

Hon Kate Worden
Minister for Environment Northern Territory Government
By email: Minister.Worden@nt.gov.au

November 14, 2023

RE: URGING THE DECLARATION OF BUFFEL AS A CLASS A/B WEED

Dear Minister Worden,

The scale of smoke and ash from the fires across Central Australia and the Barkly Region has been, in large part, fuelled by Buffel grass. It has been predicted that the majority of the Northern Territory will have experienced fires by the end of this summer. (1) In light of this heightened risk to the health of our communities and Country, AMSANT is urging the Buffel Grass Technical Working Group to support the declaration of Buffel grass as a Class A/B weed.

About AMSANT

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory AMSANT is the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) in the Northern Territory (NT). Together, AMSANT members are the largest provider of comprehensive primary health care to Aboriginal people in the NT with 12 full member organisations (ACCHSs) and 13 associate members across the Territory. AMSANT's vision is that Aboriginal people live meaningful and productive lives on their own terms, enriched by culture and wellbeing. AMSANT's aims to grow a strong Aboriginal community controlled primary health care sector by supporting Members to deliver culturally safe, high quality comprehensive primary health care that supports action on the social determinants of health, and representing AMSANT Members' views and aspirations through advocacy, policy, planning and research.

AMSANT's foundations are built on self-determination, ensuring that people who are going to use health services can determine the nature of those services, and then participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of those services.

Impacts of buffel grass on people and Country

AMSANT is urging that Buffel grass be declared a Class A/B weed due to the following negative effects attributed to its uncontrolled presence in the Northern Territory.

- Health impacts of bush fire smoke with the potential to exacerbate chronic and acute respiratory conditions including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and pneumonia. This impact has been very evident over the last few weeks, with very significant fires in Central Australia and the Barkly causing widespread smoke.
- Larger, hotter and more frequent wildfires fuelled by Buffel grass, compounding the impacts of climate change.
- Threats to lives and homes with people in Central Australia and Barkly having to be on "Watch and Act" already at an early stage of the bushfire season. This is only set to get worse as climate change accelerates and buffel grass spreads into new areas. There is a growing risk to life and properties from out of control bushfires.

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- Displacement of spinifex and other native grasses due to the invasive nature of Buffel, impacting on threatened species and damaging the landscape. This impacts our people's connection to country, cultural strength and overall wellbeing.

The impacts of Buffel on people and Country will continue unless there is action to declare Buffel grass a Class A/B weed in the Northern Territory, we have an opportunity to change this. AMSANT is urging the members of the Buffel Grass Technical Working Group to consider the points we have raised.

Sincerely,
Erin Lew Fatt
Deputy Chief Executive Officer Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory

REFERENCES

1 ABC News (2023, Nov 11), Undoolya Station reports losses as Northern Territory endures toughest bushfire season in a decade. Retrieved from: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-11/undoolya-station-burnt-in-massive-nt-bushfire/103090294>

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