

Pest plant – Bulbil watsonia

(*Watsonia meriana* var. *bulbillifera*)

Fact sheet January 2019

What is it?

Bulbil watsonia is a perennial winter-growing bulb that is native to South Africa and was introduced to Australia as an ornamental plant. It is a weed of roadsides, drains, creek lines, wetlands, un-grazed pastures, recreational and industrial areas.



What does it look like?

Flowers

The flowers spikes bear two rows of curved, tubular flowers (10-15 on each spike) that are orange, red, pink and purple in colour, and have six partially fused 'petals' 5 to 8 cm long. Flowers appear in spring and early summer.

Stems

The flowering stems up to 2 m tall appear in spring and are rounded, up to 20 mm thick and are often reddish in colour. Stems arise from the base of the plant along with the majority of the leaves.

Leaves

Bulbil watsonia produces dense stands of light green, sword-shaped leaves from the base. The rigid leaves have a prominent mid-vein and are less than 110cm long and 1 to 5 cm wide. They are produced from a central corm in winter and die off in late summer – autumn, or earlier in dry years.

Why is it a problem?

Bulbil watsonia is an aggressive weed of native vegetation. It can form dense stands that exclude other ground-layer species in more open bush, wetlands and along creek lines. It also invades roadsides, wasteland and unimproved pasture, especially in winter waterlogged areas.

It is regarded as visual pollution on roadsides because of its size and non-native appearance.

It is suspected to be poisonous to stock, with stock generally avoiding mature plants, although they appear to be unaffected by young shoots.

Distribution

Bulbil watsonia is widespread in southern SA, especially in higher rainfall areas with winter waterlogged soils. It has a reasonably wide occurrence on Kangaroo Island where it has spread from driveway and garden plantings to roadsides, and also from the dumping of garden waste.

How is it spread?

Watsonia reproduces mainly by producing new corms and by dropping cormils from the flower spike. The cormils are small, shiny, red-brown reproductive buds that develop in clusters at the base of the leaves. They are scattered when the leaves die and each one can form a new plant.

The corms (swollen underground stems) from which existing plants grow also divide and can create two to three new plants each year.

Long distance spread usually occurs through intentional planting, earthmoving or dumping of garden refuse. Cormils or corms are spread along road verges, in soil that is moved or in soil adhered to road making machinery. The cormils can also float and are transported by flowing water.



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How do we control it?

Contaminated soil and plant material should be disposed of safely to avoid creating new infestations. Cormils and corms must be burnt or buried to a depth greater than 20cm, as they will re shoot if left on the soil surface.

Remove by hand:

For small infestations, individual plants can be dug out by hand or by loosening the soil with a fork and pulling the top growth.

Cultivation

Cultivation to 10 cm provides good control if done after the old corm is exhausted and before the new corms form or before the flower stem emerges.

Grazing

Stock will graze on young shoots and can provide effective control in pastures.

Herbicide:

Small infestations in native vegetation can be controlled by spot spraying or wiping foliage with herbicide, although this can be labour intensive.

For advice on chemical control techniques, contact the Natural Resources Centre in Kingscote or download the *Weed control handbook for declared plants in South Australia* for advice on chemical control http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds_and_pest_animals/weeds_in_sa.

Declarations

The following sections of the NRM Act apply to bulbil watsonia on Kangaroo Island:

175(2) Cannot transport the plant, or any material or equipment containing that plant, on a public road

177(1) Cannot sell the plant

177(2) Cannot sell any produce / goods carrying the plant

182(2) Landowner must control the plant on their land

185(1) NRM authority may recover costs for control of weeds on roadsides from adjoining landowners



For more information

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