

Regionally prohibited weeds of the Mallee: African Feather Grass



Above: Seeds. Photo: DPI.

Left: African Feather Grass. Photo: DPI

African Feather Grass (*Pennisetum macrourum*) is a highly invasive weed. It spreads rapidly through rhizomes and forms dense infestations that eliminate other species. The weed is regionally prohibited in the Mallee. Under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act)* land owners must take all reasonable steps to eradicate regionally prohibited weeds on their land.

Description

African Feather Grass is a perennial grass that grows in clumps 1 to 1.8 m high. Leaves are light green and ribbed on the upper surface, sometimes with a purple

tinge on the tips and edges. The underside of leaves is darker green. Leaves grow up to 1.2 m long and 1.2 cm wide.

Flowers are purplish yellow or brown, clustered on erect or drooping flower heads eight to 30 cm long. Individual flowers are surrounded by bristles (usually one cm long), which give the flower head a feathery appearance. The plant flowers from October to April.

Distribution

Currently there are no African Feather Grass infestations in the Mallee. However, vigilance is needed to stop this weed from

At a glance

African Feather Grass is:

- A regionally prohibited weed in the Mallee;
- A perennial grass that invades pastures, woodlands and riparian vegetation; Infestations outcompete native species, have low palatability for stock, can harbour rabbits and pose a fire hazard; and
- Mainly spread by rhizomes (underground stems), but seeds also stick to clothing and animals.

establishing in the region.

In Victoria, African Feather Grass is mainly confined to the south west, around Casterton and the Glenelg River. Scattered populations also occur in Gippsland. The weed also occurs in New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia.

Dispersal

Once a plant is established, African Feather Grass mainly spreads via rhizomes (underground root-like stems).

Vehicles or machinery (including road graders and farm machinery) can transport pieces of rhizome, allowing the plant to spread.

Seeds readily disperse by water; infestations are often found along streams. Seeds have bristles which stick to clothing and animals and can also be spread by wind.

History

The species is native to South Africa. It may have arrived in Australia in hay brought back with horses from the Boer war. The plant was first recorded in Victoria near Casterton in 1904. In the past African Feather Grass was planted in gardens as an ornamental grass.

Why it is a problem

African Feather Grass invades grasslands, grassy woodlands and riparian vegetation and freshwater wetlands. It forms dense clumps that outcompete and displace native species. Large plants can block waterways and channels by trapping silt and debris.

It is also a pastoral weed and has low palatability to stock. Infestations can harbour rabbits and pose a fire hazard.

Table 1. Responsibilities of land managers and Government in controlling noxious weeds as per the CaLP Act.

Category	Description	Responsibilities
State prohibited weeds	Weeds that do not occur in Victoria or occur in relatively small infestations. These weeds pose a serious threat and it is possible to eradicate them.	The Victorian Government is responsible for eradicating these weeds.
Regionally prohibited weeds	Weeds that are not yet widespread in a region, eradication is possible.	Land owners must take all reasonable steps to eradicate these weeds on their land.
Regionally controlled weeds	These weeds are widespread in a region and need ongoing control to prevent their spread.	Land owners must take all reasonable steps to prevent the growth and spread of these weeds on their land.

Control options

Application of a registered herbicide and hand removal of isolated plants are the most effective ways to control African Feather Grass. However, the plant will reshoot from rhizomes; repeated treatments over a long time are needed to exhaust the reserves of these rhizomes.

The best time of year to control African Feather Grass is from October to February. For more control options, visit www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds

Care needs to be taken to prevent vehicles or machinery from spreading rhizomes.

What you can do help

Land managers can help prevent the spread of weeds on their property by:

- Maintaining vehicle hygiene to reduce spread of weeds by machinery and equipment;
- Minimising ground disturbance; and
- Monitoring their property to detect new weeds early and eradicate them before they become established.

Further information

The 'Mallee Invasive Plant and Animal Management Strategy outlines how the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (CMA) manages weeds in the region. For a copy of the strategy, visit the Mallee CMA website at www.malleecma.vic.gov.au or contact the Mallee CMA on 5051 4377.

The CaLP Act sets out the responsibilities of land managers and the Government in controlling noxious weeds in Victoria (see Table 1).

References

Department of Primary Industries (2012), Invasive plant Classification, < <http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds/invasive-plants>>.

Parsons, W. and Cuthbertson E. (1992) Noxious Weeds of Australia, Inkata Press, Sydney.

Walsh, N. and Entwisle, T. (eds) (1994), Flora of Victoria, Vol. 2, Inkata Press, Sydney.

Project Partners



Published August 2012

This publication may be of assistance to you but the Mallee Catchment Management Authority refers readers to our Terms and Conditions, available from our website.

Printed on 100% recycled Australian paper, made from pre- and post-consumer waste.