

WEED MANAGEMENT SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.

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Adelaide Hills choke on Olives

Fancy eating some olives? Splash some virgin olive oil on your salad? How about invest some spare cash in an olive grove? Say yes to any of these and you might like to consider the havoc that's occurring in our native bush.

"Feral olives are killing off our native bush and still more olive trees are being planted, it's a huge environmental problem. I love eating olives and cooking with olive oil. South Australia has seen a huge increase in olive production but what is the future environmental cost?" asks Dr John Virtue, President of the Weed Management Society of South Australia. "Local governments, community groups and landholders are already spending hundreds of thousands of dollars per year controlling feral olives. Olives are a conflict of interest."

Neville Crossman, a researcher in the School of Geography, Population and Environmental Management, Flinders University puts it bluntly "You can kiss wattles and other shrubs goodbye in the hills thanks to feral olives. Grey box woodland makes the hills what they are. Olives are changing them into a biological desert."

Dr Graham Collins from the Department of Horticulture, Viticulture and Oenology, Adelaide University, sees another side of olives. "The olive is just one of many non-indigenous species that were introduced by the early colonists and have thrived in their new environment. Olives have the potential to become part of an industry that can save Australia millions of dollars in imports in the future. However success will depend on quality not quantity."

"Feral olives in southern Australia are the product of a vast natural breeding program over the last 100 years from crosses between the world's best olive varieties. Amongst them will be new superior varieties with the advantage of adaptation to the local environment. These superior trees will be the basis of our future successful industry" said Graham Collins.

The Animal and Plant Control Commission has developed a risk management strategy to assist with the approval of olive orchard developments. "Councils are really in the hot seat with this issue" says John Virtue. "Councils are responsible for planning approvals for new olive groves. At the same time they have responsibility for weed control and fire risk reduction in council reserves. Any help councils can get with this one will be valuable."

The Weed Management Society of South Australia has organised a public meeting - *Olives: dealing with a serious conflict of interest* with speakers and guests from industry, conservation, local government and research groups. The outcomes of the meeting will clarify the positions of many of the interested parties and go some way to managing both the industry and the environment.

The Public meeting is at 7.30 p.m. on Monday 2 April at the Goodman Building lecture theatre, Adelaide Botanic Gardens.

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Media contacts

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