



June 2011

NRM Plan

CONTACT

Main Office

Northern and Yorke NRM Board
PO Box 175
41-49 Eyre Road
Crystal Brook SA 5523
Ph: (08) 8636 2361
Fx: (08) 8636 2371
www.nynrm.sa.gov.au



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This fact sheet was produced with the support of the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country program.



Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)

Reducing its impact in the Northern and Yorke NRM Region

Description of this weed

Gorse has been designated a Weed of National Significance. It is a prickly, dense shrub commonly 1 -2.5m tall, however it can grow to 7m tall.

The stems are soft, grey-green and hairy when young, hardening with age. Gorse stems are covered with small branches with alternating leaves. All the branches end in a green spine up to 50mm long with deep grooves running the length.

Leaves are 6-30mm long by 1.5mm wide and resemble spines. They are grey-green when young, darkening with age.

Gorse flowers are shaped like those of other legumes, bright yellow in colour, 15-25mm long, and have a distinct coconut-like smell.

Seed pods are 10-20mm long by 6mm deep, pea-pod shaped, covered with fine, dense hairs and are black when mature. In each pod is 2-6 seeds, 3-4mm across each with a hard, water-resistant coating which allows them to remain dormant in the soil for up to 30 years.



Why is it a weed and what is the impact?

In South Australia gorse is restricted to higher rainfall areas. In the Northern and Yorke Board area gorse occurs on the Yorke Peninsula, in the Clare Valley, in Port Wakefield and Jamestown.

Gorse reproduces by seed and has a very large, long-lived seed bank. Gorse seed pods split open explosively, ejecting seeds up to 5m. Significant long distance dispersal occurs when contaminated soil is carried on vehicles and machinery and by the transport of contaminated topsoil and fill. Sheep from gorse infested areas can carry gorse seeds and pods in their fleece. Seed may also be transported in an animal's fur or in soil carried on its feet.



Gorse thickets provide shelter for rabbits, feral cats, house mice and foxes. Gorse can significantly reduce carrying capacity as well as restricting access to the land. Gorse invades native vegetation where it reduces floral diversity and alters fire behaviour. Roadside gorse is a particular threat because it displaces threatened native veg from roadside remnants; it is a fire hazard and potential ignition point and it reduces visibility for motorists.

What can you do? – Some methods of control

Control programs require a minimum of five years commitment, including yearly site inspections and follow-up treatment of all seedlings.

Burning is a useful tool before grazing, or in dense thickets, before spraying. It stimulates germination so must be used as part of an integrated control program.

Mechanical

Bulldozers or tractors with rippers are useful for controlling large infestations. Follow up is essential for lasting control.

Chemical

Herbicides can be effectively applied, either directly to leaves when plants are at least 500mm high or painted onto cut stumps. Herbicide is best applied when plants are actively growing.

Treated bushes should be checked 12 months after herbicide application and then treated for any regrowth. Do not spray when plants are in full flower or when bees are active.

Please contact your local NRM Authorised Officer for advice on chemical control.

Further information

CRC Weed Management Guide;
Weeds of National Significance:
Gorse – *Ulex europaeus*

Help and Assistance NRM Authorised Officers

Snowtown – 8865 2166
Riverton – 8847 2544
Minlaton – 8853 2795
Port Augusta – 8641 1513
Peterborough – 8651 3577
Orroroo – 8658 1086

