

NEWSWEEK

New reality in SA Mallee

Broomrape 'containment' replaces eradication plan

KeyPoints

- Restrictions lifted
- Tolerance increased
- No market objections

By **MALCOLM SUTTON**

QUARANTINE zones for Branched Broomrape in the South Australian Mallee have been lifted.

The first year in a two-year transition from eradication to confinement of the parasitic weed has now passed, meaning all restrictions have been removed for the 2013-14 financial year.

The Branched Broomrape National Management Group decided in 2011 that it was no longer feasible to eliminate broomrape and the focus should instead be on containment.

State Agriculture Minister Gail Gago said it would now be up to farmers to manage the weed on a "property-by-property basis in line with market requirements".

"Put simply, farmers need to take their cues from the markets they supply, and the potential for the weed to become a production issue for the enterprises on their farm," she said.

"Branched broomrape is still the weed it has always been, with the same host list and potential to affect vegetable and other broadleaf crops."

Regional management will now be overseen by the South Australian Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board, which is "formulating its approach as part of the transition program".

Liberal member for Hammond Adrian Pederick said it had been a major policy

shift from the past when about \$45 million was spent by State and Federal governments to eradicate the weed, along with an estimated \$70m from primary producers.

He opposed axing the eradication program when it was

announced in 2011 and hopes that, in the long-term, moving to containment would prove to be the right approach.

"I was heartened after instigating a one-on-one meeting with Victorian Agriculture Minister Peter Walsh recently," Mr Pederick said.

"My biggest fear about it was that it could have locked out thousands of hectares in the

Mallee from being able to operate.

"But Mr Walsh had no issues whatsoever and obviously it is not an issue with domestic or overseas trading partners."

"Mind you, broomrape is a very fine seed. I would be surprised if it even survived a header. I reckon it would be blown out the back most of the time."

Grain Trade Australia has lifted its tolerance for broomrape tolerance from zero to two seeds in a 500-millilitre sample.

The final meeting of the Branched Broomrape Community Focus Group took place last week after meeting 75 times during the past decade to discuss and organise the eradication of the weed.

Biosecurity SA Branched Broomrape Program manager Phil Warren wound up his role yesterday, after 13 years at the helm of the group.

He says broomrape will now be addressed with other weeds

that farmers have to manage.

"There still may be a market reaction that we don't know

about now," Mr Warren said.

"But it should be okay. The issue will be if someone tries to introduce a new broadacre crop in the Mallee.

"They will be the ones at risk of productivity issues."

CFG member Geoff Bond said last week's meeting was a relaxed affair. Farmers had indicated the protocols they wanted put in place for the management plan.

"Industry has been the main driver of eradication because it was considered a threat to overseas markets," he said.

"Now local industries are happy with the new guidelines.

"Our grains are going through Glencore and being marketed all over the world and no one has objected.

• **Details: A new 60-page *Best Practice Manual Guide to Broomrape Control* is available through the SAMDBNRMB or the PIRSA website at www.pir.sa.gov.au**



Put simply, farmers need to take their cues from the markets they supply, and the potential for the weed to become a production issue for the enterprises on their farm

- GAIL GAGO



OUT OF TIME: Mannum farmer Geoff Bond says broomrape control will now be up to individual farming communities, as well as local natural resource management boards.