (page 70):

“In assessing all the available evidence, for each of the Terms of Reference, we can find no prima facie case for accepting any of the accusations of negative effects on the environment; no impact on native plants, nor birds, nor bees, nor spread of weeds.”

They went on to state (page 71) that, “Apart from supportive articles in *Practical Hydroponics & Greenhouses Magazine (Issue 77, July/August 2004)*, the... scientific publications relative to this issue fail to present a fair and balanced perspective on the issue.”

By making this claim the AHGA was denigrating the work of scores of scientists around the world who have documented the environmental impacts of bumblebees, publishing their work in such respected journals as *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Biological Conservation*, *Journal of Food, Agriculture & Environment*, *Oecologia*, *Population Ecology*, *Journal of Insect Conservation*, *Ecological Management & Restoration*, *Global Environmental Research*, *Austral Ecology*, *Japanese Journal of Conservation Ecology*, *Australian Journal of Zoology*, *Australian Journal of Ecology*, *Australian Journal of Entomology*, *New Zealand Journal of Botany*, and as a chapter in a book titled *The Conservation of Bees* published by Academic Press in London.

To suggest that more credible information can be found in magazines than in scientific journals is an extraordinary claim to make. It does the AHGA no credit that one of the magazine articles in question was written by the vice-president of the AHGA and the other by a consultant working for a company that sells bumblebees.

The AHGA report was written by one expert from Britain and another from Canada. They showed a remarkable lack of understanding of pest issues in Australia, stating in their introduction:

“Invasive Pest? Bumblebees are not regarded as pests anywhere in the world where they are naturalised. ... There are many positive examples of species importation, such as the European honeybee, sheep, cattle, brown trout, dung beetle, etc, with bumblebees no exception.”

It is again extraordinary that these experts should be totally unaware of the adverse impacts of honeybees and trout in Australia. As our submission points out, bumblebees are certainly considered pests in Japan, New Zealand and South America, and the AHGA report cited papers which say as much.

The AHGA report claims that bumblebees will not escape into the wild. But a consultant who was involved in the AHGA's proposal, Dr Don Griffiths, stated in *Practical Hydroponics and Greenhouses* in 2004:

“there is a risk that a limited number of fertilised queens will escape from commercial glasshouses into the environment. Whilst the overall numbers will be few, some feral colonies will establish”.

The Department of Environment and Heritage is now considering all the responses to the AHGA proposal. We know that the CSIRO and the Weeds CRC, among others, made submissions opposing the release of bumblebees. Any decision from the department is likely to be months away.

We thank all our members who wrote to the government criticising the AHGA proposal, and we will keep you informed of the outcome.

- Tim Low

Sika Deer

Sika Deer can be imported legally into Australia, but the situation is likely to change following the production of a draft report, *Risk Assessment on the Import of Live Sika Deer (Cervus nippon) under the EPBC Act, 1999*, written by Dr Mike Braysher and Ms Elizabeth Walter.

In their report, prepared for the Department of the Environment and Heritage, Braysher and Walter concluded:

“... sika deer are rated as an extreme risk of establishing [in Australia] and also an extreme risk of becoming a pest should they establish. In New Zealand, sika cause significant damage to native vegetation, initiating a change from more palatable to less palatable vegetation.”

They further noted that sika feed on crops such as soya beans, corn, oats and pasture grasses that they damage forestry plantations and transmit livestock diseases. They recommended that future importations not be allowed. Australia already has at least six species of feral deer and we do not want any more.

Cecropia Felled

ISC wrote to the Queensland Government in 2004 urging them to declare cecropia a prohibited plant, and the government has agreed to do so (see *Feral Herald* 9).

A fast-growing tree from Latin America, cecropia is listed by the World Conservation Union as one of the World's 200 worst invaders (see <http://www.issg.org/database/species/ecology.asp?si=116&fr=1&sts=sss>).

A single tree can produce as many as 8 million seeds and these are readily dispersed by birds and flying foxes.

Although the declaration in Queensland has not yet come into force, Cairns City Council has already removed a prominent cecropia tree from an intersection in the middle of the city. All that now remains is the stump.

Campaigning against pests is often intangible, resulting in a lack of something rather than in something to see, and that is certainly the situation here.

Genetically Engineered

Genetic engineers have created America's first genetically-engineered weed. A variety of creeping bentgrass (*Agrostis stolonifera*) bred with herbicide-resistance for use on golf courses, has escaped into the wild in Oregon. It has spread several kilometres by seed and by hybridising with wild plants.

Creeping bentgrass is a European plant with a long history of weediness. It occurs as a weed in most Australian states and in New Zealand as well as in North America.

The US Department of Agriculture is worried by what has happened, although the outcome was entirely predictable. Most lawn grasses have to be highly competitive to serve their purpose well, and they are often spread into the wild when the opportunity arises.

The glyphosate-resistant bentgrass, if it is not eradicated, is more likely to become an economic rather than an environmental weed, because herbicide use is far greater on farmlands than it is in forests.

It will prove difficult to control because of its resistance to the main herbicide used to control weeds. It has the potential to hybridise with other *Agrostis* species, spreading herbicide resistance through the genus.

The creation of this grass raises very serious questions about the level of responsibility and maturity of those responsible for creating it.

Join the ISC...

Keep informed, and lend your weight to our important campaigning efforts on Invasive Species.

See the [membership form](#) at the back of this newsletter.

Invasive Species Council Membership application form

ABN 27101522829

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Phone (h) _____ (w) _____

email _____

Work or voluntary position(s) (if relevant) _____

Affiliations _____

Membership rates:

(all prices are GST inclusive)

- | | |
|--|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular | \$22 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concession | \$11 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group/Institution | \$55 |

I would also like to make a donation ¹ _____
(does not include GST)

Total: \$ _____

Is this a new membership or a renewal?

* Donations of \$2.00 or more are tax deductible.

¹ Representing a donation to the Invasive Species Council Fund - a public fund listed on the Register Of Environmental Organisations under item 6.1.1 of subsection 30-55(1) of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

Thank you for joining us. Please send this form and a cheque to:

Invasive Species Council
PO Box 166, Fairfield, Vic. 3078.

Cheques and Money Orders should be made out to the 'Invasive Species Council Inc'.
Sorry we do not have credit card facilities at this stage.

The Invasive Species Council

Invasive species are a growing problem all over the world, and Australia, an isolated island state with a unique fauna and flora, is especially vulnerable. Over the years incredible harm has been done by such pests as foxes, rabbits, toads, carp, prickly pear, blackberries, rubber vine and the tree-killing disease phytophthora. At last count, Australia had 2,700 weed species and more than 200 marine invaders.

Even though the impacts are immense and ongoing, invasive species aren't being tackled seriously. An alarming number of invasive species are still coming in, staying, and spreading in Australia.

The Invasive Species Council is an independent, non-government organisation set up to campaign and advocate to stop further invasions, and to contain invading species already present. If you care about the threat posed to Australia by exotic invaders, please join the ISC. We believe we are the first group in the world created *solely* to lobby against invasive species of all kinds.

We want stronger laws on invasives, tighter quarantine controls, regular monitoring of harbours for marine invaders, and Rapid Response Teams to eliminate new invaders. Join us to help make these a reality.

campaigning

raising awareness

convincing our governments to act