



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

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NOXIOUS WEEDS

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (11.59 a.m.): In rising to speak today, may I firstly say how truly honoured I feel to be part of this very historic and memorable occasion of the first ever sitting of the Queensland parliament outside of our capital city. It is very fitting that such an occasion be hosted in north Queensland for, while this part of the world is a long way from Brisbane, it plays an integral role in the economic and social development and wellbeing of the state. And might I place on record, Mr Speaker, my appreciation of the many school groups, community groups and individuals from my electorate of Whitsunday who have travelled a considerable distance to share in this historic week.

The issue I wish to bring to the House's attention today is one of significance for all Queenslanders, and indeed all Australians, as it deals with the matter of weed control. The average suburban gardener can testify to the difficulties inherent in the war that is waged on the not-so-humble weed in our everyday lives, but consider the proposition that Australia faces a battle against weeds that costs the community in excess of \$500 million each year and the true extent of the problem caused by weeds takes on a very different perspective. The true cost of losing the battle against noxious weeds is to surrender huge tracts of pasture and arable land and to threaten the existence of many of our vulnerable wildlife species.

This is a price that is, in my opinion, far too high to contemplate. Among the major weeds of concern in the Mackay-Whitsunday area are giant rat's tail grass and associated sporobolus species, sickle pod and milk weed. In addition, parthenium, which is prolific in areas west of the range, poses an increasing threat in coastal areas. But today I want to focus on a weed that has special significance in my electorate, mimosa pigra. The mimosa pigra plant is a native of tropical America where it occurs in a wide belt extending from Mexico to northern Argentina. The plant is a shrub form of what is commonly known as sensitive weed. In maturity, it forms impenetrable thickets four to six metres in height, rendering infested areas inaccessible to man and animals.

Mimosa pigra prefers damp areas along creek and river banks and swampy lands around dams and lakes. Over the years mimosa pigra has spread to many countries and was first detected in the Northern Territory in the late 1800s. While the plant has become endemic in large areas of the Northern Territory, the remainder of Australia has until recently been free from infestation. Imagine, then, the surprise and shock of local Department of Natural Resource officers when, in March last year, the mimosa pigra plant was discovered growing in land adjacent to the Peter Faust Dam near Proserpine. How the weed came to the area is still a mystery. Perhaps the seed was transported by birds, perhaps it was brought in by fishermen who had previously been in the Northern Territory, or perhaps the seed host was machinery that originated in the territory and was consequently used in the construction of the dam. The explanation of its origin was secondary to the stark fact that it was there, alive and thriving on the foreshore of a major water storage facility that was used by many people for fishing and other recreational purposes as well as being a major source of irrigation water for the district's major cash crop—sugar cane.

What followed the initial discovery and identification period is an excellent example of government and community working together to develop and implement a response plan. Officers from the Department of Natural Resources, the Whitsunday Shire Council and Sunwater in cooperation with the landowner, inspected the site of the infestation, gathered data relating to weed density and seed distribution, then set out to implement an eradication plan. In some areas this involved spraying the weed with metsulfuron, a herbicide that is not on the poisons schedule and is safe to use near waterways. In other places, the weed was growing in inaccessible, shrubby conditions and the only way to ensure thorough eradication was to bring in a bulldozer to dig the weed out and create windrows that could be sprayed and, if necessary, burned.

It appears that this initial response has been successful in eliminating most of the mature mimosa plants; however, the job is far from over. Mimosa seeds can lie dormant in the ground for five to seven years and so ongoing monitoring of the site will be necessary well into the future. There is also an important role for the community in detecting recurrent outbreaks of the plant, which is described as having a single prickly stem when young that then grows into a branched prickly bush up to six metres tall with stem prickles of between five and 10 millimetres long. The plant can also be recognised by its pink pompom-like flower and the fact that, like its smaller relatives, the leaves respond to touch by folding inward.

I offer my congratulations to all those involved in the eradication of mimosa pigra from the Peter Faust Dam. This incident serves as a reminder of two important things: the importance of public education on the topic of weeds to aid in the early identification of outbreaks; and the need for continued cooperation between government and communities in the battle to conquer other invasive weeds like rubber vine, milkweed and parthenium. It is a battle this state cannot afford to lose.