



MEDIA RELEASE

East Timorese Delegates Learn More About Weeds

Two East Timorese delegates, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), arrived in Darwin on Monday to learn more about various weeds and measures used to control them.

The two week visit, organised by the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) and Charles Darwin University (CDU), includes a tour of the Weed Biological Control facilities at Berrimah Research Farm and several trips to some Top End sites during the next fortnight.

The people visiting are Mr Alao Alvares from the East Timor Ministry of Agriculture, Plant Protection Branch and Mrs Donata de Araujo from the National University of East Timor, Agriculture Faculty.

Mr Acacio da Costa Guterres, also from the National University of East Timor, has received an ACIAR scholarship to research controlling Bellyache Bush with staff from CDU and assistance from NRETA staff.

Bellyache Bush is a serious pest in East Timor and in the Top End.

NRETA biocontrol officer Bert Lukitsch said this month's planned indoor and outdoor sessions would not only focus on Bellyache Bush but other noxious weeds such as Sida and biocontrol measures used to prevent their spread.

"During their time here, the East Timorese will learn various aspects of weed biocontrol, such as how certain insects we call biocontrol agents need to be reared, how they behave and during which point in their life cycle they are most robust," Mr Lukitsch said.

"It is hoped that as capacity is built to learn and understand more about biocontrol agents, the East Timorese will be able to apply for permits to import the sida beetle (*Calligrapha*) or the bellyache bush jewel bug (*Agonosoma*) as both Bellyache Bush and Sida are common in East Timor with widespread negative impacts on their agriculture industry."

CDU horticulture lecturer Tania Paul said a major invasive weed toxic to livestock called *Chromolaena odorata*, also known as Siam Weed, is the focus of the project in East Timor and staff from NRETA are scheduled to visit East Timor later this year to see the serious impacts of Siam Weed on agriculture and to learn about the weed.

Gallfly, a biocontrol agent used in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, is being used to combat *Chromolaena odorata* in East Timor.

"While *Chromolaena odorata* is not found in the Territory, it is found in north Queensland and East Timor and it would be impossible to guarantee it would never find its way to the NT," Ms Paul said.

"This trip not only enables the East Timorese to learn more about our weeds control practices but to also prevent the spread of weeds within and beyond that country's borders.

“The East Timorese don’t have the facilities we do by way of laboratories so they need to manage biocontrol agents differently to us.”

Mr Lukitsch and Ms Paul said the current component of the ACIAR project had a strong spirit of co-operation between NRETA, CDU, National University of East Timor and East Timor Ministry of Agriculture.

The current two week trip is part of a \$327,384 three year ACIAR project called the Biological Control of Two Major Weeds Affecting Crop and Livestock Production in East Timor.

Ends

Media Note – For more information contact Bert Lukitsch on 8999 2380 or Tania Paul on 0438 617 600.

Visual opportunities are available today or Friday at the Berrimah Research Farm at the end of Strath Road, Berrimah, should the supplied photos not be suitable.

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