

Inside this issue

- Community Pest Management Groups: Trialling a new approach to invasive plant management
- The effects of flupropanate on non target species
- Slasher cover trials to minimise weed spread
- Isolated infestations targeted for eradication
- Don't delay put a mattock in your boot today
- A moving story
- Port Phillip isolated infestations program
- Correctly identifying serrated tussock
- Funding available

Community Pest Management Groups: Trialling a new approach to invasive plant management



Community Pest Management Group

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) may be trialling a new approach to the management of its species in a targeted community.

The VSTWP is currently planning a project in the Corangamite Catchment near Cressy focused on community education and awareness. Traditionally, the VSTWP has focused on using the

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to deliver its service; however, the new project will place a greater emphasis on promoting a community-led approach.

Jim Seager, the Chair of the VSTWP said the project will look at using education and extension through community networks and a facilitator approach, rather than focusing on DPI delivering the services.

"We feel that using these mechanisms will result in longer-term outcomes for community in managing serrated tussock," Mr Seager said.

"To protect the investment of compliant landholders, the VSTWP will still be able to refer any recalcitrant landholders to DPI for compliance."

The targeted area of Cressy in the Corangamite Catchment has been selected because it is situated on the fringe of the core infestation where serrated tussock containment and eradication of isolated infestations is a priority. *(Continued on page 2)*



Community Pest Management Groups: Trialling a new approach to invasive plant management (*cont*)

The project will work in partnership with the Future Farming Strategy's 'supporting community led action on pests through voluntary compliance' project which aims to build the capacity of the three Community Pest Management Groups (CPMG), namely the VSTWP, Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT) and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT). The project will also build the capacity of targeted communities through education which aims to reduce the reliance on DPI's compliance program.

The Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) has been using the voluntary compliance concept in North-East Victoria for over five years, and more recently far-East Gippsland. The project area covers over 150,000 hectares of both public and private land.

Michael Reid, Executive Officer to the VBT comments that: "supporting and equipping community to manage blackberry has achieved significant on-ground results, more than would we could have ever planned."

The Victorian Gorse Taskforce (VGT) recently adopted a similar approach to manage its species. The taskforce is currently seeking applications from incorporated community groups to deliver the community led gorse control project in 2010. Applications close on November 6 and more information can be obtained by visiting: www.vicgorsetaskforce.com.au

The VSTWP community led project is currently being developed and if endorsed at the VSTWP meeting on October 14 it will begin in 2010.

For more information please contact Chelsea Wardrope, VSTWP Executive Officer on (03) 5226 4680.

The effects of flupropanate on non-target species

Flupropanate is a selective herbicide used for the treatment of serrated tussock and Chilean needle grass. It is commonly used in agricultural and native grassland situations where it has been assumed the herbicide application has little or no effect on non-target species but this has never been investigated until now.

The VSTWP recently funded a research project managed by Dr Chales Grech to determine the effects on a number of non-target species.

A glasshouse trial was set up and 10 species, including serrated tussock and Chilean needle grass, were grown from seeds and then treated with a range of flupropanate rates up to 2.0 L/Ha to determine their dose response. The growth and survival was monitored for three and a half months, giving flupropanate ample time to take affect.

The experiment found that serrated tussock was very sensitive to flupropanate but Chilean needle grass was less susceptible.

One non-target species, subterranean clover, was significantly affected by flupropanate while other non-target species were not significantly affected.

The full report of the glasshouse trial is available at: www.serratedtussock.com

The VSTWP is funding a similar trial in 2009/10 that will be managed by Dr Charles Grech. The project will determine the effects of flupropanate on non-target species in a field situation with three different soil types with a range of native and pasture species. The results are expected to be released in June 2010.

Pictured: A serrated tussock plant in seed amongst native grasses



Slasher cover trials to minimise weed spread

Roadside grass slashing is a major culprit in the transportation of noxious weeds but modifications can now be installed on slashers to reduce the spread of weeds by up to 95 per cent.

Slasher covers can be fitted to slashers to stop seeds from building up on the slasher and being carried vast distances. Often weeds will be transported from an infested site to clean areas establishing themselves on both private and public land.

The DPI, in partnership with Hume City Council and Macedon Ranges Shire Council, are testing prototype slasher covers this year on tractor linkage slashers to minimise weed spread; a proven best practice management technology.

The project with the Hume and Macedon municipalities aims to not only test the prototype but also promote the concept to other grass slashing contractors. Stakeholders will be invited to attend a demonstration day in late spring.

To assist in the promotion and adoption of slasher covers the VSTWP, in partnership with DPI and the Weeds of National Significance program, will be sending letters and supporting documentation to stakeholders involved in the slashing of roadsides.



For further information please contact Dr Charles Grech, DPI Weed Sciences on (03) 9217 4120 or email charles.grech@dpi.vic.gov.au.

Isolated infestations targeted for eradication

The spread of serrated tussock in areas of isolated infestations has been reduced significantly over the past four years. Resulting from more than \$200,000 in funding delivered to private Victorian landholders to control the weed.

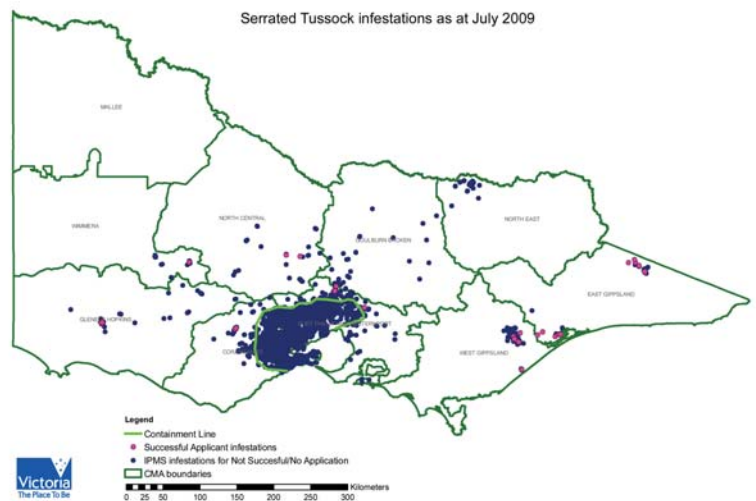
Fifty-nine landholders in seven Victorian catchments received funding through the Federal Government's Defeating the Weeds Menace 'Targeting isolated infestations of serrated tussock for eradication' project.

Funding was provided to private landholders who were working towards the long-term management of serrated tussock using integrated techniques.

A new property owner who received over \$8,000 said: "Without the funding and being a new landholder I probably would have only done the basic control works as my legal requirement, now that I've started improving my property I'll keep at it."

Serrated tussock will establish in new areas with ease so it's important to eradicate isolated infestations before they spread further. The VSTWP considers isolated infestations to be a priority along with containing the core infestation and reducing pathways of spread.

Unfortunately all funding for the project has now been exhausted but the VSTWP will continue to work



with the DPI and landholders affected by serrated tussock to eradicate isolated infestations.

Successful applicants received funding for control works such as fencing, tree planting, pasture renovation and herbicide application.

The four-year, \$365,000 'Targeting isolated infestations of serrated tussock for eradication' project, provided a good incentive for landholders to continue the long-term management plans they've put in place.

A successful applicant from East Gippsland who received over \$16,000 said: "The funding accelerated our long-term management plans by multiple years, without the money we wouldn't have been able to afford to do all this work."

Don't delay put a mattock in your boot today

The best method for controlling serrated tussock is prevention. Whether you have serrated tussock on your property or not, all land managers should adhere to these simple rules:

- Learn to correctly identify serrated tussock
- Never let a plant seed
- Ensure any vehicles or machinery entering your property are seed free
- Purchase certified weed free feed for livestock
- Quarantine new livestock or suspected contaminated livestock for 10 days
- Assign designated feed out areas and closely monitor these areas for new weeds
- Avoid areas infested with serrated tussock when in flower
- Mesh fencing can trap unwanted seed entering neighbouring paddocks
- Tree shelterbelts and windbreaks will catch windblown seed and reduce the likelihood of contaminating neighbouring paddocks
- Reduce bare ground and disturbance to the soil crust where possible

It's commonly known that incorporating prevention techniques into your daily land management practices will save time, money and protect agricultural and natural assets. So don't delay put a mattock in you boot today!

For more information on prevention please refer to the National Serrated Tussock Best Practice Manual available at: www.serratedtussock.com or by calling 136 186.



A moving story



By Lachlan Milne, Macedon Ranges Shire

Recently, a Macedon resident contacted Macedon Ranges Shire seeking assistance to identify a weed they had noticed on their land. He brought the plant into the office nicely wrapped in a plastic bag, and yes it was a beautiful, mature serrated tussock.

It was large enough to have gone to seed, and sure enough there were even some dried seed heads with viable looking seeds still on the plant.

The resident commented that the plant was growing where he usually parked his trailer. He also told me that he had worked in the Bacchus Marsh area, where he was aware of what a problem serrated tussock was. It is easy to understand how this plant found its way onto his property.

This story is a prime example of how easily serrated tussock can be transported on vehicles and how important it is to have simple hygiene procedures to prevent serrated tussock entering your property.

In the past 18 months the Macedon Ranges Shire has identified several isolated patches of serrated tussock on roadsides in the Macedon area. All have been controlled. The patches have all been noted on VicRoads roads, where there is vehicle movement as well as annual fire-prevention slashing.

Macedon, with traditionally higher rainfall, would not have been considered suitable for serrated tussock establishment in the past but ongoing dry conditions have opened niches for serrated tussock beyond our expectations.

Now more than ever we need to put energy into educating people on how to identify weeds before they become a problem and to focus energy on controlling isolated infestations.

Port Phillip isolated infestations program

By Andrew Cooper, Department of Primary Industries

Landowners in the Darraweit Guim and Bylands areas are urged to be on the lookout for serrated tussock.

DPI representatives have been in the area since May this year as part of the isolated infestations project. The aim of the project is to meet with landholders and provide information regarding the prevention, identification and long-term control of serrated tussock.

DPI Rural Extension Officer Andrew Cooper says that the response to the program has been encouraging.

“We have visited over 90 properties covering 6,500 hectares since May,” Mr Cooper said. “We have significantly reduced the infestation size over the past three years thanks to the vigilance of landholders.”

Although there has been a reduction in the density of the infestations, serrated tussock is on the move. Seven new infestations were found in the area during the project; however, Mr Cooper believes that the landowners can get on top of it.

“There is a real sense of pride in this community,” he said. “The landholders love their land, and they are very proud of it. However, many landholders find it hard to identify new weeds on their properties. Our aim is to give landholders in the area the best chance to prevent infestations establishing on their land.”

Serrated tussock, which is widespread to the west of Melbourne, was first discovered in the area in 1999. It is thought to have been brought in by sheep transportation from the Monaro plains, New South Wales.

Serrated tussock costs the Victorian agricultural sector more than \$360 million annually. Serrated tussock has the potential to produce 100,000 seeds during the summer months, and it is important for landholders to enact control options before October 2009.

Correctly identifying serrated tussock

Too often, native grasses such as native or silver tussock (*Poa labillardieri*) are killed by landholders who mistake them for serrated tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*.) A new identification brochure being developed by the VSTWP will ensure this doesn't happen anymore.

The identification brochure due to be released next month will contain information on how to identify serrated tussock as well as other *Nassella* species and similar looking native grasses.

With more than 40 photos along with descriptions, land managers of serrated tussock will be sure to get the identification right.



Now is the easiest time of the year to identify serrated tussock as it's in flower. From a distance, mature serrated tussock plants will have a purple – maroon tinge - which is the 100,000 seeds mature plants are capable of supporting. On a closer look the branched flower head of serrated tussock is significantly different to any other *Nassella* species or native grass species.



The most common form of identification when serrated tussock is not in flower is the 'roll test.' Serrated tussock leaves will roll smoothly between the thumb and forefinger like a needle. Most native species such as *Poa labillardieri* will have flat edges so won't roll as smoothly.

To get a copy of the identification brochure or the National Serrated Tussock Best Practice Manual which has extensive information on the identification of serrated tussock please contact DPI on 136 186 or visit: www.serratedtussock.com

Funding Available

Melbourne Water & PPWCMA 2009 Community Grants

Melbourne Water and the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority have three categories of community grants open to community groups that contribute to improving the health of land, biodiversity and waterways in the Greater Melbourne region.

The three types of grants available are:

- group support grants (*up to \$300*)
- group promotion and development grants (*up to \$500*)
- and
- project grants (*up to \$20,000*)

Applications close on Friday, November 6, 2009.

For more information please visit:
www.grants.melbournewater.com.au
or phone (03) 9235 2231.

Caring For Our Country – Community Action Grants

Eligible community groups can apply for grants from \$5,000 to \$20,000 (GST exclusive) to take action to help protect and conserve Australia's environment.

Applications close on Thursday, October 22, 2009

For more information please visit:
www.nrm.gov.au/funding/pubs/cag-guidelines.pdf
or phone 1800 552 008

For assistance with applications involving the control of serrated tussock please contact Chelsea Wardrope on (03) 5226 4680.

Contributions & Feedback

Thank you to those who contributed to this edition of the Tussock Times newsletter. Feedback on this newsletter and contributions to the next edition in January 2010 are welcome to Chelsea Wardrope.

Add yourself or friends to the Tussock Times mailing list by contacting:

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More information on serrated tussock can be found on the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party website www.serratedtussock.com or by contacting DPI on 136 186.

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