



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 98

WRITTEN QUESTION

K McNamara to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife, Hon Marie-Clare Boothby
MLA:

Funding to tackle Gamba Grass

The Minister announced in February some planned actions to respond to the spread of gamba grass in Litchfield National Park. These planned actions included appointment of a co-ordinator and four-person team.

1. Has the dedicated Gamba Coordinator been recruited? If so, have they started?

The 2025 control season was coordinated internally. An expression of interest seeking a coordinator for 6 months is scheduled for release in late July 2025. The coordinator will lead on-ground control outlined in the annual weed management plan with the dedicated contractor crew, park rangers, neighbouring properties, regional councils and relevant government agencies to maximise outcomes.

2. Are the four-person Gamba team that was announced an existing team or existing staff?

The four-person Gamba team consists predominantly of contractors (e.g. from Acacia Land Management, Aerial Services, etc.) supported by Parks and Wildlife (PW) for the on-ground control work, as well as the Gamba Army, which was established in 2023/24 in collaboration with Territory Natural Resource Management (TNRM).

3. If so, what were they working on prior to this gamba project?

N/A.

4. When will these staff begin work on reducing the spread of gamba grass within Litchfield National Park?

The Gamba Coordinator will commence in late September or early October 2025, allowing sufficient time for training ahead of the peak gamba management season, which coincides with the Wet season. The actions of the co-ordinator will supplement actions carried out by the rangers through ongoing efforts to manage gamba. Herbicide application is most effective when applied during the active growth phase from December to March.

Contractors have been utilised to survey, spray and report on control effectiveness. Where gamba is present in the high visitation sites, rangers and the dedicated contracted crew apply ground and aerial spraying methods to reduce the gamba footprint. In February 2025, \$10,000 of additional data logger technology was purchased and used in the control season. Data loggers eradicate the need for manual data management, avoid chemical tracking errors and give park rangers better insights and confidence regarding the effectiveness of treatment, proven by automated reporting and mapping. This will complement ongoing survey efforts by CDU researchers from the Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub. The team has developed a new, purpose-built data collection app that increases the ease and accuracy of collecting this data.

To promote the work being undertaken, an outward facing communication is expected to be released in September 2025, just prior to optimal control timeframes, typically December to March. Signs will be purchased in August 2025, and erected when works are being undertaken, so visitors and tour operators can see where the effort is being applied. Additionally, DTH is working with the Department of Lands, Planning and the Environment, Bushfires NT and Coomalie Council to develop a 'Gamba Litchfield Neighbours Project', that aims to improve the capacity of land managers that surround LNP to sustain a longer-term approach to reducing the impacts of gamba grass.

5. Is the Department informed by the 2023 scientific study named 'The cost of not acting: Delaying invasive grass management increases costs and threatens assets in a national park, Northern Territory'?

DTH works closely with the lead author of the study, Dr Rossiter-Rachor, who serves in an advisory capacity to Parks and Wildlife on the statutory Gamba Grass Weed Advisory Committee (Committee), which is managed by the Weed Management Branch. The Committee was initially established under the *Weeds Management Act 2001* to draft a plan and remains in place to advise the Minister for Lands, Planning and the Environment on the progress of its implementation.

6. Eradicating gamba in the small existing eradication zone would only protect 18% of visitor sites. Expanding the eradication zone to the larger suggested boundaries in the report would likely protect 86% of visitor sites and several species of conservation significance, and only cost around \$1.3 million per year for 5 years. Has the Department considered expanding the eradication zone?

PW is investigating efficacy of current control. This project is a partnership in adaptive management between PW rangers and planners, local weed contractors, weed management officers, and Dr Rossiter-Rachor and other Charles Darwin University researchers from the Northern Australia Environmental Resources Hub (one of 6 hubs in the National Environmental Science Program, or NESP).

The evidence gained to support the outcome of on-ground control by park rangers and weed contractors in the 2024-25 gamba control season at Litchfield National Park can be considered a key outcome of the project. The draft results of the NESP/PW aerial survey show that intensive ground-control has resulted in an almost 90% reduction in the net area of gamba grass on Tabletop range in 2025, compared to 2024.

The team has also partnered with Australia's Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network (TERN) to develop the new, purpose-built data collection app that increases the ease and accuracy of collecting this data. To date, NESP has trained 4 Litchfield National Park rangers, and 4 weeds branch staff, in how to use the app in the helicopter.

The results of the survey also suggest that a switch to more strategic weed management in 2025 (e.g. focussing on the Tabletop eradication zone, focusing on on-ground control by contractors, re-surveying to monitor control efficacy) has resulted in this successful outcome.

The work on Tabletop (identified as an eradication area in the park's Integrated Conservation Strategy) complements the work done by rangers to meet landholder obligations under the *Weeds Management Act 2001*, i.e. maintenance of 15m gamba-free buffers along all park boundaries and linear and built infrastructure.

A surge of effort was possible by virtue of an NT Government election commitment of \$250,000 to enhance the gamba control program at Litchfield National Park, following up on a previous Federal coalition government commitment of \$492,000 over 2.5 years for the same purpose. The partnership developed over this period, culminating in the successful outcome of 2024-25.