

WEED MANAGEMENT SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.

MEDIA RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

10th February 2003

Weeds CEO calls for levy on olives

Olive growers should pay a levy that reflects the cost to the community of dealing with feral olives, according to the Director of the Cooperative Centre for Australian Weed Management, Dr Rick Roush.

Speaking two weeks before his departure to the USA to take up the role of Director of the University of California's Integrated Pest Management Program, Dr Roush said it was time that industries which continued to spread invasive plant species acknowledged the high public and environmental cost. Many thousands of dollars are spent each year in South Australia on olive control alone by public authorities and landowners who never planted an olive tree in their lives.

'Despite the fact that the olive problem in the Adelaide Hills is mostly 19th century stock gone feral', Dr Roush said, 'the varieties of olive now being planted by the hectare across southern Australia would have a hard time passing the feral risk test. It is a high risk species that loves jumping the fence.'

At present growers are obliged to manage their plantations to minimise the chance of olives spreading off property. Local government is supposed to enforce this control.

'That is already quite an ask, seeing that olives are mostly spread by birds', said Dr Roush.

Dr Roush said that the market for olive products also compounds this risk. A downturn in price or demand, which has already been predicted by some observers, will leave many growers unwilling or unable to manage their groves in ways that minimise seed spread.

'There is a principle involved here. Weeds cost the Australian economy approximately \$4 billion every year, and the figure is growing. And that doesn't include the effort and money that governments and community put into 'environmental weeds', those that invade bushland.'

This is a greater cost to Australia per year than the combined figure for salinity, soil sodicity and soil acidity, he said.

'Those individuals and industries that plant invasive species like olives should be made to meet the cost of preventing its spread. It's the polluter pays principle. It's simply no longer acceptable to generate huge problems for future generations in pursuit of profit now.'

Addressing the February meeting of the Weed Management Society of South Australia Inc., Dr Roush also criticised the SA State Government for lagging behind the rest of Australia in providing support for weed research. Given that the cost to SA agriculture alone is at least \$650 million, the equivalent of a single position allocated to weed research is 'completely inadequate', he said.

Success in weed control research can bring benefit:cost returns as high as 100:1, Dr Roush said, with long-term solutions bringing great economic benefits for our children and future South Australians. Biocontrol techniques offer particularly cost-effective solutions.

'I am confident that we have identified a solution to bridal creeper, for example, and that other successes are achievable. But we must lift investment in this research if our children and their

children are to experience the same natural Australian landscape that current South Australians were lucky enough to grow up in.'

'Make no mistake. We are in a race for control of the landscape with invasive plants. They have time on their side, but we have research. We must equip ourselves and invest in our future if we hope to turn the feral tide.'

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Dr Roush will be available for comment all this week.

Picture available of Dr Roush against olive tree.

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