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SUBMISSION

9 October 2026

Parliamentary Officer
Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
North Terrace
ADELAIDE SA 5000
Via email: NRC.Assembly@parliament.sa.gov.au

Dear Parliamentary Officer,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Buffel Grass

Livestock SA is the peak industry organisation for South Australia's red meat and wool producers. Representing over 5,200 sheep producers, 2,700 beef cattle producers and several hundred goat producers across the state, we work to secure a strong and sustainable livestock industry. South Australia's $4.3 billion livestock industry is a key economic contributor to the state and supports 21,000 South Australian jobs across the red meat and wool industries.

Livestock SA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Buffel Grass. Buffel grass management is a significant issue for livestock producers because future policy decisions could affect pastoral productivity, land condition, business resilience and the management of environmental, cultural and infrastructure assets.

Introduction

In South Australia, buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris* and *Cenchrus pennisetiformis*) has been declared under the State's weed management legislation since 2015, while its value as a pasture species continues to be recognised in the northern pastoral zone. In the Alinytjara Wilurara, South Australian Arid Lands, and Northern and Yorke landscape regions, buffel grass may be retained for pastoral use but remains subject to control requirements. In all other landscape regions, producers are required to destroy buffel grass on their properties.

Livestock SA does not support the introduction of additional regulatory controls on livestock producers in relation to buffel grass. Producers are already regulated through the declared plant provisions of the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019* and associated regional management requirements. Government efforts should focus on improving implementation of the existing framework, supporting coordinated management, research and extension, and targeting high-priority environmental, cultural and infrastructure assets, rather than creating additional compliance obligations for landholders.

During September 2026, Livestock SA surveyed members in regions where buffel grass may be retained subject to control. As participation was voluntary and responses were geographically concentrated, the findings should be considered direct evidence of participating producers' experiences rather than statistically representative of all South Australian livestock producers.

The survey results identify differing experiences between pastoral businesses. Buffel grass may be an established and valuable component of grazing systems on some properties, while other properties have little or no buffel grass. These differences reinforce the need for a regionally differentiated policy framework.

Livestock SA notes that national consideration of buffel grass through the National Established Weed Priorities process did not achieve consensus, reflecting the complexity of balancing environmental, cultural and production values. The unresolved national process confirms that buffel grass is a complex conflict species; national prioritisation and state regulation are different questions; and any national or state action must preserve productive use, be geographically defined, identify responsibilities and funding, and undergo separate impact assessment. It also reinforces the importance of evidence-based, regionally differentiated policy development and meaningful engagement with pastoral stakeholders before any further regulatory changes are considered.

Key recommendations

Livestock SA makes the following recommendations to the Natural Resource Committee of the South Australian Parliament:

1. Continue to manage buffel grass as a conflict species through a regionally differentiated approach that protects its productive use in established pastoral systems while targeting unwanted spread and impacts on high-value environmental, cultural and infrastructure assets.

2. Immediately review and renew the South Australia Buffel Grass Strategic Plan, in partnership with industry and other stakeholders. As part of the review, Government should publicly report on implementation of the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan, including completed actions, funding expenditure, governance arrangements and measurable management outcomes.

3. Ensure pastoral industry representation on the State Buffel Grass Steering Committee and any future governance structures associated with implementation of a renewed Strategic Plan.

4. Continue a buffel grass capacity-building program, co-designed with pastoralists and delivered through extension, demonstrations, advice and landholder incentives.

5. Recognise shared responsibility for buffel grass management across public land, infrastructure corridors and private properties. This could include investment in strategically located vehicle and machinery hygiene infrastructure, particularly along key transport corridors where seed spread risks are highest[1].

[1] In 2024, Livestock SA commissioned ACIL Allen, with technical support from GHD, to assess South Australia's biosecurity truck wash capability and identify priority locations for future investment in wash-down infrastructure. The project delivered a Preliminary Business Case and a Basis of Design, providing the economic, operational and technical foundations for strategically located truck wash facilities to strengthen biosecurity and environmental outcomes across the state. Three priority locations were identified: Port Augusta, the Fleurieu Peninsula/Kangaroo Island region and the Murray-Mallee.

6. Establish a coordinated, industry informed research program to develop and validate integrated buffel grass management approaches across South Australia's pastoral regions.

7. Ensure that any future buffel grass policy changes be evidence-based, developed with pastoralists and supported by an assessment of regulatory, economic and land-condition impacts.

Summary of Livestock SA's position

Livestock SA supports a practical, evidence-based and regionally differentiated approach to buffel grass management that recognises both its value within established pastoral systems and the need to protect high-value environmental, cultural, community and infrastructure assets. Livestock SA does not support any additional regulatory controls on livestock producers. Effective management will require renewed strategic direction, genuine partnership with pastoralists, shared responsibility across all land tenures, targeted investment in capability and research, and careful assessment of the impacts of any future policy change.

Livestock SA does not support blanket eradication objectives in established pastoral grazing systems where buffel grass provides recognised productive and land management benefits.

Livestock SA therefore urges the Parliamentary Committee to support the recommendations in this submission and promote a balanced framework that protects productive pastoral use, targets management where it is most needed and avoids imposing disproportionate costs or obligations on individual landholders.

Please contact the Livestock SA office on (08) 8297 2299 or via email at admin@livestocksa.com.au if you would like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer

Detailed rationale and evidence

Recommendation 1:
Continue to manage buffel grass as a conflict species through a regionally differentiated approach that protects its productive use in established pastoral systems while targeting unwanted spread and impacts on high-value environmental, cultural and infrastructure assets.

Buffel grass was introduced to South Australia both accidentally and intentionally, including for pastoral production, dust suppression and soil stabilisation[2]. Its subsequent use and recognition as a pasture species is also reflected in South Australian buffel grass policy and strategic planning documents.

The *PIRSA Declared Plant Policy for Buffel Grass*[3], developed under section 9(1)(d) of the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*, and the *South Australia Buffel Grass Strategic Plan 2019–2024*[4] recognise its pasture value and importance to livestock producers. This policy framework supports managing buffel grass as a conflict species through a regionally differentiated approach, rather than imposing uniform statewide controls.

South Australian Government policy and research involving pastoralists identify benefits including livestock production, erosion control, maintenance of ground cover and resilience under variable climatic conditions. They also recognise the need to manage environmental, cultural and infrastructure impacts. This balance supports protecting established productive use while targeting unwanted spread and impacts on high-value assets.

Small-scale trials on South Australian pastoral properties date from the 1950s[5], demonstrating at least 70 years of deliberate use as a pasture species. This history establishes buffel grass as a long-standing pastoral resource. Economic modelling by Bowen and Chudleigh (2018) examined grazing pressure, land condition, productivity and profitability in a central Queensland beef enterprise using buffel grass pastures. Under the scenarios modelled, higher pasture utilisation provided a medium-term economic advantage compared with 30% utilisation[6].

Buffel grass can also provide land management benefits in South Australia's dry and variable rangelands. Published research and government sources report that buffel grass has been used for soil stabilisation and dust suppression, and that its fibrous root system can provide soil binding capacity in arid sandy soils. Its drought tolerance and rapid response to rainfall can also help maintain ground cover (Pitt 2004[7]; Soni et al. 2006[8]; PIRSA[9]).

After more than 70 years of use, buffel grass is an established component of many pastoral production systems and a practical tool for managing land-degradation risks. Future policy should recognise these demonstrated land condition and business resilience benefits alongside biodiversity considerations, supporting active management within grazing systems rather than a uniform approach.

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[2] Located at: PPQ 19-2 pp073-74 Pitt.pdf

[3] Located at: buffel_grass_policy.pdf

[4] Located at: SA_Buffel_Grass_Strategic_Plan_20192024.pdf

[5] Located at: awc201212081.pdf

[6] Located at: AN17780.pdf

[7] Located at: PPQ 19-2 pp073-74 Pitt.pdf

[8] Located at: Root distribution pattern of sewan (Lasiurus sindicus) and buffel grass (Cenchrus ciliaris) of arid ecosystem of western Rajasthan in relation to their soil binding capacity | The Indian Journal of Agricultural Sciences

[9] Located at: 4108_PIRSA_factsheet_Buffel_Grass_Control.pdf

Taken together, the policy framework, historical use and available production, economic and land-management evidence support the regionally differentiated approach proposed in Recommendation 1.

Survey results of Livestock SA members – productivity benefits

The survey indicates that buffel grass provides economic value for pastoral businesses where it is established and integrated into grazing systems. Respondents included cattle, sheep and mixed-livestock enterprises, although the extent of reliance on buffel grass varied between properties.

Of the 31 respondents, 42% (13) rated buffel grass as at least moderately important, including 32% (10) who rated it very important or essential. By comparison, 48% (15) rated it not important, often because buffel grass was absent, limited or actively excluded from their property. Forty two per cent of respondents also reported that their businesses depended on buffel grass in below-average rainfall years.

Respondents who use buffel grass described both production and environmental benefits. The most frequently selected production benefits were a reliable feed source, support during dry periods, reduced supplementary feeding, improved livestock condition and greater seasonal flexibility. Land management benefits centred on reduced bare ground, improved recovery after rainfall and stabilisation of sandy or fragile soils.

Of all respondents, 52% (16) expected a negative impact if removal or active suppression were required. This included 32% (10) who anticipated a severe negative impact. Written responses linked impacts to loss of drought feed, increased supplementary feeding, reduced capacity to retain breeding stock, erosion risk, rehabilitation costs, labour requirements and constraints on business resilience. A further 26% (8) expected no material impact, generally reflecting properties without established buffel grass or where it was not valued.

42% (13) of respondents reported one or more active grazing system practices. Common approaches included managing grazing pressure after rainfall, stocking rate management, rotational grazing or spelling, fire risk management and containment in priority areas. The responses indicate that use and management are not mutually exclusive.

Survey of Livestock SA members – land-management benefits

Livestock SA members reported reduced bare ground (45%; 14 respondents), stabilisation of sandy or fragile soils (42%; 13 respondents) and better recovery after rainfall (39%; 12 respondents).

A previous Land and Water Australia survey (2009), which included pastoralists from the South Australian Arid Lands region, found that buffel grass provided benefits through maintaining ground cover, stabilising soil and controlling erosion, particularly in landscapes vulnerable to degradation during drought and following rainfall events.

The survey found that many pastoralists valued buffel grass for its rapid response to summer rainfall, provision of feed during dry periods and support for recovery following drought. These characteristics can help grazing businesses maintain productive ground cover and reduce pressure on more fragile pasture resources[10].

[10] Located at: Quantifying_Costs_and_Benefits_of_Buffel_Grass.pdf

Recommendation 2:
Immediately review and renew the South Australia Buffel Grass Strategic Plan, in partnership with industry and other stakeholders.
As part of the review, Government should publicly report on implementation of the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan, including completed actions, funding expenditure, governance arrangements and measurable management outcomes.

The *South Australia Buffel Grass Strategic Plan 2019–2024* has reached the end of its stated term without a publicly available replacement. The plan established a coordinated statewide approach based on preventing spread, managing established infestations, protecting priority sites and building management capability. It also recognised the need to balance the use of buffel grass as a pasture species with the protection of environmental, cultural and infrastructure assets.

Livestock SA considers that reviewing and renewing the plan should be the logical starting point for the South Australian Government's future response. An updated plan should retain a regionally differentiated approach that recognises buffel grass as a conflict species. It should protect its productive use within established pastoral systems while directing containment, control and eradication resources towards unwanted spread and high-value environmental, cultural, community and infrastructure assets. This is consistent with Livestock SA's position that management must protect productive pastoral use while targeting impacts in places where buffel grass is unwanted.

The review should be undertaken transparently and in genuine consultation with stakeholders including pastoralists. The review should:

1. Publish an implementation and expenditure report on the 2019–2024 strategy; and
2. Clarify the status of any replacement strategy, then develop and fund a successor through transparent consultation.

Livestock SA does not support blanket control, eradication or additional unfunded obligations for pastoralists maintaining buffel grass as a productive pasture species. Public good management should be publicly supported, and future policy must not transfer disproportionate costs or liabilities to individual landholders.

Recommendation 3:
Ensure pastoral industry representation on the State Buffel Grass Steering Committee and any future governance structures associated with implementation of a renewed Strategic Plan.

The *South Australia Buffel Grass Strategic Plan 2019–2024* established the State Buffel Grass Taskforce to coordinate buffel grass management across South Australia. This function is now undertaken by a Steering Committee. This committee does not currently include pastoralist representation. Given the direct implications of buffel grass policy and management for pastoral production systems, Livestock SA proposes that pastoral industry expertise should be formally represented in the governance structure.

Recommendation 4: Continue a buffel grass capacity-building program, co-designed with pastoralists and delivered through extension, demonstrations, advice and landholder incentives.

The renewed Strategic Plan should retain a capacity building goal. Currently in section 3.3 the capacity building goal is – 'Ensure SA has the capability and commitment to manage buffel grass (all zones)'.

This goal includes two relevant Actions.

> Action 4.5 – 'Develop and promote integrated weed management to maximise benefits of buffel grass control'. It has a 'medium' priority. This includes two activities:
>
> 1. Establish best practice demonstration sites and conduct training in management techniques.
> 2. Promote best practice options for buffel management and alternatives to its use.
>
> Action 4.6 – 'Actively involve land managers and the community in buffel grass management'. It has a 'high' priority. Relevant activities include:
>
> 1. Establish and maintain networks with relevant agencies, groups and individuals.
> 2. Investigate funding opportunities for landholder incentives.

The findings from the Livestock SA member survey reveal a clear gap between the Strategic Plan's capacity-building objectives and practical producer support, requiring renewed, adequately funded extension, demonstration, advisory and incentive programs co-designed with pastoralists.

Livestock SA members survey

In Livestock SA's survey, producer participation in formal extension, demonstrations and funded management activity was limited. The survey recorded:

- 16% (5) had participated in an extension or education activity about buffel grass; 84% (26) had not.
- 10% (3) had attended a demonstration site showing management techniques; 90% (28) had not.
- 35% (11) had received information or advice from a landscape board, state government or another source; 65% (20) had not.
- 3% (1) had received funding or incentives to manage buffel grass; 97% (30) had not.
- 26% (8) reported engagement from landscape board staff, government officers or other relevant officials; 74% (23) did not.

The Land and Water Australia report based on producer surveys recommended improved buffel grass management measures, including incentives to address social and practical barriers to change[11].

Government incentives would help pastoralists manage buffel grass by reducing the private cost of delivering broader public benefits, such as protecting biodiversity, cultural sites and other priority assets. They could offset the costs of labour, herbicide, equipment, fencing, monitoring and follow-up treatment, enabling practical management across large and remote pastoral properties. Incentives could also encourage earlier action, participation in coordinated landscape scale programs, adoption of best practice grazing and containment measures, and accurate reporting of spread.

Importantly, incentives would recognise that pastoralists should not bear disproportionate costs for management undertaken primarily for environmental or community benefit. Well-designed programs could include grants, cost-sharing, technical advice, demonstration projects and payments for agreed outcomes. This would improve participation, strengthen cooperation with government and support practical management without undermining the productive use of buffel grass in established grazing systems.

[11] Located at: Quantifying_Costs_and_Benefits_of_Buffel_Grass.pdf

Recommendation 5:
Recognise shared responsibility for buffel grass management across public land, infrastructure corridors and private properties.
This could include investment in strategically located vehicle and machinery hygiene infrastructure, particularly along key transport corridors where seed spread risks are highest.

Buffel grass management requires a coordinated landscape scale approach because infestations and seed spread do not stop at property boundaries. The effectiveness of action by pastoralists can be undermined where adjoining roadsides, rail corridors, reserves, utilities and other public or privately managed land are not managed consistently.

Government agencies, park managers, infrastructure operators, landscape boards, councils and land managers share responsibility for coordinated prevention, containment, treatment and follow-up monitoring across priority landscapes and spread pathways. All stakeholders having a shared responsibility would improve management outcomes, protect public and private investment, and ensure pastoralists do not bear disproportionate responsibility for risks originating beyond their properties.

In 2024, Livestock SA commissioned ACIL Allen to assess the state's requirements for an effective biosecurity truck wash network. The independent report identified significant shortcomings, including insufficient facilities in high-risk areas, aging infrastructure, and limited capacity to meet modern biosecurity and operational standards. These facilities can deliver environmental and biodiversity outcomes by minimising contamination risks and preventing the spread of invasive species such as buffel grass. Port Augusta was identified as one of the three priority locations.[12]

Recommendation 6: Establish a coordinated, industry informed research program to develop and validate integrated buffel grass management approaches across South Australia's pastoral regions.

The Livestock SA survey identified that producers saw a policy focus for research into the economics 32% (10), improved understanding of integrated management 32% (10) and research into management options such as herbicides 23% (7).

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) have commissioned work to analyse the economic value of buffel grass and to define buffel grass's role in reducing soil erosion and increasing carbon sequestration in Australia. These projects should inform future South Australian policy when their findings become available.

There is a need to undertake research to assist in integrated management and management options for pastoralists.

Research should be co-designed with pastoralists with demonstration sites. The research should compare treatments, document costs and operational constraints, and translate findings into practical decision support tools and regionally relevant management guidance.

Emerging tools such as virtual fencing may also support integrated buffel grass management by enabling more targeted grazing. In South Australia, virtual fencing is currently permitted only for cattle and must use a system approved by the South Australian Government. Approved systems can support containment, rotational or strip grazing, exclusion from sensitive areas, movement towards preferred grazing areas or water points, and remote livestock monitoring. Further research and

[12] Report located at: https://livestocksa.com.au/livestocksa-projects/biosecurity-truck-wash

approved trials could assess the suitability of other technologies and livestock species for buffel grass management.

Recommendation 7: Ensure that any future buffel grass policy changes be evidence based, developed with pastoralists and supported by an assessment of regulatory, economic and land condition impacts.

Livestock SA's member survey demonstrates why future policy must be evidence based and developed with pastoralists. Sixty-one per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that buffel grass should continue to be recognised as a valuable pasture species in appropriate grazing landscapes, while 65% agreed or strongly agreed that policy should distinguish pastoral production systems from sensitive areas. Other responses were neutral, unsure or opposed, reflecting differences in local presence, productive use and environmental risk.

A future policy process should therefore:

- include genuine consultation and co-design with pastoralists so that regional conditions, property-scale management and the practical consequences for grazing businesses are understood before changes are proposed; and

- assess and publish the likely regulatory, economic and land condition impacts, including compliance costs, effects on productivity and drought resilience, erosion risks, and the feasibility and cost of available control measures. This evidence should guide proportionate, regionally appropriate policy and identify where government funding, research, extension or incentives are required to avoid transferring public-good costs disproportionately to individual landholders.