

WEED ALERT

WEEDS, ARE YOU THE PROBLEM?

Rod Randall

REGARDLESS of the supposed virtues of any plant be they medicinal, utility, pasture, crop or just plain nice to look at, the concept of 'weediness' still seems to elude most people. Commonly, a species can be one person's 'pride and joy' whilst being another's 'worst nightmare', the cause of many an internecine neighborhood battle.

Many people do not understand that what can be a devastating weed in one place is a non event in other parts of the world because it is chewed or chopped into submission by browsers or firewood collectors.

Amazingly there are many people who cannot appreciate that this is the case because of the vast differences in the flora and fauna between countries, bioregions, ecosystems, i.e:

BIODIVERSITY

These same people often believe that to introduce more and more species from differing climates and ecosystems will improve biodiversity! No thought at all is given to the consequences of a new species' introduction even though these same people will immediately recognise the potential damage that a new insect or pathogen may inflict if released into a new environment.

Why do people consider plants to be any different to diseases or insects? Plants introduced into the environment do interact with other species, they leave traces, make changes and slowly alter the original environment. All this unnoticed by most people until the new arrival has been around for some time and eventually becomes accepted, and sadly any changes made rarely noticed or appreciated.

Of course many species make no impact other than their rotting corpse, not competitive enough maybe or just the wrong



*Woody Weed says
"Don't spread weeds on your tyres".*

environment. Most introduced plants fail miserably without someone to look after them. The real problem here is of course, people.

Now we all understand diseases, and most people understand what a vector is: a disease carrier. Well, people are the very best plant vector locally, regionally and internationally.

No other class of organisms is transported around the world in such

variety and quantity as plants are. Millions of tonnes of bulbs and seeds every year comprising thousands of species are spread all over the planet, and so few people appreciate the enormous potential impacts of all this movement.

Mention 'foot and mouth' and you'll have millions of dollars thrown at you to eradicate it before you can finish the sentence. But say 'salvinia' and people look at you wondering what you're on about.

Its a quantum leap in peoples' mind to start considering weedy plant species in the same light as infectious pathogens but it has to happen or we will eventually end up with a global flora no more diverse than your favourite nursery.

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A tide of Gazanias moving out from Salmon Gums townsite.