

Thursday, June 8, 2017

Weedy Grass a Giant Problem for Grazing

Pastoral productivity in the Mackay Whitsunday region is under significant threat from the spread of a pasture weed known as giant rat's tail grass (GRT) and landholders are on a mission to reduce it.

Reef Catchments delivered three GRT control workshops across Mackay Whitsunday region at the end of May. The workshops focused on providing landholders with advice for identification, chemical application, control methodologies for managing these problem species and the opportunity to network with other landholders and key stakeholders. A common message from landholders in attendance at the events was the noticeable trend in increased GRT across the region in the last 6 months.

Emily Wood, Reef Catchments Pest and Weed Project Officer said "We had an understanding of how serious the issue is in our region before these events, but it is definitely getting worse and that has serious implications for grazing productivity and rural property values in our region".

'Our intention was to host small workshops, hoping for 15 people per day. We ended up with 94 participants in total, including 42 in Mirani, 30 in Sarina and 22 in Proserpine', said Ms Wood.

Graziers attending the event had the opportunity to discuss the issue and treatment methodology with Reef Catchments, Council staff, local agronomist consultant Farmacist, Queensland Government staff, Landcare representatives and pasture and chemical product representatives. Understanding the main chemicals used for GRT control was a key focus of the event. Allan Blair from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries delivered a lively session on chemical modes of action, role of soil type in chemical efficacy and chemical application.

GRT can produce approximately 60,000 – 80,000 of seed per square meter per year, with 90% of those seeds viable for germination. Individual plants can live for up to 10 years and seeds can last for up to 10 years in the soil. Control of the species is expensive and requires the consideration of complex weed management variables. Ecoclimatic modelling has suggested that GRT is suited to conditions present in 30% of Australia and 60% of Queensland.

GRT is one of many problem species of grass in the *Sporobolus* family, including Paramatta grass, giant Paramatta grass, American rat's tail grass and more than 100 species of native Australian *Sporobolus* grasses. These grasses grow into dense clumps, or 'tussocks', that are unpalatable to cattle and can quickly dominate pastoral land if not managed effectively. These weedy grass species are capable of spreading rapidly due to producing copious, highly viable seeds.

The workshops were funded by the Queensland Government and delivered in partnership with Farmacist, Mackay Regional Council and Whitsunday Regional Council and the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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