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## SA to benefit from additions to 'Worst Weeds' hit-list

South Australia will take the lead in developing innovative strategies to combat invasive plant species, following the Australian Weed Committee's announcement it will add 12 plants to the nation's 'worst weeds' hit-list.

Invasive plant species add around \$4 billion annually in costs to Australia's agricultural production and in SA weeds are estimated to cost agriculture more than \$650m.

Under the enlarged Weeds of National Significance (WoNS\*) hit-list, SA will spearhead efforts to combat Opuntoid cacti and Silverleaf nightshade, the latter a major problem in agricultural areas and in SA alone costs producers up to \$10 million a year.

Dr John Virtue, Manager of NRM Biosecurity with Biosecurity SA and the state's representative on the Australian Weeds Committee, welcomed the announcement to add 12 extra weeds to the WoNS list.

"South Australia will particularly benefit by hosting the national coordinators for Silverleaf nightshade and opuntoid cacti (such as Wheel cactus)," Dr Virtue said. "These roles will include developing national strategies, providing best practice control information, and national coordination of activities for these new WoNS.

"The Australian Weeds Committee's announcement will lead to better management in SA of several important weeds that have now become WoNS, including African boxthorn, brooms, asparagus weeds, Wheel cactus and Silverleaf nightshade.

"The South Australian Government has spent more than \$500 000 since 2008-2009 through the State NRM program on combating key WoNS infestations throughout SA.

"Through Biosecurity SA (a division of PIRSA) working with NRM boards, communities and landholders, local and regional management programs are containing and controlling these serious weed threats to farms, conservation areas and waterways.

"People might ask, 'why are you so worried, they're only weeds', but when you realise invasive plant species add around \$4 billion annually in costs to Australia's agricultural production – then you appreciate the threat they pose to farmers."

The original WoNS list of 20 weeds was created in 1999 and has grown to 32 with the latest additions.

\* WoNS are managed by a partnership of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments with a focus on preventing the establishment, spread and impacts of key national weed threats.

### **TWO WEEDS TWO MAJOR CHALLENGES**

*Opuntoid cacti* are a group of up to 30 species, including Wheel cactus, which in SA occurs in the Mid North and River Murray corridor and throughout 35 000 hectares of the Flinders Ranges.

Invasive cacti are drought resistant, hardy plants that can survive in low rainfall environments, with SA's Rangelands environments especially vulnerable to invasion. Invasive cacti threaten SA's environmental, agricultural and aesthetic values, besides posing a risk to animal welfare and human safety.

*Silverleaf nightshade* is a major problem in agricultural areas throughout temperate Australia, affecting both cropping and grazing enterprises. It's estimated to cost SA producers up to \$10 million a year in control costs and yield losses. Under the latest announcement, research into bio-control options and improved herbicide options will be high priorities for future weed investment.