



Speech by

Hon. S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Weeds; Mother-of-Millions

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: Weeds cost Australia at least \$3.3 billion per year in lost production and control costs. Queensland leads the national effort to combat weeds, and my department undertakes extensive research into control mechanisms to eradicate weeds and protect our environment and rural productivity.

One of the state's worst weeds is mother-of-millions, an escaped ornamental plant from Madagascar, which is poisonous to stock and can occasionally cause a significant number of cattle deaths. It is an increasing problem across southern and central Queensland, and the worst affected area is the western Darling Downs, from Goondiwindi through to Chinchilla and Miles and north to Taroom. The weed is also a problem in pasture lands on the Central Highlands around Clermont, Emerald and Dingo, and in the Burnett and Moreton regions.

Because mother-of-millions is tolerant of semi-arid conditions, it could rapidly extend across most of Queensland. That is why my Department of Natural Resources is investing resources in discovering a biological control for mother-of-millions.

I am delighted to inform honourable members that the answer may lie in a tiny Madagascan weevil, *osphilia tenuipes*. A team headed by my department's principal entomologist, Dr Bill Palmer, is currently trialling the weevil at the Alan Fletcher Research Station in Brisbane. Preliminary results are very encouraging. However, I stress that they are preliminary. Dr Palmer reports the weevil has been 'devastating' in its attack on mother-of-millions in laboratory experiments and that plants have been killed before the next generation emerge from them. Laboratory trials will be completed by the end of the year and, if successful, Dr Palmer believes the weevil could be released into the field in Queensland by late spring or summer.

A number of other insects which might be suitable for the biological control of mother-of-millions have also been identified by entomologists based at my department's South African field station at Pretoria. These include a wasp, *eurytoma* sp, which bores out the plant's stems and leaves, and a leaf-feeding beetle whose larvae are internal root-feeders and whose adults feed on new growth and plantlets. These are encouraging results, and I congratulate Dr Palmer and his research team on their good work to date in trying to establish effective biological controls for mother-of-millions.

This research is a further indication of Queensland's leading role in the national fight against weeds. In fact, Queensland met the Commonwealth deadline of 31 May to submit applications for funding from the National Weed Program to combat Australia's 20 weeds of national significance. I look forward to the Commonwealth making these funds available as soon as possible so that we can start implementing new programs to attack weed species in Queensland.
