



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 9 March 2011

Experts look for way forward on myrtle rust

Australia's leading plant and fungal scientists will join industry and government agencies at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra tomorrow to explore options for managing the outbreak of the South American fungal disease, myrtle rust.

Gardens Executive director Judy West said the 40-strong workshop would focus on the threat to botanic gardens and bushland.

"Myrtle rust is a serious fungal disease that affects Australian native plants such as bottle brush, tea tree, eucalypts and other members of the *Myrtaceae* family," Dr West said.

"Since it first emerged in a central NSW plant nursery last April, it has spread to the north and south of the state and up to Queensland.

"At the Australian National Botanic Gardens, we have a huge investment in the 65,000 plants that we have growing. It's the only place in the world where you can see this diversity of Australian native plants in one location and it's a great scientific research centre — so it is critical that we protect this collection.

"We also have a broader conservation interest in how we might manage this exotic disease in the Australian bush — in our national parks and reserves."

Dr West said the workshop was bringing horticulture and agriculture experts together with Australia's botanic gardens to update what we know about the disease in the Australian environment.

"We'll especially be looking at what we still need to learn so that we can determine research priorities," Dr West said.

"We'll be looking at options for managing the fungus, as no-one in the world has been able to eradicate it. That means we need to contain its spread through education, handling guidelines and strict hygiene protocols."

The workshop is a part of an ongoing collaboration between the federal, local and state governments and industry to minimise the threat of myrtle rust.

Media opportunities, Thursday 10 March:

12 noon: Crosbie Morrison Building, Australian National Botanic Gardens
Opportunity to shoot overlay of workshop.

12.10 pm The following workshop speakers will be available for interview:

- Dr Judy West AO — Executive Director, Australian National Botanic Gardens and one of Australia's leading botanical scientists.
- Kevin Cooper — leader of the Emergency Response Unit, Industry & Investment NSW - a national perspective on the distribution of myrtle rust
- Dr Jeremy Burdon — Chief, CSIRO Plant Industry, an evolutionary biologist with a particular interest in plant-microbe interactions.

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