

Weed or wonderful?

The *Enrich* project, currently evaluating nearly 70 Australian native shrubs for their forage potential, is putting the weed risk protocols into action.

FFI CRC project leader, Dr Dean Revell, explains that *Enrich* is a national project, currently with two field research sites: the main plant evaluation site at Monarto in South Australia (see *Focus on Salt #41*) and a second site to test animal grazing behaviour at Badgingarra in Western Australia.

Plants are being assessed against a range of criteria, including conventional growth performance, nutritive value of edible material, and 'bioactive' properties, such as their effects on ruminant microbes or intestinal parasites.

A short list of plants with the most desirable attributes will then be taken to multiple sites with varying rainfall and soil types.

"We will work with the Weed Risk Assessment Protocol to assess, monitor and manage weed risk," Dr Revell said.

Research scientist Dr Jason Emms (South Australian Research and Development Institute) explains that all the species investigated would go through the weed risk assessment protocol.

"It's all about levels of knowledge," Dr Emms said. "We don't know a lot about some of these species, so the first thing is to find out from the literature if it is a weed and draw upon other peoples' observations."

As an example, Dr Emms said *Acacia cyclops*



By Jill Griffiths
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Dr Dean Revell at work assessing the weed risk of native plants.

had been sent to him by a WA farmer who thought it may be of interest to *Enrich* as it was eaten by his stock. *A. cyclops* is indigenous to WA but a major weed in SA and South Africa. Dr Emms said the weed risk assessment would screen out a species such as *A. cyclops* for use in areas where it was a weed, but that it may still be useful in WA.

"At the other end of the scale old man saltbush, *Atriplex nummularia*, has a low weed risk. It doesn't regenerate well from seed, and is not easily dispersed. *A. cyclops* on the other hand seeds prolifically and is dispersed by birds."

Dr Revell said that although the weed risk assessment was in some ways another hoop to jump through, it was a necessary safeguard.

"There are plenty of examples of plants being released into the environment that have led to unforeseen problems. So we need to be proactive to minimise risks. The protocol is not just a safeguard for researchers, but also for farmers, and society in general," Dr Revell said. ⚡

➡ More information

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Encouraging prospects for saltland on the way

The latest addition to the Future Farm Industries CRC (and formerly the CRC Salinity) series of Prospects Statements, *Saltland Prospects*, is due for release in late 2007.

Until relatively recently salinity and waterlogging presented farmers with problems that often seemed too difficult or too costly to overcome.

Now many farmers across Australia are discovering that saltland, properly managed, opens new opportunities for profitable agriculture.

Saltland Prospects captures the existing knowledge base about saltland and uses it to outline the prospects for managing saltland across Australia.

Saltland Prospects follows *Integrated forestry on farmland* and *Lucerne Prospects* which were published in the past 12 months. Three other Prospects Statements will be published in 2007-08. ⚡

➡ More information

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