

tussock times

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Throwing the book at Serrated Tussock

An important new tool to help landholders and managers control serrated tussock is now available.

The 'National Serrated Tussock Best Practice Management Manual' was launched in Victoria on Friday the 28th November 2008 attracting over 50 landholders and key stakeholders to the private property located in Bacchus Marsh.

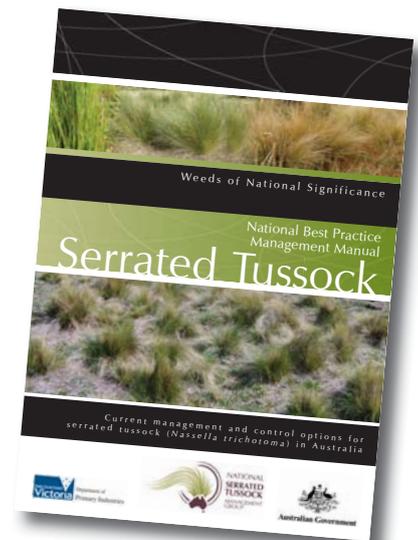
Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Landscape Protection Manager Brendan Roughead launched the Manual and says "serrated tussock could strike fear to any farmer or land manager familiar with its devastating impacts."

"As a Weed of National Significance, it's one of the worst perennial grass weeds in Australia, invading pastures, native grasslands and urban areas, and at present covers more than a million hectares in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory," Mr Roughead said.

"Serrated tussock has no nutritional value for stock and if not managed has the capacity to greatly reduce productivity of grazing lands and impact on biodiversity values.

"If left untreated it can be a continuous source of seed for whole regions and communities."

DPI Victorian Serrated Tussock project leader Byron Crowe said the National Serrated Tussock Best Practice Manual was designed to provide effective management solutions for serrated tussock within a broader context of weed management.



"The manual brings together detailed information about the plant itself, as well as best practice information about existing control and management options," Mr Crowe said.

To help fight the threat of serrated tussock the Federal Government provided funds to the Victorian Department of Primary Industries to produce the National Serrated Tussock Best Practice Manual. The manual is the first comprehensive collation of information available on serrated tussock management in Australia.

The information for the manual has been sourced from published information, existing research, reviews by technical experts, and the experiences of individuals and organisations currently managing serrated tussock in Australia. It also incorporates the outcomes from a series of serrated tussock weed management workshops held throughout south-east Australia in 2007.

Managers of serrated tussock can obtain a copy of the manual by visiting www.serratedtussock.com or by contacting the Department of Primary Industries on 136 186.



Jim Seager, Chair VSTWP; Scott Chirnside, Chair National Serrated Tussock Working Group; Brendan Roughead, DPI Landscape Protection Portfolio Manager; Dr David McLaren, Senior Research Scientist at the launch of the National Serrated Tussock Best Practice Manual.



Members of the VSTWP and DPI. From left: Graham Simpson, Byron Crowe, Jim Seager, David McLaren, Brendan Roughead, Chelsea Wardrope, Scott Chirnside, Kate O'Bryan, Tim Knight at the launch of the National Serrated Tussock Best Practice Manual.

Start with identification and prevent Serrated Tussock getting a foot hold in your local area

Due to drought conditions experienced over recent times serrated tussock is predicted to thrive in and may result in new areas being infested with the weed.

This is a timely reminder to the community on how to identify serrated tussock which can look like a number of different grasses including native poa's. Correct identification is crucial before control methods are conducted to prevent the unintentional spraying of native species.

A number of key characteristics are outlined below for successful identification of serrated tussock;

- The weed is a perennial tussock-forming grass growing to a height of 60cm with a maximum

diameter at its base of 15cm. Leaves are up to 50cm long.

- The leaves of serrated tussock are thin tightly rolled with easily felt serrations along the length. To help identify a suspected plant pull a leaf from the plant. Run the leaf between the thumb and index finger to feel for serrations, also roll the leaf between the thumb and index finger. If the leaf rolls smoothly like a needle the grass is consistent with serrated tussock. The cross section of a serrated tussock leaf is 'o' shaped with no flat edges. Many other grasses such as the natives lack serrations and have a 'V' or a 'U' shaped cross section.
- One of the key aspects of identification of serrated tussock is the ligule which is a small flap located at the junction of the leaf blade and the leaf sheath. The ligule can be found by following the tip of the leaf down to its junction with the stem. When the leaf is bent away from the stem the ligule protrudes. Serrated tussock has a white hairless ligule about 1 mm long, whereas other grasses have ligules with different colours or hairs or do not possess them at all.

For more information on identifying serrated tussock please visit www.serratedtussock.com or contact DPI on 136 186.



A serrated tussock plant in seed. In warmer months serrated tussock appears lime green in colour and produces purple seed heads capable of distributing up to 25kms. Seeds will easily germinate in bare ground as shown.



Serrated tussock has a white hairless ligule about 1 mm long. The ligule is found by tracing the leaf blade down towards the stem and bending the leaf blade backwards.



Serrated tussock leaves roll smoothly like a needle between your thumb and index finger.

Mexican Feather Grass incursion continues

DPI Landscape Protection staff continue to dedicate time and resources to the Mexican feather grass incursion response.

Mexican feather grass (*Nassella tenuissima*), a State prohibited weed declared under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, was inadvertently supplied to and sold by a number of retail chain stores in Victoria earlier this year.

Mexican feather grass is closely related and similar in appearance to serrated tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) however it poses an even greater threat to agricultural, environmental and social values. Mexican feather grass is capable of seeding and germinating year round in Australia and climatic modelling suggests it will occupy habitats not suitable for serrated tussock. In its native Argentina, where serrated tussock is utilised as a pasture grass for cattle, Mexican feather grass is deemed unpalatable and bypassed by herds.

Suspected Mexican feather grass plants were sold in pink pots and labelled *Stipa capillata* or *Stipa lessingiana* under the Regal Sensations line.

Following prompt action by DPI officers and senior management of retailers, suspect plants were removed from sale. A statewide recall of Mexican feather grass plants has since been initiated by Big W, Bunnings and Oasis Horticulture, in cooperation with DPI. However, to date only 72 plants have been returned as part of this process.

In an attempt to locate a more significant number of plants and to work with residents to remove this dangerous State prohibited weed DPI staff conducted targeted property inspections in areas where plant sales were believed to have been high. In October, authorised officers inspected over 40,000 properties in the Frankston area and have recovered 421 plants.

Following on from the success of these inspections, officers recently inspected approximately 55,000 properties in the outer western Melbourne suburbs and recovered 101 Mexican feather grass plants.

Continuing surveillance activities and reports from the public, as a result of an extensive advertising campaign, have resulted in the detection and removal of over 200 plants.

The cooperation and support of the community during property inspections and surveillance work has been tremendous and integral to the success of the operation to reduce future impact on agriculture and the environment.

There have been many significant findings throughout the investigation. One interesting example is of a landholder near Tolmie in Victoria's north east, who reported plants to DPI after receiving information about Mexican feather grass as part of the statewide media campaign.

The ten plants that were removed were in full flower but thankfully hadn't set seed yet. Each Mexican feather grass plant can produce between 70,000 and 100,000 seeds each year. If the plants hadn't been removed their seeds could have spread and caused a devastating impact on the surrounding National Parks and Forest.

While DPI is pleased with the outcome of the investigation, there is still more work to be done.

DPI is responsible for the eradication of State prohibited weeds and is urging people to please not attempt to control or dispose of this weed themselves.

If you think you may have purchased or seen a Mexican feather grass plant please contact DPI on 136 186.



Mexican feather grass growing in a naturestrip found and reported by a local resident. Over 100 plants were recovered from this intersection in Thornbury.

DPI Officer, Tim Stuckey removing Mexican feather grass plants.

More than \$1 million given to local councils to tackle invasive species on roadsides

Local councils can now take immediate action to tackle invasive species on roadsides thanks to the State Government providing over \$1 million. The funding has been provided through the \$205 million Future Farming Strategy.

The State Government is working with the Municipal Association of Victoria to develop a community pest management approach that will ensure immediate attention is given to tackling the issue of roadside weeds and rabbits in Victoria.

On ground works is the main focus of the grants targeting the treatment of regionally prohibited weeds, regionally controlled weeds and rabbits in areas where integrated approaches exist such as where the Department of Primary Industries is undertaking compliance programs on private land and in support of other broader landscape restoration projects.

The grants will be used to assist adjoining landowners prevent the further spread of invasive species across the landscape, or to reduce the spread of weeds through everyday activities such as roadside maintenance.

Round One of funding was very successful with all 46 Victorian Councils who applied on time receiving some level of funding. This round of funding was awarded on the basis that all work will be implemented by the end of June 2009.

Local Councils have the opportunity to apply for round two funding which focuses on capacity building. Round two opens on the 30th January 2009. More information is available at www.dpi.vic.gov.au/weeds > future farming initiative.

VSTWP works with Wyndham and Melton councils to reduce the impact of Serrated Tussock in a plains grassland

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party held a bus tour on the 31st October 2008 to visit serrated tussock sites in Wyndham and Melton municipalities with the aim of bringing key stakeholders together to discuss options for the long term management of serrated tussock with the protection of native vegetation.

The bus tour came to light after the Federal Government announced an amendment to the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act to include plains grasslands. For serrated tussock, this means that our methods for control have been restricted to protect native grasses occurring in a plains grassland site.

The amendment to the EPBC Act raised concerns among landcare groups and serrated tussock managers requesting clarification on the amendment and options for serrated tussock control in plains grassland.

Over 40 representatives attended from the Department of Primary Industries, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Melton Shire, Wyndham City Council, Corio landcare, Pinkerton landcare and Environment Group, Vic Roads, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and Port Phillip and Westernport CMA.

A participant on the day said "It's pleasing to see interest from a range of stakeholders and the VSTWP is keen to address and have input into the issue."

Meetings with environmental officers of local government in the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment and the Corangamite Catchment will be held early in 2009 to address any arising issues, work together to increase the awareness in the community and expand on existing serrated tussock programs.

For more information on the EPBC Act please visit www.environment.gov.au.

Looking for ways to improve – The VSTWP completes governance training

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) and the Victorian Blackberry Taskforce (VBT) joined forces on the 2nd December 2008 undertaking a one day course in governance.

Governance training provided the two groups with the knowledge to manage meetings, people, conflict of interest, meeting procedures, procedural motions, leadership behaviours and the role of the Chair and committee members.

Chelsea Wardrope from the Department of Primary Industries said "Bringing the VSTWP and the VBT together enabled the two groups to share meeting procedure information and share ideas on how to run more effective meetings."

“Both groups look forward to meeting with each other on a more regular basis to discuss ideas to improve their awareness raising programs.”

“The participants will find that the governance training will not only help them in their role as a state representative for either the VSTWP or the VBT role but also in other groups they are a part of such as landcare.”

The training opportunity was funded through the Future Farming Initiatives ‘Supporting Community Led Action On Pests Through Voluntary Compliance’ (SCLAPTVC) project. SCLAPTVC is a 4 year \$1.2 Million project seeking to build the capacity of Community Pest Management Groups (CPMG) to respond to priority species (serrated tussock, gorse, blackberry and rabbits) in target communities. The CPMG’s will work with target communities to achieve control of their species using the voluntary compliance concept therefore reducing the reliance on Departmental compliance. Through this project the CPMG’s will have the opportunity to participate in more training.

The VSTWP and VBT governance training was provided by The Education Centre Gippsland (ECG). ECG offers a range of training tailored to build the capacity of the community. Please contact Peter Winckler on (03) 5622 6000 or 0347 626 700

Improving the Victorian Serrated Tussock strategy with evaluation, community engagement and implementation plans

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party is intensifying its attack on serrated tussock by developing an evaluation, community engagement and implementation plan to supplement the Victorian Serrated Tussock Strategy “Intensifying the attack on serrated tussock 2005 – 2010.”

The community engagement plan analyses each key stakeholder the VSTWP works with by determining their current level of engagement in the serrated tussock program and how the VSTWP needs to be working with that stakeholder for them to be involved in delivering outcomes of the Victorian Serrated Tussock Strategy.

“Having a community engagement plan is an important component in developing effective partnerships with key stakeholders where they will be involved in delivering our projects outcomes,” said Chelsea Wardrope, serrated tussock partnerships officer.

The evaluation plan will identify key evaluation questions that will be used to address the progress of the serrated tussock program and assist in reviewing it at the end of the strategy in 2010.

The third plan is an implementation plan that combines the findings of the evaluation and community engagement plans into an actions list to ensure all the activities listed in the Victorian serrated tussock strategy are met.

It is expected that the three plans will be finished early in 2009.

NASTI – Serrated Tussock signs for 2009

New serrated tussock signs will be installed in the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment early in 2009 to raise the awareness of land managers to control serrated tussock in areas of isolated infestations.

The Northern Alliance Serrated Tussock Initiative Group (NASTI) prompted the installation of new signs as an incentive for land managers to ‘identify, control and report serrated tussock’ as is stated on the new signs that have been funded by the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party.

NASTI, which is comprised of the municipalities of Hume, Whittlesea, Nillumbik, Macedon and Mitchell, meet every two months putting their brains together to develop ideas to raise awareness about serrated tussock whilst, working collaboratively towards solutions to deal with this weed. Also on the agenda is the development of a serrated tussock DVD.

Bridie Wetzel, Land Management Officer for Hume City Council said “Serrated Tussock is a priority in areas of isolated infestations, installing signs is only one part of an integrated program to raise the awareness of land managers to control serrated tussock.”

“We’re making a lot of progress by working at a local level via our Council programs, whilst coordinating at a regional level through NASTI to help us achieve State outcomes.”

Out compete Serrated Tussock seedlings and save

Perennial pasture competition and grazing management were identified as two of the most important factors for reducing reinvasion of serrated tussock seedlings at the EverGraze Field day held at Fiskville in November.

Dr Warwick Badgery, Research Scientist from DPI, NSW reported on the results of his research showing that the reinvasion of serrated tussock seedlings can be dramatically reduced with maintaining 100% groundcover levels through autumn, winter and spring and having at least 0.5 tonne/hectare of perennial grass dry matter competition during summer. He said, "Rotational grazing was an important management tactic to prevent serrated tussock establishment and survival."

Warwick also said that Flupropanate being a selective herbicide was a misnomer and that it was devastating on the cool season native grasses, Spear grass, Wallaby grass and Weeping grass. "Broadacre spraying of flupropanate decreases competition and substantially increases serrated tussock seedling establishment," said Warwick. "Further control is needed after 5 years making it uneconomic and unsustainable".

Dr Zhonang Nie, Research Scientist DPI, Victoria offered highly effective grazing strategies for raising the level of competition of native grasses based on research trials at Ararat. Three different spring deferment strategies were developed taking into account a number of issues including the amount of desirable species present, the desired outcome and the farmer's need for feed. "The strategies ranged from spelling from October or November until the end of January or the autumn break but all on average increased the plant density of native grasses by 30 to 50%," he said.

Zhonang also reported on a native grass study using pot trials to indicate responses to grazing. "Warm season natives such as Kangaroo Grass and Red leg grass died if cut to 2 cm above ground frequently, indicating the importance of not overgrazing these species," said Zhonang. Cutting frequently to 2 cm was also detrimental to herbage production and negatively affected root growth of cool season grasses. The native grasses were most responsive to cutting based on their leaf stage which varied from 3 to 4 leaves per tiller or stem depending on the species. "The leaf stage is the plants own indicator of grazing readiness and should be used to work out how much rest the paddock needs," he said.

Lisa Miller, Pasture Agronomist with DPI Geelong discussed the treatments being used at the EverGraze support site in a steep gorge near Ballan to help control serrated tussock. "The worst half of the gorge will be aerially seeded with new varieties of drought tolerant cocksfoot cultivars, Sendace or Uplands next year as a means for increasing competition," she said. "It will then be spelled each year from November until the end of summer as a way of allowing it to seed set and thicken up." Lisa said that cocksfoot was chosen due to its tolerance of Flupropanate at 2 L/ha and its suitability to acid light textured soils. The other half of the gorge is being spelled from October until the autumn break to quickly return groundcover, allow native grasses to set seed and increase in density. Rotational grazing will be used throughout the rest of the year.

Further information on the field day including Warwick Badgery's research papers are located at www.serratedtussock.com.



Participants of the EverGraze Field Day on the EverGraze support site in Ballan learning how to identify native grasses and use grazing management to control serrated tussock.

Weed Spotters- Who are they?

The Department of Primary Industries through the Weed Alert program has a volunteer network of Weed Spotters. Weed Spotters are people who assist the Victorian Government by keeping an eye open for and reporting potential, new or emerging weeds to the State. These include agricultural and environmental weeds.

Weed Spotters can be anyone interested in plants. They include gardeners, farmers, teachers, students, members of groups such as "Friends" and Landcare Groups, contractors and consultants, local government staff, and other agency staff.

A keen interest and eye for plants is the basic starting point with no need to have had any botanical training. DPI will provide free training in the identification of the target weeds and how to report them. Weed Spotters who attend training will receive a kit containing information to assist in the identification and collection of weed specimens. They also receive a quarterly newsletter to keep them updated with news from around the State.

Weed Spotters are asked to be observant during their day-to-day activities and look out for a number of serious potential, new and emerging weeds in Victoria. As well as reporting these target weeds, Weed Spotters can also report other plants new to their district. These plants may be new weeds to the State.

People interested in becoming a Weed Spotter can phone the Customer Service Centre on 136 186 to register. Its free and all that is needed is your name, postal address, daytime phone number and an email address if you have one.



Weed Spotters in the field

On track to eradicating State Prohibited weeds

Throughout the year Weed Alert Contact Officers (WACO's), across the state, monitor and treat all known infestation of State Prohibited Weeds (SPW). It is through this monitoring process that we are able to slowly reduce the populations and potential threat of SPW. When State Prohibited Weeds are discovered, DPI's Weed Alert Team undertakes and bears the cost involved in the eradication of these weeds on all public and private land.

WACO's also record and map the distribution of Victorian Alert Weeds. This is achieved by the help of Weed Spotters whom report possible Weed Alert species to their local WACO. If it was not for these reports these infestations would most likely go undetected. Weed Spotters are encouraged to keep a close eye out for infestations in Victoria.

The Weed Alert Team at DPI would like to thank all people involved in the monitoring and reporting of all Weed Alert species. If it was not for the landowners and Weed Spotters, like you, we would not be able to do our job as efficiently, and we would be far from eradication of some of the State Prohibited Weeds. So please, continue your great work and remember, if you discover Victorian Alert species in the state, or if you observe State Prohibited Weeds being offered for sale, displayed or traded, contact your local WACO as soon as possible. Your local WACO can also be contacted to discuss how you can become involved in the Weed Alert program as a Weed Spotter and also of any upcoming training sessions on 136 186 or through the website www.dpi.vic.gov.au/weeds.



Flowering stem of the State Prohibited Weed, Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)

Remarkable Victorian Council wins prestigious National Landcare Award

Hume City Council has won the Leighton Holdings Local Government Landcare Partnerships Award in front of hundreds of people at the nation's top environmental awards – held in the Great Hall of Parliament House in Canberra on Thursday the 23rd October 2008.

Long time Landcare supporter and acting legend Jack Thompson said "Hume City is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Victoria. More than two thirds of the land has been zoned rural 'Green Wedge', but rapidly expanding urban and residential zones are putting increased pressure on this land."

Hume Council CEO Domenic Isola is thrilled with the Landcare environmental award win.

"Winning the Landcare award is a huge honour for Hume. It puts Hume on the national stage as a leader in caring for the land and creating an environmentally sustainable community," said Mr Isola.

Hume City has suffered long-term drought, weeds are a problem, native vegetation is fragmented knowledge about local flora and fauna is limited. Waterways are affected by stormwater pollution and earthworks from new buildings are creating excess sediment in streams.

To combat this and manage its wealth of natural resources and the challenges this involves, Hume City Council developed a framework of sustainability, the *Hume Environmental Sustainability Framework*. Hume City Council also offers a farm rate rebate and incentive scheme for landholders and a rural area plant donation scheme providing 18,000 free native plants to householders who undertake revegetation work to protect remnant vegetation or restore riparian zones.

Hume City Council encourages landholders to improve their properties and protect native vegetation. It produces a *State of Environment Report* each year, tracking the condition of the environment and reporting on actions taken to achieve sustainable outcomes. The council also produces *Ecotracks*, a land management newsletter for landholders, and distributes *Hume Weed News* to 1500 rural and semi-rural households.

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For more information about the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party visit: www.serratedtussock.com

"Community groups and council staff work tirelessly to improve our environment. Caring for the land is only possible through community partnerships and council will continue to work with residents to promote Landcare ideals," continued CEO Mr Isola.

Hume City Council is focused on education and training. It has two full time land management officers working in partnership with other councils, the State Government and environmental authorities to increase awareness of serrated tussock in the local community and expand Local Government serrated tussock programs.

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party and the Department of Primary Industries congratulates Hume City Council on their achievement.

FUNDING OPPURTUNITIES

Caring for our Country Open Grants Round 2

Round 2 grants close 6th March 2009

Visit: www.nrm.gov.au for an application form and to view successful applicants of Round 1 funding.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND FEEDBACK

Thank you to those who contributed to this edition of the Tussock Times. Contributions to the next edition of the Tussock Times (April 2009) are welcome to Chelsea Wardrope by the 20th March 2009.

Please find enclosed an evaluation form, your feedback will help us improve the Tussock Times Newsletter by targeting it to your needs and reaching a greater audience.

To be added to the mailing list please contact Chelsea Wardrope, Serrated Tussock Partnerhsips Officer, Department of Primary Industries;

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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.