

## ***Limnocharis flava*, *Mikania micrantha* and *Clidemia hirta* detected in north Queensland: are these weeds lurking at a site near you?**

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**Summary** In mid-2001, populations of three potentially serious weeds were discovered in north Queensland. Factors associated with the location and possible duration of the infestations make it likely that plants have been more widely dispersed and that other infestations may be lurking unrecognised elsewhere.

*Limnocharis flava* (L.) Buchenau (yellow burrhead or limnocharis) is an aquatic herb with distinctive foliage and attractive yellow flowers. It has enormous reproductive capacity, spreading both vegetatively and by waterborne seeds. Infestations can choke shallow wetlands and slow-moving streams. Small, naturalised populations were found at several sites near Cairns and Townsville and have now been destroyed, but the discovery of some plants in ornamental ponds suggests a wider distribution is likely.

*Mikania micrantha* Kunth. (mile-a-minute or mikania vine) is a vigorously growing vine that smothers underlying vegetation. A weed of pastures and horticulture it also invades the understorey and margins of disturbed forests. Enormous numbers of small wind-borne seeds can be widely and unobtrusively dispersed, but vegetative reproduction is also important and new plants develop readily from small stem fragments. Several small infestations occupying a total of one hectare were discovered in north Queensland in 1998 and have been target of an eradication campaign since then. In 2001 the detection of previously unknown infestations

at several 'new' localities including a nursery, emphasises the importance of searching more widely for this weed. Circumstantial evidence suggests that some of the infestations may have different origins.

*Clidemia hirta* (L.) D. Don (Koster's curse or clidemia) is a shade-tolerant shrub that invades pastures, plantations and the understorey of disturbed forests. Plants can flower and fruit within the first year of growth, producing numerous small, many-seeded berries. Avian and mammalian dispersal assists rapid spread away from the site of initial establishment adding to the difficulty of locating all plants. In August 2001 a small infestation was discovered at a former nursery near Julatten, north Queensland. A search along the banks of a stream flowing through the property revealed plants up to two kilometres away, with evidence of flood-borne dispersal. Subsequently, a single plant was found near Kuranda, some 25 kilometres to the south. All plants were destroyed as they were located, but it seems inevitable that more will be found. Timely recognition of potentially serious weeds before they become widely established, offers the best opportunity for successful and cost-effective early intervention. The true extent of these 'new' invaders is yet to be determined but a public awareness campaign using colour warning brochures and newspaper articles has already led to further detections.

**Keywords** *Limnocharis flava*, *Mikania micrantha*, *Clidemia hirta*, weeds, early intervention.