

Question on Notice

No. 61

Asked on 22 February 2023

MRS S BENNETT asked the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the shortage of the chemical Flupropanate in Australia—

Will the Minister advise whether the Queensland Government is aware of, or funding research into, biological controls or pathogens to combat Giant Rats' Tail Grass on Queensland farms?

ANSWER:

The Queensland Government supports local governments, industry and landholders who undertake giant rats tail grass (GRT) control activities. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) invests in invasive plant and animal regional services, research, planning and policy which all support stakeholders to deal with the impact of invasive plants such as GRT.

The Invasive Plants and Animals Research Group in Biosecurity Queensland, DAF, has recently published summaries of GRT research programs in its annual Technical Highlights 2021-22 report (the report). On 28 November 2022, copies of the report were distributed to partner local governments and other stakeholders throughout Queensland. On 30 November 2022, the report was also published on the DAF website at www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/biosecurity/invasive-plants-animals/research/highlights.

As outlined in the report, DAF supports continual improvement in GRT management with research. This research is detailed in the report from pages 38 – 45. Currently, research projects DAF agricultural scientists are undertaking include:

- GRT classic biological control
- Native and introduced pathogens of GRT
- Influence of soil type on flupropanate availability for managing GRT
- GRT wick wiper
- GRT management

The two current Biological Control projects, the GRT classic biological control project, and the native and the introduced pathogens of GRT project, aim to evaluate insects and pathogens for release on GRT in Queensland to help support its management. This process is regulated by the Australian Government.

The GRT classic biological control project is part of an AgriFutures research project under the Rural R&D for Profit Program. Under this project, two potential biological control agents for GRT have been identified as promising candidates to control weedy *Sporobolus* grasses such as GRT in Australia. Two species of stem feeding *Tetramesa* wasp have been found to be host specific to GRT in South Africa, after extensive host testing of grasses from the weed's country of origin.

DAF has continued this research and imported the wasps into the high security quarantine facility at the Ecosciences Precinct, Dutton Park. Researchers hope to commence host testing the wasps on Australian grass species this year. This research will likely take up to two years to complete.

The native and introduced pathogens biological control project for GRT is also funded as part of the AgriFutures research project under the Rural R&D for Profit Program. Under this project research will evaluate native endemic pathogens that may be able to be used to support the management of GRT. This research includes field experiments to determine the impact of the recently discovered GRT leaf smut, the development of rearing methods for the identified pathogens, conducting testing on the pathogen species, and progressing the release of at least one suitable native pathogen for the biological control of GRT. This project is coming to an end in March 2023 and a final report will follow.

The Queensland Government looks forward to continuing to work with industry, local governments and the community to help reduce the impact of GRT on Queensland farms.