

GIANT RAT'S TAIL GRASS MANAGEMENT GUIDELINE



1. Introduction

Giant Rat's Tail grass (GRT) includes the four declared GRT grasses *Sporobolus pyramidalis*, *S. natalensis*, *S. jacquemontii*, and *S. fertilis*. In the Gympie region, GRT is a well-established, widespread, and abundant weed, which negatively impacts the economy and the environment. GRT management is expensive and time consuming, and control activities are often met with limited success in the long term.

Council management strategies for GRT are based on biosecurity risk, and higher risk situations are prioritised for compliance management actions. Higher biosecurity risk sites are likely to be located where GRT is NOT as widespread and abundant on a regional scale, OR where inadequate GRT management will result in GRT being directly spread to areas where GRT is NOT already widespread and abundant on a regional scale.

This guideline is designed to assist all land users to meet their general biosecurity obligation (described below) and to manage the risk of GRT spread onto and across the land they use, and to other properties.

2. Management expectations

GRT management is a shared responsibility. To minimise the spread of GRT from an existing location and to reduce the impacts that GRT have on valued assets, everyone should follow the eleven (11) recommended actions listed below.

If there is very little GRT growing on land you use, it is important that you have an effective management plan for ALL GRT under your control. Intensive efforts in controlling small amounts of GRT will benefit the individual property and the region in the long term.

Recommended actions for EVERYONE:

The two (2) points within the blue box are recommended to be undertaken as a priority; all points are important management actions.

1. Treat GRT growing on and 1.5 metres either side of all 'movement zones' (e.g., roads/tracks/footpaths, stockyards, and vehicle/material laydown areas).
2. Install and maintain a five (5) metre wide 'containment buffer' around the perimeter of the property.
3. Treat GRT infestations located on accessible flood plains.

4. Quarantine livestock for at least 7 days and have a containment area for isolating potentially contaminated stock/feedstuffs/equipment that can be monitored and treated for GRT.
5. Livestock should be fenced out of waterways and flood plains, and other areas where GRT cannot be effectively managed, such as land with inaccessible terrain.
6. DO NOT slash/mow GRT bearing mature seed. If pasture must be slashed, wash down dirty equipment before slashing areas free of GRT or before moving machinery off-site.
7. Do not sell or buy GRT contaminated items, such as fodder/hay/mulch from land with GRT present. Buy GRT free soil/plant material.
8. Manage a 'vegetated buffer' area around your boundary, to protect your land from GRT seed entry.
9. Keep vehicles and equipment clean - stick to designated roads and tracks and avoid GRT infested areas.
10. Clean all vehicles, machinery, tools, boots, and other equipment when leaving GRT infested areas.
11. Ask that visitors and service providers clean their vehicles, machinery, and any other equipment before entering your property. You may need to provide an area for them to wash-down.

3. General Control Considerations

- Council Biosecurity Officers (CBOs) are available to provide GRT management and control advice tailored to individual properties and land uses. Integrated weed management processes are usually the most successful at controlling GRT.
- Adjacent to neighbouring property fence lines, spot spraying individual GRT plants with a permitted, fast acting herbicide such as glyphosate (e.g., Roundup), followed by application of flupropanate (e.g., Taskforce) to control new GRT seedlings, is a recommended action. The use of herbicides to control GRT is more likely to reduce GRT plant density over time and create effectively maintained containment buffers.
- After removing GRT seed heads or GRT plants bearing seed, carefully burn or bury (at least 50cm deep) seed-heads or put them in a sealed bag for disposal.
- Broad-acre GRT management is best achieved through good pasture management. Any process to promote the health and vigour of competitive, beneficial pasture grasses/ groundcovers, and to reduce soil exposure, will assist with GRT management over time.
- Appropriate stocking rates should be maintained to prevent overgrazing, which is a known cause of GRT spread and population increase.
- If an area has small amounts of GRT, it is advisable to control these prior to introducing stock into that area. If possible, avoid running stock in areas with GRT.

4. Legal requirements

These declared GRT grasses are restricted invasive plants under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* (the Act). They must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment without a permit. The Act requires everyone to take reasonable and practical steps to minimise the risks associated with invasive plants and animals under their control; this is referred to as a general biosecurity obligation (GBO).

The Act also requires Councils to risk assess declared species that pose a biosecurity risk to the local government area and determine what regional management outcomes match the biosecurity risk. Refer to Council's Biosecurity Plan for GRT management goals.

5. Biosecurity risk assessment

CBOs conduct property inspections under Council's Biosecurity Surveillance Program, to determine GRT infestation levels, biosecurity risk and management expectations on a property scale. Based on this information, CBOs provide advice on effective, best practice GRT management methods and expectations in line with this guideline.

For more information on management goals, refer to Council's Biosecurity Plan and Biosecurity Policy.

6. Compliance actions

In areas where GRT poses a higher biosecurity risk, a CBO may undertake compliance actions if a land user does not manage GRT risk appropriately. Compliance actions will be prioritised for properties where GRT is NOT widespread and abundant on a regional scale, or where a CBO determines from a biosecurity risk assessment, that compliance actions will make a substantial difference to the spread of GRT.

Council administered compliance actions will:

- Be prioritised for localities within the Gympie region where GRT is NOT widespread and abundant.
- Be based on an assessment completed by a CBO, of the regional and site biosecurity risk. From this assessment, a CBO may require certain outcomes in GRT management to be achieved.
- Target situations that will have the greatest impact on reducing biosecurity risk (GRT spread), be practically achievable, and have outcomes that benefit the broader community.

Where biosecurity risk associated with GRT management is high, and a land user fails to satisfy GRT management requirements specified by a CBO, Council may issue a 'Biosecurity Order' (under section 373 of the Act). If the recipient of a BO does not comply with the order, Council will arrange for control work to be undertaken on the land, at the expense of the recipient. Administrative fees will also apply.

7. Definitions:

Declared – an invasive species (Biosecurity Matter) that is listed in Schedule 2 of the Act as *restricted* invasive species.

Containment buffers:

- separate a widespread or dense GRT infestation from an area with less GRT, or an area that is actively being managed to reduce GRT. Movement zones (roads, tracks, walkways) should be maintained in the same manner as containment buffers. This is an area where GRT is 'treated' and GRT plants are practically free of seed at ALL times.
- Containment buffers and movement zones should:
 - Be treated with herbicide so that GRT plants are dead or dying AND/OR,
 - Be mechanically treated to remove GRT plants or seed (seed heads should be cut prior to seed maturity) AND,
 - Be effectively maintained at all times.

Treat (control/manage):

Actions taken to limit the spread of GRT seed and the growth of GRT seed and plants. These actions can include:

- Herbicide treatment: herbicides are substances that kill plants and are used to control GRT in agricultural, commercial, and domestic situations. Always follow the herbicide label instructions and ensure the herbicide is registered for use on GRT.
- Mechanical treatment: this type of weed control is a physical activity that inhibits unwanted plant and seed growth by removing, injuring, killing, or by making the growing conditions unfavourable. Mechanical weed control includes actions such as hand pulling, chipping out, cultivation with a competitive cover crop, mulching, and regular mowing or slashing prior to seed set.
- Fire is a mechanical treatment but MUST NOT be used in isolation of other actions (speak to a CBO for guidance on using this technique).

Vegetated buffer – an area of thick vegetation (crop, shrubs, beneficial grass, etc.) that will assist in stopping the direct GRT seed spread from and to neighbouring land. This action may be hugely beneficial to the landholder without any or much GRT – this is an asset protection measure.

Biosecurity Order - issued when a land occupier has failed to take all reasonable and practical measures to prevent or minimise a risk posed by invasive plants on land under their control and requires certain actions to be undertaken within a prescribed timeframe, to meet their GBO and this guideline.