

# MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **Humble beetle gives Tassie Farmers \$19m boost**

A humble beetle is one of the major keys to controlling Tasmania's growing weed problem which is costing farmers \$58 million a year in lost production, a 20 year research program has found.

The results of the study, a joint effort between the CRC for Australian Weed management and Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research, has implications for all farmers as it details another successful use of biological methods to help control the national weed problem.

One of the report's authors, Dr John Ireson, said use of the ragwort flea beetle (*Longitarsus flavicornis*) had reduced ragwort infestations by up to 95 per cent in some pastures across Tasmania, particularly when used in conjunction with an integrated control strategy using wick wiped or spot sprayed herbicides, sheep grazing or cutting.

Dr Ireson said over the past decade, ongoing research and the use of biological methods had contributed greatly to the decline of ragwort as a major Tasmanian pasture weed.

This had led to an estimated increase in production benefits of \$19.2 million for Tasmanian beef and dairy farmers between 1985 and 2005, while helping to offset the \$1.2 million a year spent on herbicides to control the range of weeds that affect these industries.

Dr Ireson said effective weed control affected the whole community, not just farmers, as weeds spread across public land, impacted on human and animal health, water resources, were a fire hazard, provided vermin shelter, and acted as hosts for pests and diseases.

He said while biological methods are being effective in controlling ragwort in Tasmania, ongoing research was continuing into the control of other serious agricultural weeds, including spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* agg), horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) and Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*).

Gorse, in particular, was one of Tasmania's most significant agricultural weeds and one of twenty 'Weeds of National Significance'.

Dr Ireson said biological control research on gorse, funded as part of the Federal Government's 'Defeating the Weeds Menace Programme' was a current priority.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION/INTERVIEWS**

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