



Media Release

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**Agriculture and Environment  
Committee**

Chair: Joe Kelly MP  
Deputy Chair: Pat Weir MP

## Parliamentary weeds inquiry coming to Gatton

A toxic weed quietly invading the state's best pasture land will be under the spotlight at a parliamentary inquiry in Gatton later this month.

Chair of the Queensland Parliament's Agriculture and Environment Committee and Member for Greenslopes, Joe Kelly, warns that weeds such as fireweed pose a major threat to the state's agriculture sector, as well as high-value environmental areas.

"Fireweed is one of three agricultural weeds we are looking at as case studies for our inquiry into the impact and control of invasive plants in Queensland," Mr Kelly said.

"It first came to Australia in 1918. It didn't spread much at first, but it's exploded in the last 30 years. You can find it right along the New South Wales coast, and up into the Lockyer Valley. If we can't control it, it's predicted to spread north as far as Rockhampton."

"Fireweed contains alkaloids that are quite toxic to cattle. That wouldn't be a problem, but if it's left to spread, fireweed can choke out grasses that cattle need to eat. It also affects sheep and goats, though not quite as badly. But whatever kind of livestock a property carries, a fireweed infestation can drastically reduce its capacity. Fireweed is difficult to spot until it flowers, and by that point it's very difficult to get rid of it."

At the public hearings the committee will hear about the effectiveness of control programs run by councils, NRM groups and Biosecurity Queensland, the agency charged with managing fireweed and other weeds in Queensland, including the development of bio-controls.

The committee will report its findings to the Queensland Parliament later this year. The committee's roundtable meeting and public hearings will be held on 4 May 2017, from 12:30 pm, at the University of Queensland's Gatton campus.

The committee has published an [information paper](#) for the inquiry.



**For media comment:** please contact the committee Chair, Joe Kelly MP on (07) 3414 2100

**For background information:** please contact the committee secretariat on (07) 3553 6662, via email at: [aec@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:aec@parliament.qld.gov.au) or visit the committee's webpage at: [www.parliament.qld.gov.au/aec](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/aec).

*The inquiry terms of reference and information on the three weeds for case studies follows:*

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## Terms of reference for the inquiry

The committee will investigate and report to Parliament on the impacts of invasive plants (weeds) and their control in Queensland, particularly whether:

- the responsibilities of local governments in relation to the control of prohibited, restricted and invasive plants imposed under s.48 of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* are reasonable, and local governments are meeting those obligations
- programs for the control of weeds on Crown land administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines are effective
- Biosecurity Queensland's weeds programs, including biological controls and new technologies, are adequately funded and effective at controlling weeds
- environmental programs administered by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection impact favourably on weed control programs administered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and local governments, and
- federal, state and local government weeds programs are coordinated to maximise their achievements and to have a whole of government approach.

## Case studies

**Prickly acacia** is regarded as one of the worst weeds in Australia because of its economic and environmental impacts and potential to spread. Originally introduced to Queensland from India as a shade and specimen tree, each medium-sized prickly acacia can produce as many as 175,000 seeds per year.

At present over 6.6 million hectares of arid and semi-arid areas of the state are infested. If left unchecked, prickly acacia could spread to vast areas of grasslands and woodlands throughout Australia.

**Giant rat's tail grass** arrived in Australia in contaminated grass seed. It is a tough, perennial grass that grows up to 1.7m tall with seed heads up to 45cm long and 3cm wide.

Rat's tail grasses can produce up to 85,000 seeds per square metre in a year. Seeds can remain viable for up to 10 years. When mature, giant rat's tail grass has tough leaves which make it unpalatable to stock. It quickly dominates native grasses.

**Fireweed** is a native of Madagascar and Southern Africa and may have started in Australia as a garden plant. It has yellow daisy-like flowers and grows to 50cm tall in ideal conditions.

Fireweed is an annual perennial, and toxic to livestock. It spreads quickly and competes strongly with pasture grasses. Each plant can produce over 10,000 seeds during the growing season.

Fact sheets for weeds in Queensland are available from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries website: [www.daf.qld.gov.au](http://www.daf.qld.gov.au)



Prickly acacia



Fireweed

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