



2019 – 2020
**PROGRESS
REPORT**

VICTORIAN
SERRATED TUSSOCK
WORKING PARTY



VICTORIAN SERRATED TUSSOCK WORKING PARTY PROGRESS REPORT 2019-2020

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

VISION

REDUCE THE IMPACT OF SERRATED
TUSSOCK ON VICTORIA'S ECONOMY,
ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES.

VSTWP COMMITTEE 2019/20

Lance Jennison	Chair
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Wendy Bitans	Community Representative
John Webb Ware	Community Representative
Mandy Coulson	Community Representative
Norm Cameron	Community Representative
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Charles Grech	Community Representative
Graham Hooper	Community Representative
Shawna Dominelli	Community Representative
Martin Deering	Secretary

VSTWP EXTENSION OFFICERS 2019/20

Ivan Carter
Tim Johnston
Roger MacRaïld
Antares Fuhrmann

CHAIRPERSONS REPORT

As a Weed of National Significance, serrated tussock is regarded as one of Australia's worst weeds due to its invasiveness, potential for spread, economic and environmental impacts. The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) recently conducted a cost-benefit case study that concluded that if serrated tussock was left to infest a property or landscape, the cost of controlling it was at least five times higher than if it was prevented in the first instance. Managing serrated tussock before it establishes is potentially a massive cost saving and an important message to deliver to landowners who have untreated plants on their property.

The 2019-20 year started off well with the VSTWP general meeting held in Maffra, West Gippsland. This was a great opportunity to meet with stakeholders in the area, including representatives from the Wellington Shire, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Landcare, Department of Transport, and Agriculture Victoria.

The VSTWP extension program has been running since 2012, resulting in coordinated management and real-world reductions in the density spread of serrated tussock. Over the past 12 months, our Extension Officers delivered projects in Monegeetta, West Gippsland, Mt Wallace, and Teesdale North, assisting communities by engaging and educating landowners for the management of serrated tussock. A total of 19,500 hectares of land was assessed for serrated tussock, resulting in treatment of approximately 70 hectares of land infested with serrated tussock. This is a remarkable achievement under the COVID-19 restrictions.

In 2019-20 the VSTWP also received the largest Federal Government White Paper grant to date. This round three funding allowed the VSTWP to deliver the following innovative projects:

- **Four cost-benefit case studies** to communicate the costs and benefits of controlling serrated tussock in relation to four different landowner types; small non-commercial landowner; small commercial landowner; Local Government; and residential developer.
- **Provision of extension services** to landowners in Stratford and Briagolong, in West Gippsland.
- **A citizen science mapping project** aimed at empowering communities throughout Victoria to contribute to the Atlas of Living Australia. Increased citizen science mapping is expected to improve our understanding of

CHAIRPERSONS REPORT CONTINUED

the distribution and spread of priority weeds and the effectiveness of management strategies.

- **Serrated tussock signs** to increase awareness of this noxious weed. Provision of 100 long lasting aluminium fence signs for landowners, along with 100 corflute signs for distribution to rural supply stores across Victoria.
- **A best practice weed hygiene guide** to improve weed hygiene practices and reduce the spread of serrated tussock through the implementation of strategies and plans, along with improved contract oversight.

Although there is no recent economic modelling on the impact of serrated tussock, previous figures indicate that serrated tussock costs the Victorian economy tens of millions of dollars each year, along with significant environmental and social costs. The Victorian VSTWP is well placed to tackle this problem in partnership with Government, industry and the community. With adequate resourcing, we can continue to make progress in reducing the impact and density of this invasive grass.

Our vision is to reduce the impact of serrated tussock on Victoria's economy, environment and communities. The Victorian Serrated Tussock Strategy 2018-23 provides clear focus for the VSTWP. The strategic objectives are:

- To build community capability to prevent and manage serrated tussock
- To reduce the current impact of serrated tussock on affected communities
- To restrict the establishment and spread of serrated tussock in Victoria.

Unfortunately, 2020 proved to be a challenging year, starting with catastrophic wildfires and then the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of our projects stalled or slowed down as we adapted and extended our timeframes. We were also unable to attend field days or hold our quarterly meetings in Seymour and Hamilton as planned. Despite these difficulties, the VSTWP continued to deliver high quality services for the community. The VSTWP quarterly meetings were able to continue online with good attendance, and we expect to visit Seymour and Hamilton in 2021.

The VSTWP committee members and Engagement Officer were able to attend several field days including the Seymour Farming Expo and the Longerenong Agricultural Show. Attending field days provides an opportunity to engage with a diversity of landowners and raise awareness of serrated tussock across the state. The VSTWP also raises awareness of this noxious weed through

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the VSTWP website, the quarterly Tussock Times newsletter, videos, media articles, radio interviews, and social media avenues. It was heartening to see that we achieved a commendable 22 media articles published in Local Government and community newsletters across the state, assisting with our education program.

It is a pleasure to collaborate with the various stakeholders who contribute so much to serrated tussock management and VSTWP projects. I thank the VSTWP committee members, Extension Officers and consultants for their flexibility in delivering projects during the challenges of COVID-19 restrictions. I thank Agriculture Victoria, Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions for providing the core funding for operations, and for providing project support through the appointment of the VSTWP Executive Officer. Lastly, the VSTWP wouldn't exist without the dedication and leadership of the committee members who volunteer their time, I thank you for your continued support and contribution to your communities.

Lance Jennison

Lance Jennison

VSTWP Chairperson

Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party

12th November 2020



Lance Jennison,
Chairperson of the VSTWP

THE VICTORIAN SERRATED TUSSOCK WORKING PARTY

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) was started in 1995, representing the first community led approach of its kind. The intention was to create a cooperative model of governance between community, Government, and other key stakeholders to deal with the threat of serrated tussock.

The VSTWP is community-driven and focused on providing a strategic direction for Government and community. The cooperative governance approach to the strategic management of pest species increases participation in decision making through involving a wide range of stakeholders, sharing decisions in resource allocation, and increasing the ability for different parties to move forward with a shared understanding and responsibilities.

The VSTWP has delivered a wide range of serrated tussock programs, including research into management practises, production of appropriate extension materials, provision of incentives to land managers and community groups and comprehensive mapping, extension, monitoring and extension campaigns.



SERRATED TUSSOCK

Native to South America, serrated tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) is a highly invasive, tussock forming grass that is capable of growing in a range of climates and soil types.

Serrated tussock is a declared noxious weed in Victoria and is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) due to its highly invasive nature, its negative impacts on agricultural production and its threat to biodiversity. Plants readily invade agricultural land, native grasslands and grassy woodlands, and will rapidly infest areas of bare ground. Each mature serrated tussock plant can produce more than 100,000 seeds in a year, which is mostly dispersed by wind, however, seeds can also be carried in fodder, vehicles or livestock and transported over vast distances.

The occurrence of serrated tussock in Victoria was first documented in 1954 at a site in Melbourne's north. In 1997 the estimated area of serrated tussock in Victoria was 130,000 hectares, but its potential distribution has been predicted to cover 4.6 million hectares in Victoria or one fifth of the state. Serrated tussock is also found in New South Wales and Tasmania.

The distribution map at figure 1 shows where serrated tussock is currently found in Victoria. If left unmanaged it is estimated that serrated tussock has the potential to infest roughly two-thirds of arable and grazing land in Victoria (figure 2).

SERRATED TUSSOCK DISTRIBUTION

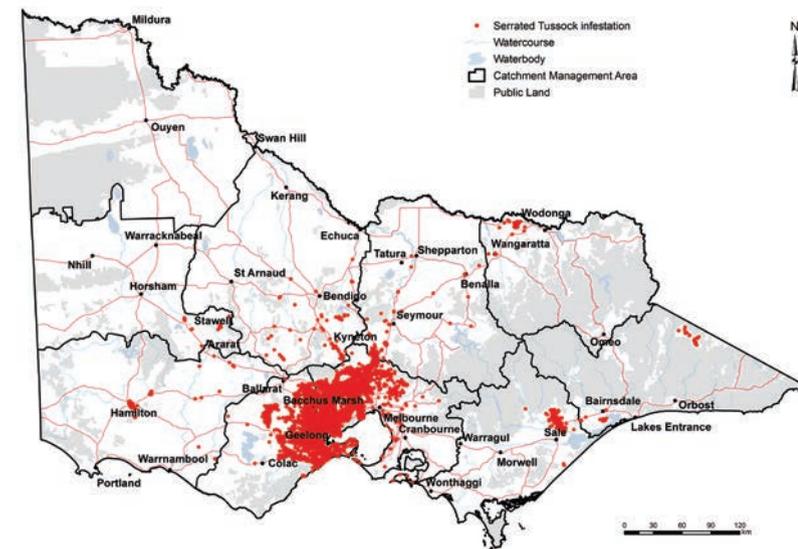


Figure 1: Distribution of serrated tussock in Victoria. (DJPR, 2020)

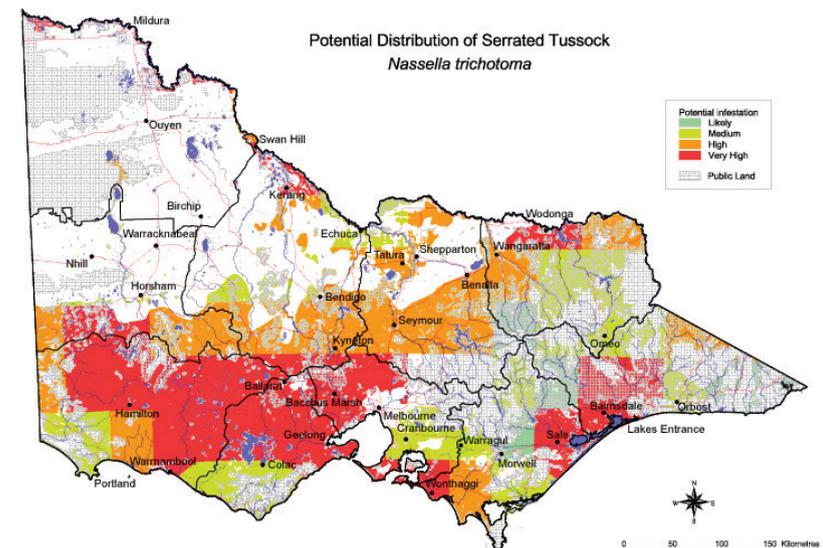


Figure 2: The potential distribution of serrated tussock in Victoria. (CSIRO, 2012)

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Since its formation the VSTWP has been responsible for the development and implementation of a number of management strategies; these documents have not only provided direction but have been fundamental in promoting a coordinated community-led approach to serrated tussock control throughout Victoria.

The VSTWP has strived in partnership with all levels of Government and their agencies, industry, research institutions, Landcare, and the wider community to achieve the original recommendations of the strategy.

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party Strategy 2018-2023 outlines how the VSTWP will support communities impacted by serrated tussock and communities at risk of infestation. The strategy also addresses pathways of spread, maintaining awareness and motivation among stakeholders, along with the need for a targeted approach to extension and education along with an increased collaboration and innovation.

Some key actions of the new strategy include the design of a new extension program for community groups and the coordination of land managers, as well as industry and Government, in a bid to reduce the impact of serrated tussock. The strategy identifies that with the widespread distribution of serrated tussock there are numerous opportunities to support other areas of Victoria.

The strategy commends the VSTWP's historical focus on the north west of Melbourne, Bacchus Marsh, Geelong, and Ballarat areas which has been critically important in reducing the impact and containing the spread of serrated tussock. It goes on to say that with the distribution of serrated tussock in Victoria being widespread, there are numerous communities that could benefit from the VSTWP's support.

The VSTWP Chairperson Lance Jennison said, "the VSTWP has started delivering extension projects in West Gippsland and we held our first General Meeting of the year in Maffra. These initiatives demonstrate our commitment to assist affected communities throughout Victoria."

"The addition of a stronger emphasis on raising community awareness and preparedness across Victoria has assisted us to diversify communications and engage on a deeper level. The VSTWP has been reaching a broader audience through a targeted approach to extension and education, with new videos, case studies and increased online presence," Mr Jennison said.

VSTWP EXTENSION PROGRAM

The VSTWP has found the most effective way to reduce the spread of serrated tussock from the core infestation is through its extension (educational) programs. At the heart of these programs is their community focus, engaging landowners and empowering them to voluntarily achieve high levels of serrated tussock control. The VSTWP now completes a second season of inspections for landowners that have not adequately controlled serrated tussock. Where extension efforts are unsuccessful in convincing landowners of their obligations to control serrated tussock, Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions (DJPR) compliance is then recommended to support the community.

Experienced Extension Officers are engaged by the VSTWP to work with landholders within defined project areas, offering tailored serrated tussock identification and management advice.

In 2019-20 VSTWP Extension Officers delivered extension projects in the following areas;

- **Monegetta**, Macedon Ranges Shire
- **Stratford**, Wellington Shire
- **Mt Wallace**, Moorabool Shire (50% of properties inspected)
- **Teesdale North**, Golden Plains Shire (50% of properties inspected)

In 2019-20 VSTWP Extension Officers also delivered follow-up inspections for properties in the following areas;

- **Toolern Vale**, Macedon Ranges Shire and Moorabool Shire (11 properties)
- **Bannockburn South**, Golden Plains Shire (14 properties)

Providing expert one-to-one advice is recognised to be most beneficial to landholders and forms the foundation of success. Personalised advice provides the landholder with the capacity and confidence to successfully achieve long-term control of serrated tussock on their property. The expertise of our Extension Officers and relationships with communities are what makes our extension projects so well received and successful.

The VSTWP extension project delivers extension services to targeted communities affected by serrated tussock, to raise awareness of the invasive plant, to promote best practice management and to encourage communities to voluntarily manage the invasive species.

VSTWP EXTENSION PROGRAM

Extension Officers contracted to the VSTWP form strong working relationships with various stakeholders including private landowners, Landcare, industry, community groups, Local Government, Catchment Management Authorities, and the State Government.

Landholders in the extension area receive:

- An invite to an information day to launch the extension project.
- A landholder information package detailing serrated tussock identification, control, and management options.
- Individual property visits to inspect for serrated tussock.
- Property maps containing mapped serrated tussock infestations
- Technical advice on serrated tussock control and management for each situation.
- Information on the local Landcare group.
- Rapid Appraisal Management Plan, if required.

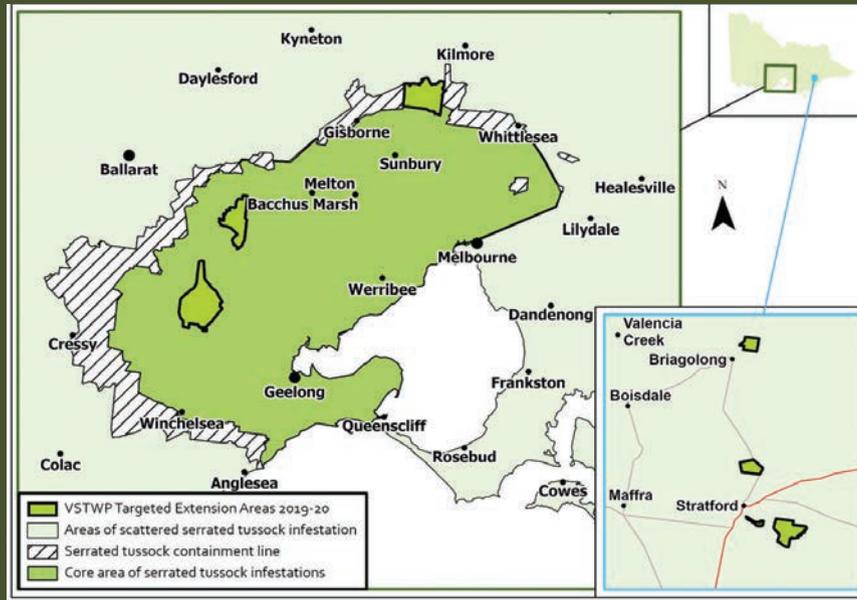


Figure 3: VSTWP Extension Areas 2019/20 [DJPR 2020]



JAMES BOYD AT HIS PROPERTY ON THE BARWON RIVER, 12 MONTHS AFTER CARRYING OUT AERIAL SPRAYING WITH FLUPROPANATE FOR SERRATED TUSSOCKS (MAY 2019)



MONEGETTA

The Monegeetta extension project area covers over 8,700 hectares and lies within the Upper Jacksons and Deep Creek Catchment, an area known for its natural temperate grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains. There were 187 properties in this target area, mostly large farms, and hobby farms, in particular horse properties.

The land systems contain a mix of mostly cleared land and some excellent grasslands that have been used for agricultural production and hobby farm purposes. Common indigenous ground cover grasses found in this area include Common Tussock grass (*Poa labillardierei*), Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia* spp.) and various *Juncas* species, with some good specimens of endemic large gum trees and acacias.

There were a variety of invasive plant issues, with Chilean needle grass being a massive emerging issue in the region, many properties were covered completely. Serrated tussock was in low density across the south and east of the target area, and along the deep creek escarpments.

Of the 189 parcels in the target area, 143 were assessed for serrated tussock and a total of 71 hectares of infestations were discovered. The project has seen 65 hectares of serrated tussock treated under voluntary compliance, some pre-inspection, some during the inspection and some after the inspection. There was one property referred to DJPR for a complaint letter due to a significant untreated infestation, and around 10 properties that are engaged in a second season of extension to ensure treatment of all plants.

The previous Agriculture Victoria compliance program ensured landowners were aware of their requirement to control serrated tussock, in many cases this left a legacy of successful control. The local Landcare group was crucial in spreading the project's key messages and the Shire did a great job in treating the roadside infestations.

The initial information day had a high attendance and was useful in informing landowners of the project aims and that they would receive a visit. The door to door approach was important in contacting landowners who did not respond to the introduction letter, information day or media article, with many successful outcomes from property visits and face to face interactions.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



8783 Ha
assessed
land



187
properties
assessed



71 Ha
observed with
serrated tussock



65 Ha
treated for
serrated tussock



“THE AREA AROUND MONEGETTA IS NEAR THE CORE INFESTATION OF SERRATED TUSSOCK IN VICTORIA, AND TOOK SOME TIME TO INSPECT CAREFULLY AND GET ALL LANDOWNERS ON BOARD.”

– Ivan Carter, 2020; VSTWP Extension Officer



Figure 4: Monegeetta Extension Area. [DJPR, 2020]

“WEST GIPPSLAND IS A KEY AREA FOR STOPPING THE SPREAD OF SERRATED TUSSOCK,”

- Lance Jennison, VSTWP Chairperson

STRATFORD/BRIAGOLONG

This project encompassed 175 properties over 628 hectares comprising four separate areas of Stratford, Avonlea Estate, Briagolong, and Heath Estate, within the Wellington Shire, West Gippsland. This extension project represents a departure from the typical VSTWP extension approach because it is located well outside the main area of serrated tussock and consists largely of smaller town blocks. The typical VSTWP extension areas consist of larger properties with higher densities of serrated tussock. The surveillance and education provided by this project works in with Agriculture Victoria who deliver extension and compliance on larger holdings in the area. West Gippsland is a key area for stopping the spread of serrated tussock.

The project started in mid-November 2019 with an introductory letter distributed to all landowners. VSTWP Extension Officer, Antares Fuhrmann, officially launched the project by attending the Maffra Community Market in early December 2019, which provided a valuable opportunity to engage with the community and stakeholders in the region.

Antares worked closely with stakeholders in the area, including; Agriculture Victoria, Wellington Shire Council, Southern Rural Water, Department of Land, Water and Planning, Maffra and District Landcare Group, West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Gippsland Water, Gippsland Plains Rail Trail Committee, and the VSTWP Community Representative in West Gippsland.

Landowners were able to access a grant through the Maffra and Districts Landcare Network which supported the control of priority weeds and pest animals on private land located within the Wellington Shire.

Of the 34 properties assessed during Phase 3, 18 were identified as having serrated tussock present, this represents 53% of those inspected.

The smaller holdings and town blocks provided a challenge, with some difficulties inspecting a proportion of the properties due to the property owner either not agreeing to participate in the project or being uncontactable.

This project provided a good opportunity to engage with landowners and raise awareness of serrated tussock in the west of the state. The VSTWP is expected to continue delivering extension in West Gippsland to restrict the spread of this noxious weed.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS (72% completed in 2019-20)



457 Ha
of assessed land



127 properties
assessed



2.79 Ha
observed with
serrated tussock



0.27 Ha
treated for
serrated tussock



Figure 5: Stratford/Briagolong Extension Area. (DJPR, 2020)

MOUNT WALLACE

The Mount Wallace project area is located south of the township of Ballan and bounded by the Geelong Ballan Road to the east, and the Moorabool River East Branch to the west. The area covers 77 properties over 6,741 hectares within the Moorabool Shire. As of the end of June 2020 there were 42 properties inspected, representing 50% of the project area.

The project commenced in late November 2019 with an introductory letter distributed to all landowners. VSTWP Extension Officer, Roger MacRaild, officially launched the project at the Ballan Autumn Festival in mid-March, which provided a valuable opportunity to promote the project and provide advice on managing serrated tussock.

There was great support from the Moorabool Catchment Landcare Group and the Moorabool Shire, with the Shire controlling serrated tussock on roadsides early in the project. The results of that spraying were quite apparent and provided a good starting point for engaging with landowners in the area.

It was encouraging to see a high level of compliance on the properties with wind turbines being installed. This is expected to reduce any spread via vehicles involved in construction and maintenance.

This project was impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, with several landowners not being available to attend inspections or meet the extension officer on properties. This extension project will continue into the next financial year, with a number of treatments outstanding and further engagement and extension services required. It is hoped that the easing of COVID-19 restrictions will allow further access to landowners who have been affected by the lockdown.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS (50% completed in 2019-20)



5,073 Ha
of assessed land



42
properties
assessed



122 Ha
observed with
serrated tussock



“THERE WAS GREAT SUPPORT FROM THE MOORABOOL CATCHMENT LANDCARE GROUP AND THE MOORABOOL SHIRE, WITH THE SHIRE CONTROLLING SERRATED TUSOCK ON ROADSIDES EARLY IN THE PROJECT;”

– Roger MacRaild, VSTWP Extension Officer



Figure 6: Mt Wallace Extension Area. (DJPR, 2020)

"MANY OF THE LANDHOLDERS WITH LARGER PROPERTIES ALREADY HAD GOOD SERRATED TUSOCK CONTROL PROGRAMS IN PLACE AND WERE VERY SUPPORTIVE OF THE PROGRAM."

- Tim Johnston, VSTWP Extension Officer.

TEESDALE NORTH

This project area lies within the Golden Plains Shire and is bounded by the townships of Teesdale to the south, Meredith to the north, Lethbridge to the east and Meredith-Shelford Road to the west. The project area encompassed 167 properties over 13,047 hectares and includes the ephemeral waterways of Native Hut Creek and Bruce's Creek.

Project delivery was delayed from March through to the end of June due to COVID-19, which limited face-to-face property assessments. As of the end of June 2020, there were 83 properties inspected, representing 50% of the project area. Properties that had not been inspected by March received a second mailout in May 2020. Despite these delays the project is expected to be completed by December 2020.

The project area covers two Landcare Networks - the northern section of the project area is within the Moorabool Landcare Network (Bamganie Meredith Landcare Group) and the southern section is within the Geelong Landcare Network (no designated Landcare group).

VSTWP Extension Officer, Tim Johnston, commenced the project by attending the Bannockburn Farmers market in collaboration with the Geelong Landcare Network (GLN) in September and October 2019. The GLN are commended for regularly promoting serrated tussock control at this market.

Most of the larger properties to the west and north of the area are commercial agricultural enterprises, focussing on broad-acre grain production or pasture grazing by sheep. As much of the region had previous exposure to the state Government serrated tussock compliance activities, many of the landholders with larger properties already had good serrated tussock control programs in place and were very supportive of the program.

The bulk of the area observed to have serrated tussock was located at the 185-hectare Boonderoo Nature Conservation Reserve, a high value plains grassland reserve with heavy infestations of serrated tussock. However, Parks Victoria coordinated some excellent spot spraying activities in June 2020 to ensure the infestations were treated and contained.

Other problem areas for serrated tussock were smaller land holdings with a non-commercial focus, predominantly around the township of Lethbridge. Some of these landholders had limited exposure to best practice land management practices and were relatively new to the area, so they generally had limited exposure to previous serrated tussock extension activities.

The project will continue until the end of 2020, with an aim to increase landowner engagement and treatments.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS (50% completed in 2019-20)



5452 Ha
assessed
land



83
properties
assessed



180 Ha
observed with
serrated tussock



45 Ha
treated for
serrated tussock



Figure 7: Teesdale North Extension Area. (DJPR, 2020)

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FUNDED PROJECTS

The VSTWP delivered a number of projects through a grant from the Federal Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper.

Cost-benefit case studies

The VSTWP developed four cost-benefit case studies to communicate the return on investment of controlling serrated tussock in relation to four different landowner types:

- small non-commercial landowner,
- small commercial landowner,
- Local Government, and
- residential developer.

Provision of extension services in West Gippsland

This project provides support and management plans to landowners in Stratford and Briagolong, in West Gippsland. Details can be found on page 19.

Citizen science mapping project

This project was aimed at empowering communities throughout Victoria to contribute to the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA). Increased citizen science mapping is expected to improve our understanding of the distribution and spread of priority weeds and the effectiveness of management strategies. The course sessions were delivered by ALA staff over a 6-week period from mid-August to late-September 2020, with 37 people from a range of organisations across Victoria. Total duration of delivered course time was approximately 45 hours.

Serrated tussock signs

The project involved the provision of 100 long lasting aluminium fence signs for landowners, along with 100 corflute signs for distribution to rural supply stores. The signs are expected to increase awareness of serrated tussock across Victoria.

A best practice weed hygiene guide prescribing methods for planning site works, implementing weed hygiene measures, and contract oversight. It aims to increase the capacity of Local Government, linear reserve managers, land managers, and public land managers, to manage serrated tussock and prevent spread.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

- Over 4,500 pieces of extension material distributed through 16 field days, one stakeholder event, community engagement activities, enquires and extension projects.
- Interviews on ABC Country Hour, Bairnsdale FM, ABC Western Victoria, Apple FM, 3CR, Voice FM and Seymour FM.
- Added four new videos to the VSTWP YouTube channel and website, with permission from NSW DPI. New TV Commercial added to website.
- Distribution of four editions of the Tussock Times newsletter, delivered to over 280 subscribers via e-news.
- The production of three new case studies highlighting successful serrated tussock management from the most recent extension areas.
- The publication of serrated tussock media articles in seven Local Government newsletters across the state, and 15 community newspapers, promoting the VSTWP and serrated tussock control.

PROMOTION

- VSTWP Facebook page gaining 360 followers, an increase of 30% over 12 months.
- YouTube channel updated, featuring four new videos attaining over 11,000 views, an increase of 15% over the 12 months.
- Major Radio Advertising on the Hamilton FM and Gippsland FM for 2 months, highlighting the services offered by the VSTWP. With an average of 150 website visits per day over this period.
- Eight Community Radio Community Service Announcements, promoting the VSTWP and our achievements.
- Serrated tussock signage displayed at Farm Supply Stalls across the State, in Seymour, Castlemaine, Creswick and Sunbury
- Continued funding for applied science research through Federation University to provide improved management practices for control of serrated tussock.
- Contributing funding to international research into biological control methods for serrated tussock.
- 30 second TV Commercial 'Serrated tussock is bad' and 'Who is the VSTWP' videos completed and added to the website and social media.

THANK YOU

The VSTWP Committee would like to thank the following groups and organisations for their ongoing support:

The large number of Landcare groups and Local councils that have contributed to the success of our projects.

The following organisations for providing funds:

- Victorian Government, Agriculture Victoria, Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions
- Australian Government, Department of Agriculture Water and Environment

The following local councils for supporting VSTWP extension projects:

- Macedon Ranges Shire Council
- Wellington Shire Council
- Moorabool Shire Council
- Golden Plains Shire Council

Without you, our serrated tussock projects would not be as effective as they are today. We greatly appreciate the time, dedication and involvement in controlling serrated tussock.

VICTORIAN SERRATED TUSSOCK WORKING PARTY

For more information please visit:

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