

MEDIA RELEASE

9 November 2006



New blackberry fungus: “fantastic”

A new biological control agent for European blackberry was released at two sites near Stanthorpe last Monday.

The new strains of the *Phragmidium violaceum* fungus were developed by CSIRO Entomology and the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management.

The effectiveness of the new strains will be tested nationally over three years.

The Stanthorpe Shire Council and a private wool producer near Stanthorpe are the first sites in Queensland to participate.

Scott Jamieson’s sheep property, ‘Karalea’, has struggled to control blackberry infestations, and he looked to his local Landcare group, and natural resource management group the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee, for help.

“The blackberry closes up areas of the property to the sheep, competes with pastures and native vegetation, and increases rabbit numbers because it’s such a good habitat for them,” he said.

“This time of year is when it starts to get away, too. But we’re busy with shearing and don’t always have the time to burn and spray it – the only other control measures available to us.”

“That’s why this release program is fantastic,” he said.

Granite-Borders Landcare Coordinator, Tamara Keogh, said that finding out about the CSIRO-run program couldn’t have come at a better time.

While not so widespread as in some areas of NSW or Victoria, she said that European blackberry is spreading and causing concern for locals.

“I was very excited when I heard about the CSIRO Entomology release program,” she said.

“When QMDC told me about it, I’d just recently had some landholders raise the issue of blackberry control, and straightaway knew who to suggest to be involved with the program.”

Blackberry currently infests 8.8 million hectares, nationally, and is one of Australia’s 20 ‘weeds of national significance’.

In Queensland, the weed is most problematic around the Toowoomba, Warwick and Stanthorpe regions.

CSIRO Entomology hopes to find additional release sites in these areas to test the effectiveness of the new fungus strains.

Dr Louise Morin, from CSIRO Entomology, said “These fungus strains can infect the whole range of blackberry biotypes in Australia.”

“Where the strains establish, they should reduce, but not eradicate, blackberry infestations. This biocontrol agent will thus complement existing control methods and will be particularly useful where other control methods are inappropriate or impractical,” she said.

For the Jamieson’s, and Stanthorpe Shire Council, there is interest in the outcomes of this program.

“If this fungus is effective, it could be of real benefit to some of the wool-producing country, and the abundant native vegetation around this area,” said Tamara.

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Caption: Scott Jamieson (front) releases the new blackberry fungus, with assistance from neighbour Andrew Ferrier, and local Landcare Coordinator Tamara Keogh.



Caption: *Phragmidium violaceum*