

Weed Meta-biosecurity: Toward an Eco-literate Approach to Weed Invasion

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Ecology is the study of the conditions that support life in an ecos ('home'). Literacy refers to the intellectual frameworks that enable us to study eco-systems. When we combine these two terms, the result is a meta-biosecurity context: eco-literacy. The paper combines eco-literacy with a concern for invasive plant biosecurity. It examines the mediating frameworks that enable us to define and practice plant biosecurity.

Weeds can be thought of constructively in the above framework. Weeds are usually considered to be a 'problem' because they are 'plants in the wrong time and place'. Implicitly, therefore, weeds are plants out of sync with humans because our social priorities have made them so. Indeed, if this is the case, we might then also say that weeds respond to the logic of our human systems and behave like 'terrorists'.

The admonition is often made to 'fight back' against unwanted plant life. Plant biosecurity in this sense is based on fear – the fear of plants causing harm to our environment, economy or social values. As such, the popular call for a 'war on weeds' is a struggle over the understandings we use to determine what is life. Thus, certain types of plant life can be sustained by the contexts we currently use, or effaced – we can choose. Biosecurity, in this sense, is the securing of a way of life that enables only valued life to survive, not necessarily all life. Securing future life, therefore, also involves securing the meta-understandings needed for sustaining future life. More specifically, by naming a plant 'weed', we extend our present eco-literacy frameworks into the future political constitution of plant life.

Given the above context, it is argued that the resilience of our agri/ecosystems may rely on our ability to recognise and value plant dissent ('weediness'). This idea is explored with reference to biological methods for controlling and/or preventing weeds. A case-study is presented using material from a large community-based biological control project funded under the Australian Federal Government's "Caring for our Country" initiative. This project uses community groups to raise, disperse and monitor weed biological control agents. The case-study is analysed to suggest that community-based biological control of weeds should be viewed as an eco-literate form of civil defence.