

**Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries
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Media Release**

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Weedbusting ... crocs aren't the only menace lurking in northern waters

Loosening the vice-like grip some weeds have on sensitive areas of northern Australia including Kakadu, the Wet Tropics and Cape York Peninsula can be a treacherous undertaking.

While terrestrial weeds can be contained with a combination of machinery knock-down, herbicides and biocontrols, it is not as easy in the estuarine areas where thick rainforests and mangroves meet the blue seas.

In these far reaches, control methods need to negotiate the crocodiles and cyclones that are a part of life in northern climes.

The man charged with the responsibility of coordinating the national management of pond apple and hymenachne, two Weeds of National Significance (WoNS), is Biosecurity Queensland's Rob Cobon.

Mr Cobon heads up the federally funded strategic plan for each weed. For hymenachne, the program is overseen by the National Hymenachne Management Group, with a similar group for pond apple.

Hymenachne is a semi-aquatic, perennial grass while pond apple is a semi-deciduous woody tree.

"Hymenachne (*Hymenachne amplexicaulis*) is undoubtedly the most prevalent and invasive of all aquatic weeds in Australia, and is present in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales," he said.

"Introduced initially as a ponded pasture species for grazing, hymenachne is encroaching on waterways, forming dense thickets on top of the water surfaces and suffocating any aquatic life below, including barramundi," he said.

Pond apple (*Annona glabra*), first introduced as grafting stock for custard apples, is a similar aquatic menace with enormous potential for further spread with fruit floating north and south on weather-affected ocean currents.

Present in Mackay, the Wet Tropics and Cape York, the response program for pond apple is concentrating on mapping its distribution and strategic control of isolated infestations.

The impact of these weeds resulted in them being identified in 1999 as two of 20 WoNS in Australia. As a result, these species are declared nationally to stop further spread through sales and trade, and place control obligations on landholders in most states and territories.

The ground troops in this on-going battle against hymenachne and pond apple are the local government officers, government agencies and landholders who wage the war in their own backyards.

"We rely heavily on these local stakeholders to have the troops on the ground to enter these often remote locations in treacherous terrain," Mr Cobon said.

"We are talking about isolated, remote tracts of mangroves or brackish estuarine areas where limited registered herbicides can only be used to control these pests.

“Obviously, eradication teams need to be trained to work in these areas, not only for herbicide application, but in dealing with an environment where mosquitoes and crocodiles have free reign.”

Mr Cobon said technology was also playing an increasingly vital role in weedbusting.

“Aerial surveys have been completed to ascertain the spread of pond apple on Cape York. Remote sensing is another technique that is being used.”

Mr Cobon said landholders, bushwalkers, fishers and other people whose work or hobbies take them into low-lying areas are a great source of information about weed infestations.

“We encourage landholders and those who adventure into wetlands to familiarise themselves with aquatic weeds and report any sightings to their respective local government pest officer,” Mr Cobon said.

As part of Weedbuster Week 2008, from September 1-7, Biosecurity Queensland will be hosting weed identification days throughout Queensland. For more information, log on to <http://www.weedbusters.info>

For a hymenachne or pond apple information pack, contact the DPI&F on 13 25 23.

Further information:

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