Darwin and Palmerston residents will be asked to take part in the National Grapevine Leaf Rust Eradication Program next month, Primary Industry Minister Dr Chris Burns said today.

Dr Burns said residents would be asked permission by Commonwealth Grapevine Leaf Rust inspectors to enter their property after the disease was discovered in Darwin and Palmerston in July 2001.

"Grapevine Leaf Rust is found in Asia, including Indonesia and East Timor. It’s not harmful to humans or animals if consumed, but in wet weather, such as our tropical climate, causes vine leaves to yellow and form a rust coloured film," Dr Burns said.

Seven inspectors will be employed as part of the Commonwealth eradication scheme to look for vines at every home in Darwin and Palmerston and selected rural properties considered at risk of the infection. Surveys and monitoring have been conducted since the disease was discovered.

"Inspectors will ask permission to enter a property to look for vines. Diseased plants will need to be destroyed and I ask everyone to co-operate so we can eliminate this plant disease.

"I understand many Territorians grow grapevines and the issue will be treated with sensitivity. Permission will be sought before any non-diseased plants are removed."

A Community Advisory Group will be established for consultation and a public awareness campaign will begin soon. The program is expected to continue until June 2006.

"The Australian grape and wine industry is valued at $3.6 billion a year. Grapevine Leaf Rust, while not damaging to health, reduces vine productivity and could be costly to control if the disease spreads.

"The Territory’s grape industry is still young but there is great potential for future growth and employment opportunities – it’s therefore very important that we participate in this Commonwealth program to protect not only the national industry but also our local developing industry."

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