



Speech by

**Hon. RUSSELL COOPER**

**MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST**

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Hansard 20 October 1998

#### **PARTHENIUM WEED**

**Hon. T. R. COOPER** (Crows Nest—NPA) (7.13 p.m.): I rise to speak about parthenium weed, which is spreading right throughout the central part of Queensland. It has spread already into New South Wales and other States. I spoke about this subject in this place in about March 1984, and the problem still exists. The way in which this weed has spread is incredible, as are the efforts that have been made through all sorts of measures—chemical and biological—to try to control it. I have recently returned from a trip to Charters Towers, Clermont and Emerald, where anyone can see that this weed has blossomed like nothing on earth.

I wish to acknowledge Scott Dearden and his wife from Rolleston in Queensland. Scott is the project officer for the Parthenium Action Group, which has provided me with good information. The work that they are doing must be acknowledged. I also acknowledge Councillor David Bridgman, who has put forward some ideas for controlling this weed. I am concerned that the funding which that particular group has received in the last three years from the national Landcare program has been cut. They received about \$73,000 over the past three years to fund the control of parthenium. That funding has been cut, and all funding now comes under the Natural Heritage Trust. Recently, when the project group applied for \$88,000, they were told that funding was not for weed eradication. In fact, it is for weed eradication; creeping lantana managed to get through. Parthenium weed does cross over into other States. Therefore, I am going to make an effort to ensure that the funding is distributed properly, because productivity right throughout that area has been cut dramatically.

India has recently made some comments about this issue. India has parthenium, which starts in the Himalayas and covers virtually the entire country. Today we have wheat export contracts with India totalling 2.325 million tonnes. So far we have shipped 1.3 million tonnes, with another shipment due after July. The Indians have said that they will not renege on the contract, but they will insist on new quarantine standards relating to weeds. An Indian delegation identified seven noxious weed species in Australian wheat shipments—one of which was parthenium, which grows from the snow line of the Himalayas to the southern tip of India. The alarm bells should be ringing when a country that has parthenium from one end to the other does not want to buy our wheat because of parthenium weed contamination. That is a worry.

Some of the methods of control need to be spelled out, because a lot of work has been done in this regard. Parthenium was first discovered around Toogoolawah in 1955 and again at Clermont in 1964. Since then, with a season like we have just had, it is controlling a massive area of the State. Some insects are being used to control the weed. Zygomma is a leaf defoliating beetle like a ladybird, except that it is cream and black. The epi-blemma is the stem-galling moth—a Mexican moth that was introduced in about 1983-84. The listronotus is a stem-boring weevil. The smicronyx is a weevil that lives in the seed. Carmenta is a new one. It is a wasp that ringbarks the root ball from the plant. That does sound like a very good and promising biological control. It is something to watch. Now that insects have plenty to operate on, I believe that they will be able to control that spread.

Members should not forget the prickly pear, which dominated Queensland and much of New South Wales from about 1840 through to the 1940s, when cactoblastis was introduced and became very successful. It is still successful today in clearing country of that particular weed problem. Puccinia Abrupta is a rust that appears in the winter. That is also very good in the right conditions. We have many types of control that we need to encourage.

I want to come back to the funding aspect. If a Federal Government—of whatever political persuasion—cuts off funding for Landcare projects such as this, every one of us has to make a massive effort to allow those people who are trying to control parthenium weed in Queensland to make every attempt possible, and to fund them properly. \$88,000 for this year is all those people have ever asked for. But that has been knocked back, and those people are unable to continue the work that they have been doing. Therefore, quite obviously, we do have serious problems. Parthenium also creates health problems, such as dermatitis and many other conditions that have been caused among primary producers in that area. Surely we can make people sit up and take notice. I acknowledge those people who have done that work in the past.

Time expired.

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