

SESSION 2

DISCUSSION.

There was general agreement that the control of weeds was basically an agronomic and ecological problem. Although they have had remarkable effect, the use of chemicals was only a temporary expedient. Sound land use was essential, though it might be assisted by cultural, mechanical, chemical and biological control methods. There was also agreement with Dr. Callaghan's contention that effective legislation was required to assist in weed control. The discussion made it apparent that in most States weeds were not declared noxious unless they had become a threat to agricultural land or in themselves possessed undesirable characteristics. In some States the control of weeds was in the hands of several governmental authorities in addition to the Department of Agriculture.

The statement by Mr. Moore that roadside weeds, which merely colonized bare areas, were relatively unimportant was questioned. It was stated that such areas could be a source of infestation in agricultural areas. In reply it was pointed out that every problem had to be treated on its own merits, but that in general it was of little value to kill pioneer plants in such situations since re-invasion would occur, either by the original or some other species.

The speaker maintained that notwithstanding the example of biological control of prickly pear in almost pure stands, biological control was most likely to be effective in a mixed community where competing plants could assist in the eradication of the weed and occupy the area.

In reply to a question whether prickly pear was now completely eradicated, Mr. Dodd said that while the pear had been controlled over 60 million acres, there were still plants scattered throughout Queensland. Cactoblastis gave complete control but not eradication, and there was now a balance between the cactus and the insect.

The use of chemical poisons against prickly pear was not generally recommended. In certain areas of low rainfall, and in others of high altitude, cactoblastis did not do very well, but at the same time these areas were in fact not suitable for the spread of pear.

A representative from each State outlined the major weed problems as well as the research in progress in their respective States.

It was agreed that detailed knowledge of life histories of individual weeds and of the principles of their ecology was necessary for a complete understanding of the problem; little knowledge of this kind existed, however, and departments did not have the staff to carry out this basic work.

Some delegates considered that part of the purpose of weeds conferences should be to make recommendations regarding weed control treatments, e.g. spraying quantities, cultural treatments etc. It was generally felt that this conference could not achieve this result.