

## Regionally prohibited weeds of the Mallee: Serrated Tussock



Above: Field of Serrated Tussock. Photo: DPI.

Left: Serrated Tussock. Photo: DPI.

**Serrated Tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) is one of Australia's worst weeds. Infestations are a key threat to native grasslands and can severely reduce the carrying capacity of pastures. It was declared a weed of national significance because of its invasiveness, potential to spread and economical and environmental impacts. The weed is also 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**

Serrated Tussock is perennial tussock grass that grows up to 60 cm high. Leaves

are stiff, narrow, are tightly rolled and have finely serrated edges. Flower heads can grow up to 35 cm long. They are initially erect but droop once seeds have formed. The plant flowers from September to December.

Serrated Tussock changes colour with the seasons. In full flower (late spring/summer) it has a distinctive purple tinge. After flowering the seed heads turn golden brown. The plant remains green over summer when other grasses have usually browned off, and then turns golden yellow in late autumn and winter.

When not in flower, Serrated Tussock looks similar to native tussock grasses, such as Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia*

### At a glance

Serrated Tussock is:

- A weed of national significance;
- A regionally prohibited weed in the Mallee;
- An aggressive weed of pastures, grasslands and grassy woodlands;

Serrated tussock displaces native grassland species, is unpalatable to stock and reduces the carrying capacity of pastures.

species) and Poa species. The best way to distinguish Serrated Tussock from natives is to identify the ligule: a small (1 mm long) white flap at the junction of the leaf and stem. In Serrated Tussock the ligule is hairless, whereas it is hairy in native grasses.

### Distribution

In Victoria, dense populations of Serrated Tussock occur around the Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat area. Fortunately, Serrated Tussock does not currently occur in the Mallee, but vigilance is needed to keep this problem weed out of the region.

### Dispersal

Serrated Tussock is a prolific seeder (a single plant can produce up to 100 000 seeds). Wind can carry seed heads many kilometres. Machinery, animals and contaminated hay can also spread the seeds. Seeds may be carried downstream in rivers, creeks and channels.

### History

Serrated Tussock is native to Argentina, Uruguay, Chile and Peru. It was first noticed in Victoria in the early 1900s.

### Why it is a problem

Serrated Tussock is a highly invasive, drought tolerant species. Because it looks similar to native grasses, Serrated Tussock often goes unnoticed until it forms large infestations. Spread is most rapid in disturbed or degraded areas. If left unchecked it can develop a monoculture after a few years.

Serrated Tussock is a key threat to native grasslands. It displaces native grasses and herbs, reducing the habitat for native animals and negatively affects biodiversity.

Serrated Tussock is a serious pasture weed. It has a very low nutritional value and is unpalatable to stock. Heavy

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.

infestations can severely reduce the carrying capacity of pastures and can lower property prices.

Dense infestations also pose a fire risk, as does wind-blown seed building up against fences and sheds.

### Control options

Chipping with a mattock and removing individual plants is an effective way to eradicate small isolated infestations. The base of the tussock needs to be removed completely for this to be effective. For more control options, visit [www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/serratedtussock](http://www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/serratedtussock)

Application of a registered chemical is the preferred method of control for larger infestations.

### 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](http://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 (2008), National best practice management manual – serrated tussock, Victorian Department of Primary Industries.

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

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