

A COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO WEED MANAGEMENT: KEEPING TASMANIA FREE FROM THE GRIP OF ALLIGATOR WEED

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Alligator weed, *Alternanthera philoxeroides*, is considered to be one of the greatest threats to rivers, irrigation schemes and wetland habitats in the world. The pest status of alligator weed in waterways results from prolific growth that reduces recreational use of water, alters aquatic ecology and displaces desirable plant species. It blocks rivers, streams and drains causing sedimentation and flooding problems and provides habitats for disease vectors and insect pests (Julien *et al.* 1979). Unlike other aquatic weeds, alligator weed can grow vigorously in terrestrial situations. In 1996 alligator weed was found growing in a Brisbane suburban garden. Further investigations indicated it was being propagated in gardens around Australia by some ethnic groups who were mistakenly growing it as a vegetable plant native to their own country.

An investigation into the potential occurrence of alligator weed in Tasmania was initiated in November 1997. Expertise was sought from the Keith Turnbull Research Institute in Victoria, who were undertaking their own management program, and it was determined that alligator weed was likely to be growing in Tasmania. A taskforce was established, which included representatives from the Sri Lankan community and Office of Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs.

The major role of the taskforce was to develop and implement a strategic plan for the eradication of alligator weed in Tasmania. The main priorities of the plan were to identify the problem, develop a targeted public awareness campaign and to put in place a management plan that identified actions for control and an ongoing monitoring program. The awareness and education program that followed resulted in the confirmation of two garden infestations and a potted plant of alligator weed.

To assist in determining the location and eradication of all plantings of alligator weed a replacement species program was implemented. This program paralleled with what was taking place in Victoria with the same replacement species, lesser joyweed, *Alternanthera denticulata*, being adopted. This species was chosen due to its favourable taste and food value and it was also native to Tasmania. It has been adopted by the Sri Lankan community as an acceptable alternative to alligator weed.

This successful program is an example of State governments and local community groups working together in cooperation to achieve a solution that is acceptable for everyone concerned. It also highlights the benefits of collaboration, consultation and an emphasis on a sensitive approach when dealing with weed issues of a cross cultural nature.

REFERENCES

Julien, M.H., Broadbent, J.E. and Harley, K.L.S. (1979). The current status of biological control of *Alternanthera philoxeroides* (alligator weed) in Australia. Procs. 7th Asian-Pacific Weed Science Society Conference, Sydney.