



## WSV Campaign for Australian Centre for Weed Research *Support of WSV members needed*

The WSV Executive Committee is campaigning to secure funding for an Australian Centre for Weed Research to replace the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management (Weeds CRC) following its closure in June 2008. Members are invited to contribute to the campaign by signing and posting the enclosed letter to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to inform the Federal Government of your support for a centre of expertise in weed prevention and management.

Without the continued research efforts of the Weeds CRC, losses to the agricultural sector of \$4 billion per annum will increase and savings through improved weed management practices will not be realised. There are significant financial benefits to the Australian economy with improved weed prevention and management but the CRC funding structure with its focus on the development of products for commercial purposes has not recognised the contribution of the Weeds CRC and other similarly structured CRCs (see article *Economic myopia threatens environment*, page 2). The preservation of the biodiversity of Australia's flora and fauna will be further affected by a reduction in funding for research such as trials for new biological controls. Research is needed to respond to the impact of climate change and drought on environmental and agricultural weeds.

WSV and the Council for Australian Weed Societies have written to the

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in support of the proposed research centre and is considering other ways to lobby the Federal Government. The Executive Committee of WSV has requested a meeting with the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change and the Minister for Agriculture to ask that the Victorian Government lobby the Federal Government for the establishment of the proposed Research Centre.

**SUPPORT BY WSV MEMBERS IS VITAL** to ensure the Federal Government is aware of the importance of weed research to improved management of weeds.

### Ways you can contribute:

- Sign the enclosed letter and post to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.
- Send copies of the enclosed letter to The Hon. Eric Abetz, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources.
- Send a letter or email to your local federal member of parliament.
- Send a letter or email to the Victorian Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change.
- Let the WSV Executive know your ideas to assist with the campaign (contact Ken Young, President – see WSV Directory on page 4 for contact details).

## Invasive Species Seminar *with Dr Randy Westbrooks*



WSV and the Faculty of Land and Food Resources, University of Melbourne are co-sponsoring a seminar with Dr Randy Westbrooks (pictured), Invasive Species Prevention Specialist with United States Geological Survey (USGS) National Wetlands Research Centre in North Carolina.

The seminar '*Invasive Species – Coming to America*' will be held at 5.30 pm, Wednesday 12 September, Agar Theatre, University of Melbourne, Parkville.

Dr Westbrooks is the author of numerous publications on invasive species, including the Weed Fact Book (*Invasive Plants - Changing the Landscape of America*), which was published by the US Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW). As a leading advocate for invasive species prevention, he is currently working to organise an International Invasive Species Early Detection and Rapid Response Working Group under the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group and is working with numerous interagency partnership groups to develop and field test a National Early Detection and Rapid Response System for Invasive Plants in the United States.

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**Copy Deadline for Next Issue:**  
30 August 2007

## Missing WSV Member

Can you provide contact details for Nicholas Kelly, Western Land Services, Ballan? If so, please contact Ros Shepherd on tel: 03 9576 2949 or email: secwssv@surf.net.au.

## Economic myopia threatens environment

Distorted economics, coupled with ideologically driven decision making, is threatening Australia's best efforts to preserve its natural heritage, according to the CEO of the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management.

Speaking in Brisbane in the lead up to World Environment Day on June 5, Dr McFadyen said that while the latest national budget contained some good initiatives, the past decade had been one of neglect and lost opportunities for environmental research.

'The dominance of short-term commercial objectives in setting the national research agenda has been a disaster for environmental science', said Dr McFadyen. 'It has left many of the scientific groups focused on public good and the environment scabbling for support.'

Within the CRC Programme, for instance, the Rainforest CRC, the Reef CRC, the Tropical Savannas CRC and the Weeds CRC are all casualties. The Weeds CRC was advised in November 2006 that its funding will not be renewed, and that it will wind up in June 2008. Even the Bushfire CRC, possibly the world's leading research body in this area and vital to Australia with a drying climate, had considered not reapplying for funding as a CRC suggesting that its non-commercial focus could rule it out of consideration.

In a wide-ranging statement anticipating her retirement at the end of next year, Dr McFadyen criticised the rundown in research capacity and facilities across Australian universities and research agencies. According to Dr McFadyen, Professor Julian Cribb (The Australian Higher Education supplement, 24/5/2007) was right to point to short-sightedness in the 1990s that wound back public investment in energy research and the geosciences in Australia and which led to their widespread decline. Mathematics was another casualty.

'To those I would add a generally inadequate investment in insect and plant taxonomy over the decade, as well as in weed science.'

On the environment, Dr McFadyen said despite the National Heritage Trust investment, science that predominantly benefited the environment had been sidelined. She said the \$10 million a year for four years for the federal government's Defeating Weed Menace program had been valuable, but paled into insignificance compared to the size

of the problem.

'Weeds cost the agricultural sector over \$4 billion per year - that is in the same league as the total national export income from refined gold (\$6 billion in 2004-05), or from exports of liquefied natural gas (\$4.4 billion in 2005-06)', she said. 'We know that the country could save billions of dollars in the long term by investing in better ways of weed management.'

'We have all the evidence you need - for example, over 100 years of data shows that investing in the biological control of weeds delivers a benefit of \$23 million for every \$1 million spent. This is data from a well conducted economic analysis.'

'We also showed that the nation's farmers could save \$2 billion over 25 years by investing a further \$30 million in weed science over the next seven years', Dr McFadyen said.

Regrettably, Dr McFadyen said, too often governments are not prepared to fund research which saves them money in this way. Costs avoided do not seem to count - rather it has to be cash made from products and services marketed.

'This approach is made even less appropriate by the fact that returns from biological control can take ten years or more to be fully delivered, even though the benefits can be spectacular, and permanent,' Dr McFadyen said.

'This kind of thinking doesn't even make common economic sense, let alone serve the interests of the country's long-term scientific and agricultural development', she said.

'In particular, on World Environment Day 2007, I am concerned that still so few

people are prepared to stand up for the environment and back the science needed to protect it.'

Dr McFadyen said that new reports show that biodiversity is indeed threatened by the spread of invasive plants, both at the local and national scale. Indeed, we now know that invasive plants and animals together represent the most important immediate threat to Australia's biodiversity, she said.

Yet many concerned scientists were effectively being forced to ignore this evidence when applying for funds to survive as researchers, knowing that only the commercial aspects will be considered relevant.

Dr McFadyen said the Productivity Commission was absolutely correct in emphasising that government funding should support public good research - namely, the translation of research outputs into economic, social and environmental benefits.

'I'm hoping for new priorities to emerge', Dr McFadyen said. 'I want my successors not to have to continually set aside the environmental benefits of their research in order to work as scientists within the government system in this country.'

'And I want savings attributed to better weed control counted as an outcome, and not dismissed as irrelevant', she said.

A media statement and updates about the closure of the Weeds CRC and the proposal for an Australian Centre for Weed Research can be viewed at [www.weeds.crc.org.au/main/weeds\\_crc\\_to\\_end.html](http://www.weeds.crc.org.au/main/weeds_crc_to_end.html).

## Sponsorship, advertising and displays

### Third Biennial Victorian Weeds Conference Earth, Wind, Fire, Water & Weeds

3-4 October 2007  
Bendigo, Victoria

**SPONSORSHIP:** Sponsors are sought for the conference. Sponsorship is a great way of reaching a large audience of people and organizations with an interest in the improved detection, management and control of weeds. For more information or to provide suggestions for sources of sponsorship, please contact Chris Knight (see WSV Directory).

**ADVERTISING:** Members are asked to assist with advertising the conference. A hard copy of the brochure is included with this issue of Weedscape. For an electronic version or more hard copies of the brochure and electronic or hard copy coloured A4 conference posters to assist you to advertise, contact Ros Shepherd (see WSV Directory). Ideas about where to advertise the conference are also welcomed.

**DISPLAYS:** Space is available for both posters and tables for display purposes. To reserve space please contact Ros Shepherd.



Weed  
Society of  
Victoria Inc.

## Report on seminar and field trip: Over the garden fence and far away – Communities' actions on weeds Dandenong Ranges, 19 April 2007

The morning seminar was held at the Burringa Community Centre and Gallery in Upwey where the significant role of volunteers in the management and eradication of weeds was highlighted by Trevor McIntosh from Parks Victoria. In 2005/2006 financial year 186,598 volunteer hours were dedicated to weed management in state and national parks in Victoria of which 21,300 volunteer hours, the equivalent of 11 full-time staff, were provided within the Dandenong Ranges National Park.

As the Weed Strategy Officer for the Shire of Yarra Ranges, David Blair has responsibility for approximately 3,000 sites (2,234 roadsides and 765 reserves) covering 250,000 hectares adjacent to the urban fringe, agricultural land, vineyards, and in the Dandenong Ranges, and state and national parks. David developed a weed threat matrix to prioritise sites for weed management, with different weightings given to a range of values, from ecological to social, to enable a direct comparison of all sites. A coarse desk-top assessment combined with aerial photos was used to initially identify a list of 620 sites which required a site visit. Data collected from both the desktop and field assessments included: vegetation quality score (based on the state-wide scoring system of habitat hectares), presence / absence list of weed species, weed cover, the involvement of community groups, available resources, and other site and management information. By sorting and analysing the information gathered at the site level an overall picture of the Shire emerged including information about the Shire's assets and the distribution of weed species. This information was used to identify priority sites for weed management (300) and define a budget allocation for each site. Continued collection of this information will provide a comprehensive database and enable a better understanding of the effectiveness of effort expended to reduce weeds over the years.

Attendees at the seminar also heard from:

- Daniel Joubert, Department of Primary Industry (DPI), about the different legal status of weeds and other terms used to group weeds.
- Graham Peterson, EcoRepair, about the management of weeds
- John Weiss, DPI, about weed risk assessment and the implications



**Graham Peterson, Daniel Joubert, David Blair and Ros Shepherd enjoying the afternoon sun at the end of the field trip.**

of changes to declared weeds to community groups.

- Darcy Duggan, Bushland Management Services, described his 4-step plan for the management of weeds in the home garden.
- Trish Grant, DPI, spoke about the role of Waterwatch and the need to consider waterways when managing both aquatic and terrestrial weeds.

After a (well-) packed lunch we travelled by minibuses to the Dr Ken Leversha Reserve, Montrose. Graham Peterson and David Blair took us on a walking tour of the reserve. They described the range of weed management techniques used in the reserve and also the relationship between the ecology / biology of the weed species and the features of the habitat.

Key areas shown to us within the reserve included:

- The significant reduction in *Asparagus aethiopicus* (asparagus fern) following the great efforts of volunteers at the uppermost area of the reserve.
- The different approaches to the management of woody weeds. A powerful owl *Ninox strenua* has taken up residence in a stand of *Acacia elata* (cedar wattle), which was a popular garden plant approximately 30 years ago. Graham recommends using drilling and filling to kill the trees but allowing the dead trees to remain standing so that they continue to provide habitat to the owl. This contrasts with the chopping down of weedy tree species in an adjacent area which was undertaken without considering the implications of the resulting hole in the canopy which encouraged the

spread of a number of other weed species. In yet another area of the reserve, which was relatively intact, a stand of woody weeds was removed as it was judged that the quality of the surrounding habitat would support native regeneration.

- *Acacia pruinosa* (frost wattle), which has been found in the reserve, is not listed in the Flora of Victoria and may be a new and emerging weed for the Shire.
- A large patch of *Watsonia meriana* var. *bulbillifera* (watsonia) occurs in an open grassy area, and had been sprayed with roundup. A mower was used to prevent the spread of *Anthoxanthum odoratum* (sweet vernal) found in another area on the edge of the grassland.
- In one corner of the reserve there was a dense concentration of weeds with *Salix* spp (willows), *Rubus fruticosus* aggregate (blackberry) and *Lonicera japonica* (Japanese honeysuckle) which were removed. Because of the level of fire risk to the adjacent property the lighter woody material was removed and burnt off-site.
- *Tradescantia fluminensis* (wandering creeper) occurs along the creek. It had been previously raked out but had grown back without any further follow-up works. As hand raking and weeding of *T. fluminensis* is only effective on a small scale and given its present extent, herbicide will need to be used for effective control in this area.

David described how the Shire of Yarra Ranges used a letter-writing campaign to many local residents advising them about the presence of weeds in each of their gardens. The aim of the letters was to raise weed awareness and offer residents the opportunity to work together within the Shire to manage weeds on the boundary of private and public land.

The seminar and field trip was well attended with over 70 participants from diverse backgrounds including water authorities, local and State governments, Landcare and friends groups. The weather was very kind with the sun shining on our backs as we made our way around the reserve. Many thanks to Graham, David and the other presenters for an informative day and to Ros Shepherd, WSV Secretary for organising the event.

*Lisa Minchin*



## Conferences and Events

**6–8 August 2007**

**Agriculture Australia Conference**, Melbourne. Contact: Rosemary Richards, Telephone: 02 9427 6999.

**27–31 August 2007**

**Integrated Weed Management Training: Workshops for Grain Growers.** Contact: Murrumbidgee CMA, Telephone: 02 6118 6012.

**28–29 August 2007**

**Bitou Bush and Boneseed National Forum.** Mercure Hotel, Geelong, Victoria. Contact: Hillary Cherry, Bitoubush and Boneseed Coordinator, hillary.cherry@environment.nsw.gov.au, Telephone: 02 9585 6587 or Mobile: 0427 104 448.

**7–9 September 2007**

**Victorian Environment Friends Network 12th Biennial Conference: 'A Climate of Change'.** Registrations close on 3 August. Contact Maelor Himbury, Telephone: 03 9374 1902 or maelor@melbpc.org.au.

**12 September 2007**

Weed Society of Victoria and Land and Food Resources, University of Melbourne Seminar: **'Invasive Species – Coming to America'**. Randy Westbrook, Invasive Species Prevention Specialist with United States Geological Survey National Wetlands Research Centre in North Carolina. 5.30 pm, Agar Theatre, University of Melbourne, Parkville. For further information

contact Erin Wilson at E.Wilson@unimelb.edu.au, Tel: 03 8344 0102.

**3–4 October 2007**

**Third Biennial Victorian Weed Conference: 'Earth Wind Fire Water & Weeds'**, Bendigo, Victoria. For further information contact Ros Shepherd at secwssv@surf.net.au or www.wsvic.org.au.

### WSV Travel Grants – closing date extended to 1 August 2007

Are you a WSV member planning to attend this year's third Victorian Weed Conference or other weeds conference? WSV provides travel grants annually (depending on the standard of the applications) to enable up to two of its members to attend a weeds conference. The maximum grant per recipient is \$1500. WSV members are encouraged to apply for support to attend a conference in order to learn about the latest in weed research and management and / or present a paper.

You can download the WSV travel grant guidelines and relevant application forms from our website: [www.wsvic.org.au](http://www.wsvic.org.au) or email Ros Shepherd, Secretary at [secwssv@surf.net.au](mailto:secwssv@surf.net.au).

## The Weedy Truth about Biofuels

With climate change so much in the news, biofuel crops are attracting interest, but initial investigations by the Invasive Species Council (ISC) have found that many of these are potential major weeds-putting the economy and the environment at risk.

'We have found that some of the plants being promoted by biofuel organisations in Australia are serious weeds,' said ISC spokesman Tim Low.

'For example a biodiesel company in Queensland has called on farmers to grow jatropha (also called physic nut), an Indian plant that is banned in Western Australia and the Northern Territory because of its weediness. Jatropha is also closely related to bellyache bush, one of the worst weeds of grazing lands in northern Australia - and like bellyache bush it is poisonous to livestock. It could be a disaster if this plant was deliberately put in the ground as a crop in Australia,' said Tim Low.

The ISC has found that other known major weeds touted as biofuel crops include Chinese tallow tree, castor oil

plant, reed canary grass, giant reed and Chinese apple. For example Chinese tallow tree is one of America's worst weeds, and it was recently declared a noxious weed in northern New South Wales because it is invading land so rapidly. In September last year, six scientists published an article in the prestigious journal *Science* warning about the weed risk posed by biofuel crops. In the United States, corn is grown as a biofuel, but the costs of cultivation are so high that without subsidies it is not a viable alternative to petroleum. The search is on for hardy low-maintenance biofuel crops, but unfortunately some of those proposed are well known weeds. This poses a potential major risk to Australian agriculture and the Australian environment. Due to the risk the Invasive Species Council is preparing a comprehensive report on the weed risk posed by some biofuel plants.

For further information contact Tim Low on 07 3878 2099 or [Tim.Low@uq.net.au](mailto:Tim.Low@uq.net.au).

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