

Managing pest plants

PEST PLANT CONTROL IN THE UPPER NORTH DISTRICT

A pest plant or weed is a plant that grows where it is not wanted. In most cases, agricultural or environmental pest plants have been introduced into an environment and become over abundant.

Pest plants often arrive unintentionally, carried into the district or onto properties by machinery, vehicles and animals, attached to clothing or footwear, or embedded in hay and fodder.

They can compete with crops and pasture for moisture and nutrients; contaminate crops; compete with native flora and fauna; reduce the agricultural and conservation value of the land; and in some cases they may be toxic to people, livestock and native animals.

Pest plants have a major impact on Australia's agricultural productivity and environment. Each year, more than four billion dollars is lost through decreased production and the cost of control programs.

How are pest plants categorised?

Pest plants are categorised based on how invasive they are, their potential to spread and their environmental, economic and social impact.

Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) are very invasive, high impact pests that are difficult to manage without a coordinated management program. There are 32 pest plants on the WoNS list and their management is coordinated nationally between all levels of government, as well as organisations like Natural Resources Northern and Yorke and individual landholders.

Alert List weeds are non-native weeds that have established naturalised populations in the wild. They are likely to pose a serious risk to the environment, but are currently of limited distribution nationally. With appropriate intervention, Alert List weeds can be successfully contained or eradicated.

Declared plants are those that present a significant threat to agriculture, the environment and public health and safety. They are supported by legislation.

Priority weeds are not restricted to WoNS or declared plants, but have been identified as a priority plant to manage within a particular district or region.

Managing pest plants is important to help reduce their impact on the environment and to stop them from spreading further.

Priority plants for Upper North District

Silverleaf nightshade (*Solanum elaeagnifolium*) – WoNS



Silverleaf nightshade has infested thousands of hectares of agricultural land in the N&Y region, reducing crop and pasture production. It develops large interconnecting root sections within colonies and spreads as seeds and root sections. A highly competitive and persistent plant, silverleaf

nightshade can be toxic to stock and horses.

Bridal creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*) - WoNS



Bridal creeper forms dense thickets of foliage that blanket the ground, and dense tuber mats below ground that prevent the germination of native plants. Unlike many other pest plants, bridal creeper is able to colonise undisturbed ecosystems. Attracted to the berries, birds, rabbits

and foxes can spread the seeds over large areas. Seeds can also spread when soil is disturbed by water or machinery.

Wheel cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) - WoNS



Wheel cactus invades agricultural land and native vegetation. Dense stands provide harbour for pest animals such as foxes and rabbits, limit stock movement and diminish agricultural productivity. The large spines can cause injury to animals and people and contaminate wool and

hides. Drought resistant, wheel cactus spreads readily from seeds and stem segments.



African boxthorn (*Lycium ferocissimum*) – **WoNS**



The thorny bushes of African boxthorn form impenetrable thickets that can become a problem along fence lines, creeks, flood outs and around dams. It can prevent stock access to watering points and crowd out desirable pasture plants. African boxthorn can also invade native vegetation after a

disturbance. Seeds are spread in flood waters, in contaminated soil or produce, and by birds and mammals that eat the berries. African boxthorn can also regrow from root segments.

Wild olives (*Olea europaea*) – **declared plant**



Wild olives are woody weeds that aggressively invade native vegetation and outcompete understorey plants. The long-lived trees permanently change the structure and biodiversity of bushland. Large wild olive infestations are expensive to control and are a fire hazard due to the

natural oils in the plant. Fruit of the wild olive are smaller and less fleshy than those cultivated for edible olives and oil. Seeds are spread by birds and foxes.

Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) – **declared plant**



An introduced perennial pasture plant, buffel grass can dominate the ground layers in many plant communities. Used in other parts of Australia as a pasture plant and to minimise dust, buffel grass can reduce plant diversity over time. Pasture production may also decline. Seeds are

spread by wind, water and animals. Dry buffel grass foliage forms a continuous flammable ground layer. It can carry intense and extensive fires at much shorter intervals than the native understorey, altering native plant communities over time.

Other declared pest plants in Upper North District include:

Caltrop (*Tribulus terrestris*), horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), Lincoln weed (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*), innocent weed (*Cenchrus longispinus* and *C. incertus*) and creeping knapweed (*Rhaponticum repens*).

Pest plants – whose responsibility?

Pest plants don't recognise property boundaries. By working collaboratively, Natural Resources Northern & Yorke and landholders have the best chance of controlling priority pest plants in the Upper North District.

Each pest plant has a different life cycle and characteristics. Management should be targeted for each plant type. Often, a combination of methods will be required to achieve effective control. Vehicle, plant and equipment hygiene is also important.

Private land:

Landholders have a legal responsibility, under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*, to control declared plants on their land. They should know their pest plants, their responsibilities and the resources that are available to them.

On roadsides:

Roadsides are part of public road reserves, which are owned by the Crown. Under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*, regional NRM boards are responsible for ensuring that declared pest plants are controlled on roadsides.

Landholders are encouraged to control declared plants on roadsides that adjoin their property. Where the Board undertakes the work, under the NRM Act, landholders may be issued with accounts.

As approvals may be required, landholders should contact the Natural Resources Centre Clare, before undertaking control work on roadsides. Care should also be taken to avoid any off-target damage to native vegetation.

Natural Resources Centre Clare can provide the following support:

- A free weed identification service to help landholders determine if pest plants are present on their property.
- Advice about the most appropriate management method for plants on their property.

The Northern & Yorke NRM Board encourages landholders to work together to control pest plants across districts.

For more information

Natural Resources Centre Northern and Yorke

Unit 2/17 Lennon Street Clare
P (08) 8841 3400

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/northernandyorke

Control Methods

Biosecurity SA Weed Control Handbook
www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecuritysa

Weed Management Guides for WoNS weeds

www.weeds.org.au/WoNS

SA Weed Control App (free) available from App Store

Images provided by DEWNR and Biosecurity SA.



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