

Estimates B – 4 July 2007

Branched broomrape

Part of opening statement by Minister for Environment and Conservation the Hon Gail Gago

'As part of the branched broomrape eradication program, teams surveyed 193 000 hectares within the quarantine zone and an additional 148 000 hectares in the surrounding area. This represented the largest market assurance and discovery survey since the program began in 1999.'

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 12.67, 'Income statement—Controlled', and dot point 5, the branched broomrape eradication program. How has the government saved \$0.8 million on this program and how has it saved \$0.3 million more than was budgeted for in the September 2006 budget?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: Some 20 well-managed paddocks containing 1 040 hectares of known infestation have been free of branched broomrape for seven years. On reaching seven years of freedom from broomrape emergence, they attain provisional paddock status, allowing the freeing up of certain quarantine restrictions. They will be eligible for release from quarantine if they remain free for a further five years. The field works fumigation program was completed with a total of 339 hectares treated, despite drought conditions reducing the window of opportunity for effective control. Only 65 per cent of the planned Basamid fumigation treatment was completed because of the dry season. Some pine oil treatment was also able to be carried out. Surveys have identified that the infested area is 7 048 hectares within the broader quarantine zone. Research undertaken during 2006 that was financed using national and state funds has identified a growth model that will identify the optimum time for herbicide application based on the weed's life cycle, and that is a significant step forward.

In terms of the 2006-07 outcomes, survey teams completed the largest market assurance and discovery survey since the program began in 1999. The survey has covered the 193 000 hectares quarantine zone, as well 148 000 hectares surrounding the quarantine area. Landholders with infestations on their land continue to work with the program. Management plans were prepared for all infested paddocks. The dry season meant that it was difficult to undertake on-farm control measures, and these were less successful than desirable. However, the program used the conditions to develop herbicide control measures that are known to work under dry seasonal conditions. The program is providing \$57 000 towards financing a rural counsellor for the Murray Mallee through the Rural Financial Counselling Service of South Australia. The program has requested a carryover of \$320 000 from 2006-07. This can be largely attributed to drought conditions reducing the program's exposure to incentive payments for landholders to develop and then carry out management strategies for infested paddocks.

Mr PEDERICK: Will those savings be ploughed back into the program, or will they be taken as a budget saving overall?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: Those 2006-07 savings which were part of the savings initiatives determined for the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation for this particular program have been removed from the budget. Targeted savings are being made by re-allocating work within the existing seed destruction project in the branched broomrape program, thereby reducing reliance on alternative and more expensive fumigation techniques. This has been effected by modifying the fumigation program with the use of methyl bromide at \$20 000 a hectare, to be used strategically on critical and small sites, totalling 4 per cent of the seed destruction budget; replacing the relatively expensive pine oil at \$9 800 per hectare with the more cost-effective Basamid at \$2 200 per hectare on arable sites; and implementing better application technology.

Mr PEDERICK: On the same budget line, do you have an outline of what percentage of treated land has been treated with Basamid, Interceptor or methyl bromide which has allowed those savings to occur? How successful are these different methods of treatment on branched broomrape?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: I am able to answer at least some of the questions here today. The reliance on methyl bromide has been reduced to around one hectare treated; however, the fumigation program will be maintained and 344 hectares treated with the cheaper pine oil, and granular fumigants. The fieldworks fumigation program was completed with a total of 339 hectares treated despite, as I said, the drought conditions reducing the window of opportunity for effective control. Only 65 per cent of the planned Basamid fumigation treatment was completed because of the dry treatment. If there is any unanswered component I am happy to take that on notice and bring back a response.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, just the part about the success rate of the different methods.

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: That is right; I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr PEDERICK: On the same budget line, have there been any new outbreaks of branched broomrape, either in the recognised area or in other parts of South Australia, since the budget has been reduced? Has the minister met with the ministerial advisory committee since 21 February 2007 to discuss the reduced budget and the progress and future of the program?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: I have been advised that there have been no new outbreaks of branched broomrape since the budget was handed down. Was that your question?

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, but since the budget was reduced; since the new costings last year.

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: Simple savings have been removed so that my advice is no. The ministerial advisory committee has been re-formed and met for the first time on 21 May 2007. Mr John Berger has been appointed as the new chair of the community focus group. John is a former landowner from the Mallee and has chaired the local soil conservation board. He has also worked with the soil conservation council during the implementation of natural resources management reform. They know that I am available if required.

Mr PEDERICK: I think that was a community focus group you referred to then. Yes, John Berger, will do an excellent job as chairman of that group. Has the minister met with the ministerial advisory committee, which is the next committee up from that, since February?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: That was only re-formed on 21 May 2007 and I have not as yet met with that committee. But, again, I am available at any time if the chair needs to talk to me. I am always available.

Mr PEDERICK: Has the minister consulted with either the community focus group or the ministerial advisory committee about the general acceptability of the branched broomrape eradication program grant agreement, which is an integral part of the cost saving and, if so, when did the consultation occur? That is the grant agreement for the larger areas that need to sign a legal document.

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: I understand there was a review of the governance of the whole branched broomrape program and that extensive consultation did occur at that time—that was completed in early 2007. That included consultation with the community focus group and resulted in a range of recommendations, including the recommendation pertaining to the reform of the ministerial advisory group. They also recommended that the program continue to work closely with the community focus group to ensure that landholders are able to access grants which support control work as efficiently as possible. As part of this program, staff will be working to reduce the level of apprehension surrounding the recent introduction of grant agreements which require landholders to sign a formal agreement with the minister in order to access grants greater than \$5 000 in value.