



MEDIA RELEASE

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Dog sniffing out Alligator Weed

A detection dog and his handler were sniffing around at Barren Box Storage and Wetland last week to find patches of the pesky Alligator weed, which can choke up local waterways.

English Springer Spaniel, Connor, was trained by veteran dog trainer Steven Austin, and his handler Ryan Tate explained he could detect four types of noxious weeds: Alligator and three varieties of Hawk Weed.

“As far as I am aware, Connor is the only dog in the world trained to detect Alligator Weed,” said Mr Tate.

“Training a dog to detect the Alligator in the training yard isn't the hardest part, its doing it in all the field environments.”

“For those concerned about the dogs' safety, Connor is also trained to avoid snakes,” he added.

A GPS tracking device is placed on Connor before he goes to work detecting Alligator Weed, with the dog clocking up around 28 kilometres in a day.

“He is not the type of dog content with playing fetch in the backyard,” Mr Tate explained.

“They live for the hunt. Even though he is only hunting a plant he is using his nose to hunt out something.”

New South Wales Department of Primary Industries estimates the potential cost of Alligator weed to irrigation farming in the MIA from the Barren Box Swamp infestation to be \$250 million a year if it was uncontrolled.

Alligator Weed was a huge problem in Barren Box in the 1990's, but it is now kept under control by Murrumbidgee Irrigation (MI) Vegetation Control Officers.

MI Vegetation Team Leader, Jeff Shaw, said it was impressive to see what the detection dog could do, especially in relation to getting into places where humans couldn't, from a work safety perspective.

“Alligator weed is extremely difficult to control once established but eradication is possible when infestations are detected early,” he explained.

“Using Connor would certainly assist us to detect Alligator weed in hard to get at places, and he can also swim to track it down.

“We will definitely be looking at the possibility of using Connor in the future.”

Mr Tate pointed out that Australia is currently on the frontline of conservation detection dogs.

“We are also having dogs finding endangered turtles, koalas, and there has been one just deployed in Western Australia finding leaking water pipes underground,” he said.

Photo: English Springer Spaniel, Connor, and his handler Ryan Tate on the hunt for Alligator weed at Barren Box last week

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