

White weeping broom (*Ratama raetam*)

REDUCING ITS IMPACT IN THE NORTHERN AND YORKE NRM REGION



Description of this weed

White Weeping Broom was brought to Australia from the Mediterranean as an ornamental shrub. It was first recorded in South Australia in 1841. It has become naturalised in South Australia, including the Yorke Peninsula.

It is a shrub that grows to about 3m tall and may reach 6m across. Plants are grey-green with slender, drooping branches.

Young plants are wispy with a single stem and strong taproot. The leaves which are very small and narrow (about 5mm long and 1mm wide), are quickly dropped and the plant remains leafless for most of the year. Flowers are 8–10mm long, white and pea-like, appearing close to the stems in clusters of 3–15.

White Weeping Broom reproduces from seed. The hairless grape-shaped seed pod (10–15mm diameter) contains one or two kidney-shaped seeds (6.5 mm long) which may be yellow, green, brown or black in colour.

Stems of young plants are covered with long soft hairs but become hairless with age. Each plant produces hundreds of seed pods and up to thousands of seeds. The seeds drop when the seed pods split open, and can be spread by water. A hard seed coat renders most seeds dormant initially, but as the seed coat wears away germination can take place. Seeds remain viable in the soil for several years.

Why is it a weed and what is the impact?

White Weeping Broom is on the Australian Government Alert List for Environmental Weeds, a list of 28 non-native plants that threaten biodiversity and cause environmental damage. Although only in the early stages of establishment, these weeds have the potential to seriously degrade Australia's ecosystems.

This species is possibly the most drought tolerant of the exotic brooms in Australia, making it a particular threat in dry regions and during drought years. Like many of the broom plants, it invades nutrient-poor to fertile, well-drained soils where it can fix nitrogen. It forms a scrub layer that can out-compete and shade out native plants.

It may infest grazing land and prevent access by stock. It is probably the least palatable of all the exotic broom plants.

What can you do?

Prevention and early intervention are the most cost-effective forms of weed control. It is important to identify existing sources of White Weeping Broom, such as garden specimens, and remove them before they invade natural ecosystems.

Outbreaks should be reported **immediately** to NRM Officers. Do not try to control White Weeping Broom without their expert assistance.



Control effort that is poorly performed or not followed up can actually help spread the weed.

Currently no herbicides are registered for control of White Weeping Broom.

Physical removal is an option for isolated plants, especially if they have not seeded, although seedlings are hard to hand pull. Hand-pulled plants can be placed into large plastic bags and left in the sun and then thrown out. Seeds present on pulled plants should be cut from plants, collected in bags and placed in the rubbish. Take care not to spread seeds.

Once an area of White Weeping Broom has been treated, it will be necessary to monitor the treated area for many years and destroy new plants. Monitor the area in summer and remove any young plants that may have germinated.

Early detection and eradication of small infestations is important to prevent the spread of White Weeping Broom.

An ongoing commitment to ensure that new infestations do not establish in surrounding areas should be a priority.

Pest plants – whose responsibility?

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

On private land:

Landholders have a legal responsibility, under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004*, to control declared plants on their land.

On roadside reserves:

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 the control of declared pest plants on roadside reserves.

Landholders have the opportunity to control declared plants on road reserves adjoining their property. Where control work is undertaken by the local board, an account may be issued to landholders.

Before undertaking control work on road reserves, landholders should contact the Natural Resource Centre to determine if any approvals are required. Care should also be taken to avoid any off-target damage to native vegetation.

Natural Resources Northern and Yorke can provide the following support to landholders:

- A free weed identification service
- Advice about the most appropriate management method for pest plants on their property.

Other N&Y NRM Fact Sheets

Weeds - Reducing their impact in the Northern and Yorke NRM Region



Further information

Australian Weed CRC (2003), Alert List for Environmental Weeds - Australian Weed Management Guide – White weeping broom (*Ratama raetam*).

Lamp, C & Collet, F. (2002). A Field, Guide to Weeds in Australia. Inkata Press, Melbourne.

For more information

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Control Techniques

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

South Australian Weed Control App
available from your App store (free)

Weed Management Guides for WoNS weeds
www.weeds.org.au/WoNS



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