

## Question on Notice

No. 757

Asked on 15 June 2021

**MR C WHITING** ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)—

### QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise how the government is helping protect our native rainforest ecosystems and pasture and cropping land from weed incursions such as Koster's Curse?

### ANSWER:

A significant proportion of the tropical rainforests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area is highly susceptible to invasion by exotic weed species. For example, Koster's Curse (*Clidemia hirta*) is a fast growing weed of grazing, plantation, cropping and natural ecosystems in many countries. It has been spread around the world's tropics from its native range in Central and South America as a contaminant of imported goods.

It was first detected at Julatten in North Queensland in August 2001. It was managed as part of a national cost-share eradication program until more infestations were detected in 2015. Its eradication was determined by the National Management Group not to be technically feasible.

Fortunately, Queensland was prepared for that eventuality. Koster's Curse was approved as a target for biological control in Australia in 2014. The Queensland Government's biological control program is focusing on the introduction of the Clidemia thrips (*Liothrips urichi*).

That insect was released in many Pacific Island countries including Fiji, Solomon Islands, Hawaii, Palau and American Samoa and has been very effective. Its larvae attack the weed's growth tips causing dieback, effectively suppressing it in more sunny, open areas.

The insects recently arrived at the quarantine facility at the Ecosciences Precinct, Dutton Park, from a laboratory culture provided by the United States Department of Agriculture in Hawaii. Host specificity testing has begun to determine if its proposed release in Australia would be environmentally safe for Queensland's rainforest ecosystems.

The Australian Government also supports this research through the Rural Research and Development for Profit program with funding until 2022.