



NORTH EAST  
CATCHMENT  
MANAGEMENT  
AUTHORITY

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**10 April 2006**

### **Kiewa willows stripped by Sawfly**

An insect from the Northern Hemisphere is attacking willows along the Kiewa River in Victoria's North East.

Willow sawfly (*nematus oligospilus*) is a leaf-feeding insect that was first recorded in Australia in 2003.

The North East Catchment Management Authority and Department of Primary Industry (DPI) this week confirmed the outbreak of Willow sawfly in the Region.

The CMA and DPI collected insect samples and sent them to Keith Turnbull Research Institute for identification and testing in response to concerns raised by local landholders.

"People reported that something strange was happening to the Crack Willows along the Kiewa," said Veronica Lanigan, Manager of Water Programs at the North East CMA.

" Many willows between Kergunyah and Kiewa townships on the Kiewa River had lost their leaves and some people thought they may have been poisoned. We now know that the Willow Sawfly is responsible for the damage."

Willow sawfly feeds exclusively on *Salix* willow species (including Crack willow, Weeping willow Pencil willow and Golden willow), generally defoliating the trees in Spring and Summer. It is widely distributed in the Northern Hemisphere and in the last decade it has also been found in South Africa, South America and New Zealand. It is not known how it reached Australia.

The insect is well established in the ACT and surrounding areas and has been reported along the south coast of NSW, the Adelaide Hills and in Keilor, near Melbourne.

Ms Lanigan said the potential severity and the dynamics of sawfly outbreaks in Australia are as yet largely unknown.

" The Sawfly can be both a blessing and a curse. Some willows are noxious weeds so damage to these species will actually support the hard work of Landcare, local government and landholders who are trying to control and destroy willow infestations. Sometimes though, willows are the only tree along river banks and, if they are attacked by the sawfly, there is a loss of shade. This leads to an increase in river water temperature that can in turn impact on water quality and fish populations. "

The North East CMA will continue to gather scientific research about the Willow Sawfly before determining the most effective long-term strategy for its control.

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“ The Sawfly is very new to Australia so it’s difficult to know how it will impact on the North East, “ concluded Ms Lanigan.

“ If people are concerned about its control, we suggest they contact the Victorian Department of Primary Industry’s Chemical Information Service - ph. 03 9210 9379 - to find out what chemicals are registered for 'sawflies' in Victoria. “

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**Photo opportunities:**

File images of the Willow Sawfly are available for press/websites.

For further details or to arrange an interview please contact

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**(02) 6043 7600**

**The North East CMA region – key facts:**

- covers approximately 1.9 million hectares of North East Victoria;
- contributes an estimated \$3.24 billion to the National economy each year;
- supplies 38% of total water to the Murray Darling Basin;
- key industries include agriculture, forests, tourism and valued added processing;
- more than 55 per cent consists of public land.