

Thursday 9th February, 2012

NIC Calls on State and Federal Government to Increase Weed Funding now to prevent an environmental catastrophe

The National Irrigators' Council (NIC) is calling on the State and Federal Governments to increase budgets now to fight the invasive weed menace which is being exacerbated by major floods and the two wettest years on record.

The NIC CEO, Tom Chesson said invasive weeds were a major issue in Australia and State and Federal Governments must be ready to fight new infestations when and where they occur following major flood events.

“Of particular concern is Water hyacinth which was spreading throughout the Gwydir wetlands.

“The Government has stated that ‘The greatest concern for this aquatic weed (Water Hyacinth) is that a flood could create a massive dispersion, with a significant risk of the weed spreading to the Murray-Darling system which would have massive environmental implications.’

“In the last three months the two major floods have not only damaged homes in Moree and properties in the Gwydir Valley, the Gwydir Wetlands which are usually a terminal wetlands have and will flow into the Barwon-Darling River system.

“There are now grave concerns that this insidious aquatic weed which to date has defeated all control measures will escape into the wider Murray-Darling river systems and create an environmental nightmare.

The NSW Department of Agriculture website states;

‘Water hyacinth is justifiably called the world’s worst aquatic weed due to its ability to rapidly cover whole waterways.

In Australia, it forms dense, impenetrable mats over the water surface. Specific impacts include:

- blocking irrigation channels and rivers
- restricting livestock access to water
- destroying natural wetlands
- eliminating native aquatic plants
- reducing infiltration of sunlight
- changing the temperature, pH and oxygen levels of water
- reducing gas exchange at the water surface
- increasing water loss through transpiration (greater than evaporation from an open water body)
- altering the habitats of aquatic organisms
- restricting recreational use of waterways
- reducing aesthetic values of waterways
- reducing water quality from decomposing plants
- destroying fences, roads and other infrastructure when large floating rafts become mobile during flood events, and

- destroying pastures and crops when large floating rafts settle over paddocks after flood events.

'Water hyacinth will rapidly take over an entire waterway. Under favourable conditions it can double its mass every 5 days, forming new plants on the ends of stolons. It also grows from seed which can remain viable for 20 years or longer. This enormous reproductive capacity causes annual reinfestation from seed and rapid coverage of previously treated areas, making ongoing control necessary.'

Mr Chesson said if Government's do not increase funding and surveillance for this and other weed threats in the Murray Darling Basin they would be guilty of allowing an environmental catastrophe to take unfold before our very eyes.

"A healthy working river system is about more than just adding water," Mr Chesson concluded.

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