



Policy

Oleander (*Nerium oleander*)

Background

History. Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) is an imported shrub that is grown as a garden plant throughout Australia. It is very hardy and is planted extensively in street and park areas and in civic areas such as schools.

Current distribution. Oleander has been noted as naturalised at Parachilna, Balcanoona, and Maralinga, in the arid zone of South Australia. In all cases the preferred habitat is coarse sand in ephemeral creeks. The plant seems to invade a largely empty niche, or in some cases, bulrush beds.

Potential distribution. Although the growth requirements for seedling oleander plants have not been investigated at this stage, it could be considered that oleander could establish in most creek systems of the arid zone and adjacent areas. Clearly, once established, oleander can survive in most areas of South Australia without care.

There appear to be no management practices that increase the weediness of oleander.

Problem. Oleander is not invading native vegetation, except in the case of some bulrush beds in Parachilna Creek. It is however, invading a largely empty niche, which may be important for stream-flow and deposition; or a potential site for desirable native species. Oleander is toxic, and if consumed, may cause death. At the sites where oleander has naturalised plants are available to stock and/or native herbivores, which may be vulnerable to the poison. The plant is also growing densely in permanent water holes, dropping its toxic flowers and leaves into the water. A landholder interviewed showed no concern, which may reflect poor understanding of the problem or may suggest that after years of living with the plant, he has not observed any problem.

The threat of an extremely toxic plant that is grown extensively throughout Australia is often considered as a reason to consider a destruction program. In an extensive review, Pearn (1987, p49) concluded that there was no valid reason why oleander "should not continue to bring delight to home gardeners". He noted that oleander is a classic example of a *potential* as opposed to a *realised* hazard; no child has died accidentally from oleander poisoning in Australia in the last three decades.

Control. Oleander control methods have not yet been explored. At the recommendation of insurance companies, some local government councils have commenced eradication programs from civic areas. From time to time media releases by health authorities highlight the toxic aspects of oleander and suggest that property owners consider control. We know of no formal district control programs.

Meeting the criteria

It is difficult to determine if oleander meets the former Animal and Plant Control Commission's criteria for proclamation as control costs have not been determined, and benefits are unclear.

The plant is well established as a garden plant throughout the state. The plant has serious adverse effect on the environment, particularly creek systems of the arid zone. Decisions about control of the plant are best left to individual landholders. Natural Resources Management authorities should be involved by way of extension programs.

Occurrences of naturalised oleander are being monitored by DWLBC staff, and this policy will be



reviewed from time to time.

Co-ordinated control program

The Commission will not administer a co-ordinated control program at this stage. Interested individuals or groups may wish to develop their own programs. The following is offered as a basis for program planning.

Aim.

- To maintain the integrity of native vegetation; and
- To raise awareness of the toxicity to prevent poisoning of people, stock and wildlife.

Program objective.

- To locate and eradicate naturalised infestations of oleander.
- To make efforts to reduce the seed source in areas vulnerable to invasion.
- To raise awareness of the toxic nature of oleander so that landholders can make informed decisions about replacing the shrub with more desirable species.

Implementation.

- Occurrences of naturalised oleander will be reported to the Animal and Plant Control Commission.
- A planned program of eradication in areas with naturalised plants funded by landholders, conservation groups, DENR or special grants.
- Gardens plants in vulnerable areas to have a stepped program established for replacement with desirable species, funded or supported by concerned groups.
- Civic replacement programs to be increased so that gardeners in all areas are prompted more often to remove oleander.
- Program of extension of the toxic principles to all people to be increased.

Priorities for NRM Authorities.

- Identify civic authorities, conservation groups, and health authorities, to suggest that a planned local program be developed.

Declaration

No sections of the Natural Resources Management Act apply to oleander.

References

Pearn, J. (1987) Oleander poisoning. In Covacevich, J., Davie, P., Pearn, J. (Eds) (1987) Toxic plants and animals - a guide for Australia. (Queensland Museum).