



MEDIA RELEASE

National Athel Pine Management Committee Meeting

Some of Australia's chief weed management practitioners will meet in Alice Springs next week to discuss Athel Pine, one of Australia's 20 weeds of national significance.

Chief among them will be Tasmanian-based National Weeds Management Facilitator John Thorp who said the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) was to be congratulated for trying to rid central Australia of Athel Pine.

"Northern Territory Government and Landcare with the support of the Australian Government and the National Heritage Trust have gone a long way towards eradicating Athel Pine from along the Finke River west of Alice Springs," Mr Thorp said.

"Where Athel Pine was uncontrolled in about 600km of the river some 15 or so years ago, it has now been reduced to about the last 200km.

"But this of course does not mean the battle against this weed is over and much of next week's National Athel Pine Management Committee meeting is to reinforce the need to continue efforts in the fight against it.

"The meeting will also focus on matters such as the status of the National Athel Pine Strategy and the appointment of a National Coordinator for Athel Pine Management across Australia."

As part of the three-day meeting that begins Monday, the group will travel to Horseshoe Bend on the Finke River to review the Athel Pine control management program.

Athel Pine is a drought tolerant tree which invades riparian zones and has a high level of water uptake. It can take over areas displacing native trees and shrubs that are the major food source for native animals.

Its leaves also excrete salt which affects the soil surface, raising the salinity and killing plants and impacting on the overall environment.

Athel Pine national coordinator and NRETA regional manager Neil Phillips said native birds such as parrots and honeyeaters had returned to areas once dominated by Athel Pine along the Finke River as the weed had been replaced by native shrubs and River Red Gums.

"While there is little documented proof of the amount of fauna that has returned to these areas there is strong anecdotal evidence this is happening and improving," Mr Phillips said.

"And as birds spread the seeds and pollinate native plants this works to rehabilitate the previously infested areas improving the availability of food sources for other native fauna."

Weed species such as Athel Pine cost the Australian economy about \$4 billion each year on herbicides, production loss and other eradication programs.

Ends

Media Note _ For more information contact Neil Phillips on 8951 9259 or John Thorp on 0419 323 400

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