



Policy

Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*)

Background

Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*) was introduced as a pasture grass around 1870 and distributed through most of its present South Australian range for this purpose. However, under some conditions it can become toxic, and was reported as a weed in irrigated horticultural situations. For these reasons it was declared a noxious weed for the whole State under the *Weeds Act, 1956*. It was proclaimed only for certain areas under the *Pest Plants Act, 1975* and the *Animal and Plant Control (Agricultural Protection and Other Purposes) Act, 1986* until reviewed by the former Animal and Plant Control Commission in 1990.

New growth of Johnson grass produces cyanide, which can build up to levels dangerous to stock in summer. It is a rhizomic perennial which grows rapidly in favourable conditions and forms dense persistent stands, but is restricted to habitats where water is abundant during the summer growing season.

Johnson grass is regarded as a major competitive weed of crops and pasture in warm, summer-rainfall climates overseas (Holm et al., 1977). In these regions, dispersal occurs by seeds, which are long-lived and can spread in contaminated crop seed, fodder or machinery and in flood waters (Ross, 1986). Therefore, some export markets prohibit imports of grain or fodder from regions known to be infested with Johnson grass.

Discussion

In this State, Johnson grass has proved to be limited as a weed to irrigation areas, apart from scattered occurrences restricted to urban situations or wet roadside microhabitats. This is illustrated by its continuing rarity on Eyre Peninsula (Carter & Cummins, 1988). It is not a weed of grain- or fodder-producing areas of the State.

Johnson grass does not fit the criteria for proclamation as it has already reached its limits in this State. Continuing control in irrigation areas is part of the general weed control practised by landowners in their own interests; there would be little value in initiating or continuing enforced control programs.

Co-ordinated Control Program

None proposed.

Declaration

Johnson grass is not declared, and no sections of the *Natural Resources Management Act, 2004*, apply to it.



References

- Carter, R.J. & Cummins, J.A. (1988) Distribution and Abundance of Proclaimed Plants Eyre Peninsula and West Coast, South Australia, 1985. Department of Agriculture South Australia Technical Report No. 132.
- Holm, L.G.; Plucknett, D.L.; Panco, J.V. & Herberger, J.P. (1977) The World's Worst Weeds: Distribution and Biology (University Press of Hawaii: Honolulu).
- Ross, M.A. (1986) Johnson grass: Two decades of progress in control. Crops and Soils Magazine 12-14.