

## MEDIA RELEASE

14 February 2007



### Sawfly stripping North East willows

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

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

It feeds exclusively on willows, 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 North East Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and Department of Primary Industry (DPI) this week confirmed widespread outbreaks of the insect in the North East.

Sawfly populations and tree damage is greatest in the Kiewa Valley with outbreaks confirmed around Kergunyah, near the CMA's Kiewa depot and in the Dederang area.

Populations have also been found between Leneva and Leneva West, at Beechworth Camping ground, Happy Valley Creek near the Ovens River, Tea Garden Creek at Everton, near the King River, near the Edi Cutting camping ground on the Wangaratta - Whitfield Road and along the King River at Cheshunt.

According to North East CMA Chief Executive, Mr John Riddiford, the cause of the outbreak and the interaction between Sawfly impacts and drought are extremely unclear.

"The potential severity and the dynamics of sawfly outbreaks in Australia are as yet largely unknown. DPI has a monitoring site at Kergunyah through which it is carefully checking what is happening this season. We need to understand the dynamics of Sawfly and the willows response in order to have any ability to predict the likelihood of tree death or ill-health and the consequences of Sawfly for willow management."

The insect is more widespread than expected. Infestations have been confirmed in the ACT and surrounding areas, along the south coast of NSW, the Adelaide Hills, northern Tasmania and in Keilor, near Melbourne.

Mr Riddiford will be asking the researchers to investigate the possibility of how the sawfly came here from New Zealand. Some possibilities include by wing (although against the prevailing winds) or infected planting stock that was imported from New Zealand.

Mr Riddiford concluded that the outbreaks could 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 eradicate willow infestations where they are causing localised erosion and river health problems. Sometimes though, willows are the only tree along river banks and if they are attacked by the sawfly there is a loss of shade."

The North East CMA's willow management policy recognises there are some sites where the complete eradication of willow is warranted, and some willow species (eg weeping willow) have little or no known adverse impact. Native vegetation is preferred over willows for biodiversity attainment and erosion control.

#### ENDS

**Photos/interviews:** File pics of the Willow Sawfly are available for press/websites. For further details, please contact: Mary-Anne Scully, CMA Media and Communications Consultant. Tel: **0408 685 225**

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## **Extract from Victorian Department of Primary Industries report**

Willow Sawfly (*Nematus oligospilus*) in Victoria  
Status Report, July 2006

Outlook for Victoria:

It is highly likely that willow sawfly will continue to spread across Victoria over the next two to three seasons, and be present in all areas with significant willow populations within three seasons.

If environmental conditions are favourable to the development of willow sawfly populations, defoliation of willow trees is likely. Warm, dry spring conditions seem to favour population increases, and if defoliation events occur in November or December, then several defoliation events are likely to occur throughout a season in situations where trees produce new leaves after each defoliation.

If defoliation events are frequent and serious, there is a high likelihood of tree deaths amongst susceptible willow taxa.

Tree deaths will occur more rapidly if trees suffer several defoliation events in one season, but trees may still die if they are unable to replace defoliated leaves until the following spring and remain bare for a significant portion of the season, if this pattern of defoliation occurs for several years.

However, it is not known whether or not sawfly population numbers will develop to potentially damaging levels in all areas or every season. The factors that influence population development are not fully understood, and factors such as temperature and predation by other insects may limit sawfly numbers. It is possible that in the medium to long term willow sawfly will have only a minor effect on willows and will not require a change in current willow management programs.

There are many variables that affect willow sawfly and its interaction with willow trees that are currently poorly understood and so it is not possible at this stage to determine the most likely outcome of the impact of willow sawfly on willows in the Victorian context.

### **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.