QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 742

Asked on 13 June 2018

MR J MADDEN asked the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister outline some of the research projects that the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is involved in regarding pest weeds?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has an applied research program that aims to better manage Queensland's worst weeds and pest animals to reduce their impacts on agriculture, the environment and the community. This includes the development of effective control strategies and methods (e.g. biological control and herbicides), as well as improved knowledge of weed biology and assessment of weed impact.

A number of biocontrol agents, including insects and rust fungi, have now been released on parthenium, one of Queensland's worst weeds. Together, these agents have reduced the abundance and impact of parthenium across large areas of the State. Other notable successes include biocontrol of groundsel bush, Harrisia cactus, rubber vine and of course prickly pear.

Weed biocontrol can be a lengthy and expensive process, but the dividends are usually worthwhile. Two-thirds of released agents establish and, while the results are variable, there is an average benefit:cost ratio of 23:1. Globally, one third of all biological control programs are so successful that no other weed control is required. Around half are partially successful, requiring alternative, conventional control, but at a much reduced level than if there was no biological control.

Other research projects are supporting State or national eradication programs on numerous weeds, including red witchweed, miconia, mikania and limnocharis. Effective control options are being sought and ecological data collected that will help determine the frequency and duration of control activities. Similar work is continuing for former eradication targets Siam weed and Koster's curse. These weeds have major impacts overseas and so eradication from Australia will avoid future damage and control costs. Research is critical to detect and kill plants and seeds. Researchers in the Invasive Plants and Animals group have identified a treatment regime that could eradicate red witchweed in five years.