

Damn the torpedos!

Recently some misinformation appeared in very visible publications that could be symptomatic of a polarization developing within the exotic plant management community. This worries us. One of these statements, in an attempt to justify (or explain) the need for biological control of melaleuca, seemed to minimize the value of herbicidal or mechanical control and belie the successes that have been realized using these methods. At about the same time an article appeared in a pro-pesticide newsletter that implied that chemical control was preferable to biological control because chemical control had never caused a species to become extinct. The clear and erroneous implication was that biological control had, in fact, caused species extinctions. Another example was in the prestigious international news magazine "The Economist" in an article about waterhyacinth in Africa. The author indicated that waterhyacinth weevils introduced into Florida began to destroy other plants, eventually destroying lawns and be-

came so abundant that they caused "an unpleasant crunchiness underfoot." This was blatantly untrue. None of these authors were personally knowledgeable about the informa-

tion they provided, and probably shouldn't be faulted for it. What is disturbing, though, is that each probably acquired this information from an expert, probably one of us, who skewed it in a self-serving way to influence public opinion.

Let's face it, we are united in a common purpose - namely, the management of invasive plants. Biological control research is not predicated on the

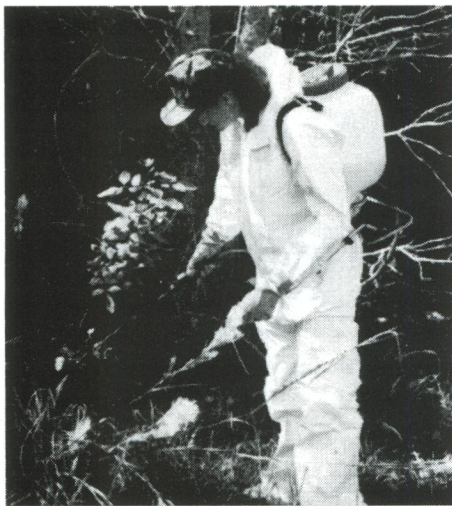
failure of herbicides. Likewise, the need for herbicidal methods won't vanish if we find effective biological control. We need both approaches because we want maximum results. Both methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Integrated control programs strive to supplement the weaknesses of one approach with the strengths of the other. The ability of biological control to alter the biology of the weed

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and the quick, highly targetable effects of herbicides ought to make for an ideal combination in an integrated program. Rather than comparing the merits of one over the other, we ought to be thinking about how best to use them together.

When we first became involved with EPPC, we were very impressed with its nobility of purpose. EPPC's orientation was toward solving exotic plant problems, and all approaches and ideas were equally valid. The individuals involved weren't trying to protect turf or zealously defend one particular control approach - they were mission-oriented biologists who understood the complexities involved in management programs. They wanted to control weeds, not bicker over trivial issues. We both found this refreshing. As a result, we were eager to become more involved with EPPC. Let's preserve this constructive attitude and support one another's efforts. If we try to enhance our own programs by tearing down other programs or by providing the media with biased, unfair information, we'll all lose in the end. The penalty will be the further degradation of our natural areas. As Benjamin Franklin once said, "We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

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