

In Brief

Sale of weeds online highlights the need for tighter controls

The regular online sale of declared weeds in Australia has highlighted the inadequacy of the current state-based system of weed management, and reiterated the urgency for more stringent national controls.

Ecos was alerted by a reader in early August to the sale of seeds from species of state declared weeds on at least three confirmed vendor-sites on Australia's eBay website, one of various websites that sell plant products. Dutchman's pipe (*Aristolochia elegans*) – a prohibited plant in Queensland – and lantana (*Lantana camara*) – a declared plant in all states except Victoria and the ACT – as well as other weed species declared in different states, were found listed for sale on this one site alone after a quick search.

The stock appears to have been imported for sale in Australia, and the vendors, who simply post the seeds nationally on request, operate with immunity out of states where the species are not listed weeds.

This free distribution of seeds across the country underlines the inadequacy of the current state-based weed listings and control system – particularly when the accelerating battle against the rapid infestation of pest species across Australia is already costing billions of dollars.

A WA representative for the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Australian Weed Management contacted representatives of eBay Australia in December 2004 to raise the issue of weed species being sold online and discussed plans by the company to look at applying its tighter US plant filtering standards in Australia.

Alistair McGibbon, Trust & Safety Director of eBay Australia & New Zealand, could not give details of progress on the matter since then, but said eBay was speaking with agencies including the Weeds CRC.

Both a Weeds CRC representative and WWF-Australia's Senior Policy Advisor Andreas Glanznig remarked that given the urgency of the national weed problem, current state listings and border controls needed to be reformed into a national weed register and monitoring system, and that better screening was required for mail.

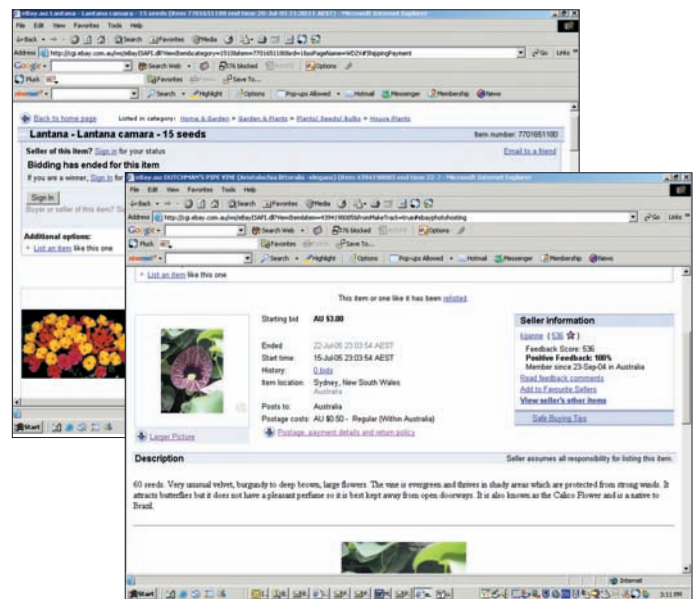
Interstate mail scanning processes are apparently not in place in any States due to the limitations of the Australian Postal Corporations Act

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(amendments are reportedly imminent) and varying state powers. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) scans all international mail for unwanted imported material, but small consignments of seeds are still coming into the country.

Weeds CRC representatives said AQIS had also been informed about successfully trialled US software that scans web shop sites for the sale of unwanted plants and animals. Discussions with the US software developers are apparently in progress.

In late July, meanwhile, the Australian Biosecurity Group, convened by the premier



Seeds from some declared weed species are easily available online.

national invasive species research bodies – the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre and the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management (Weeds CRC) – and WWF-Australia, launched *Invasive Weeds, Pests and Diseases: Solutions to Secure*

forward-looking plan to all governments, as part of their negotiations to develop options for a new national invasive species system by October this year.

‘Currently, too many invaders are slipping between the cracks of mismatched State and Territory laws and policies,’ said Dr Rachel McFadyen, CEO of the Weeds CRC. ‘This includes a quarter of the Weeds of National Significance, which are still advertised for sale as garden plants.’

Dr Tony Peacock, CEO of the new Invasive Animals CRC affirmed ‘The Australian, State and Territory governments have a rare opportunity to put in place a nationally coherent and efficient set of laws, policies and programs on invasive species that builds a watertight post-border system. We must have a system that is up to the same standard as Australia's world class border biosecurity system.’

More information:

Read *Australian Biosecurity Group's Invasive Weeds, Pests and Diseases: Solutions to Secure Australia* at www.wwf.com.au

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