

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 1777
Asked on Thursday, 13 November 2008

MR WENDT asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

QUESTION:

What initiatives have been taken by Biosecurity Queensland to reduce the risks of Pimelea poisoning (St George Disease) and avert widespread stock losses on the Western Downs?

ANSWER:

Pimelea poisoning (St George disease), and associated cattle mortality, is caused by *Pimelea*, a group of native annual plants that germinate and grow in response to cool weather rainfall in inland Queensland.

AgForce estimates that the cost of Pimelea poisoning averages more than \$50 million annually. This includes production losses, stock death and extra management work.

Biosecurity Queensland scientists are leading a Natural Heritage Trust funded research project focusing on developing a better understanding of the ecology of the plant, with an emphasis on ways to minimise the abundance and growth of Pimelea plants and methods to assess toxicity risk.

Scientists have established a new method to measure the toxins in Pimelea plants using 'state of the art' technology (known as Liquid Chromatograph-Mass Spectrometer or LCMS), so that the plant and toxin intake required to poison cattle may be defined for the first time.

The research team has also investigated the density of Pimelea plants required to cause poisoning and options for herbicide control. This research aims to identify the best management options for reducing or avoiding the Pimelea poisoning of cattle and the optimal timing of these interventions.

A best practice management guide, aimed at boosting long-term sustainability of grazing operations, is being developed incorporating this new research and previous studies.

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, through Biosecurity Queensland, is the major research partner in this collaborative research project managed by AgForce, with contributions from the New South Wales and South Australian Departments of Primary Industries, the University of Queensland Chemistry Department and a commercial beef partner, Australian Agricultural Company.

Producers as far afield as Marree, Broken Hill, Mitchell and Longreach have assisted in the running of field trials on toxin breakdown and seed dormancy on their properties. This support has greatly assisted the project team.

Biosecurity Queensland has the major role in the project because of its unique skills, facilities and knowledge in toxicology, chemistry and pasture agronomy.