

When Native Plants Become Weeds

There is an increasing dilemma amongst bush regenerators on how to treat some native plants that have become self-introduced to K'gari. FIDO Backgrounder Number 86 by John Sinclair (April 2018) summarizes an emerging problem resulting from species native to northern Australia. What may be K'gari weeds now may not necessarily be considered weeds in the future as a result of climate change. Questions arise of determining what plants should be treated as weeds now.

Some weeds natives to North Queensland such as Umbrella Trees (*Schefflera actinophylla*) were identified very early on as invasive weeds in South East Queensland and on K'gari. In one of FIDO's earliest weeding operations in 2002 with a team of Greening Australia volunteers, FIDO ripped out hundreds of Umbrella trees in the core area of Happy Valley. They were so obviously out of place and such evident invaders. Fortunately it was a move just in time but there were some escapees into the bush and we are still dealing with some of these.



These 2002 FIDO Weedbusters removed hundreds of umbrella trees from Happy Valley

There was no hesitation about dealing with the Umbrella trees but since then a number of other plants native to North Queensland have become naturalized in South East Queensland and aren't so easy to define. A debate rages about the place of Coconuts on K'gari. So far they are accepted in urban areas as ornamentals but in the National Park they are weeds.

Beach Almonds: During the FINIA Face to Face meeting on K'gari in February we were confronted by Beach Almonds (*Terminalia catappa*) growing on the edge of Happy Valley that some of us are inclined to consider to be weeds but they are native to areas of Northern Queensland. The Atlas of Living Australia shows Beach Almond records for Gladstone and an island in the Capricorn Group but no further south. It isn't listed in the Wildnet. The Beach Almond is a large tropical tree that grows mainly in the tropical regions of Asia, Africa, and Australia. It is widely grown in tropical regions of the world as an ornamental tree, grown for the deep shade its large leaves provide. It is now found in Happy Valley and Eurong as well as at the Lake McKenzie picnic area. A determination needs to be made as to whether to treat this as a weed or as

a self-introduced native.

A new Nature: The answer to that question isn't made easier by the recent identification of *Thespesia populnea* that was obviously self introduced at the entrance to Eurong's Residential Valley. This species and other tropical-subtropical plants are likely to continue spreading southwards as a result of climate change. Some tropical and sub-tropical trees including *Calophyllum inophyllum* that occur to the north as grander specimens, peter out on K'gari. As K'gari becomes more tropical they may shape up more like their northern cousins. It can be anticipated that climate change will change K'gari's ecology and a number of species that we now treat as weeds may be part of the ecology in a warmer regime.

White Cedar: White Cedar (*Melia azedarach*) is now very well established in and around Eurong yet it doesn't appear on the Wildnet list for the island nor does it appear in the Atlas of Living Australia. It is FIDO's belief that although this tree is native to Australia, it was only introduced to K'gari and Eurong as a part of the landscaping of the Eurong Resort. One large parent tree can be identified growing in the protection of the Korawinga Units.

White Cedars have now begun to aggressively spread around parts of Eurong and are beginning to head bush. So far all are within a few hundred metres of the parent tree. Unlike Umbrella Trees that came from the north far from K'gari, White Cedars occur naturally on the adjacent mainland and are common in many dry rainforest areas. This caused FIDO to seek more information about White Cedars.

So far we have learnt that White Cedar has become a serious problem in parts of the Northern Territory (outside of its natural range) and Western Australia in particular. Problems aren't limited to Australia. Seeds are spread by birds principally cockatoos. After being introduced as an ornamental to some southern United States in the 1830s, it has become naturalized to tropical and warm temperate regions and is today considered as an invasive species as far north as Virginia and Oklahoma. While the seeds are toxic to animals, many birds are able to eat them, which have helped the plant become the weed it has in some areas.

FIDO is planning a White Cedar eradication program in Eurong that should begin sooner than later to prevent the spread of White Cedars into the bush where they are out of place.