What are State Alert Weeds?

These are invasive weeds that are not known to be in South Australia, or if present, occur in low numbers in a restricted area and are still capable of being eradicated. An Alert Weed would pose a serious threat to the State’s primary industries, natural environments or human health if it became established here. All Alert Weeds are declared under the Natural Resources Management Act 2004: their transport and sale are prohibited (Sect. 175 and 177), plants must be destroyed (Sect. 182), and if found on your land their presence must be notified to NRM authorities (Sect. 180) – refer overleaf.

Alligator Weed

*Alternanthera philoxeroides*

**WHAT IS IT?**

- An aquatic, semi-aquatic or terrestrial perennial plant that produces dense weed mats
- A Weed of National Significance (WoNS), it is a serious threat to waterways, wetlands and irrigated crop areas
- It is native to temperate regions of South America, but accidentally introduced to Australia
- It has been mistakenly grown in the past as a food
- Synonym: *Bucholzia philoxeroides*
- Also known as pigweed

![Alligator Weed](image)

**WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?**

- It is a particularly troublesome weed as it invades both land and water, it spreads easily from fragments, and is very hard to control
- When growing in fresh water, it can cover the entire water surface, preventing flow, and obstruct drains and waterways
- Dense weed mats can also reduce oxygen exchange, increase water loss and reduce water quality, adversely affecting aquatic plants and animals
- When growing on land it displaces other more favourable plants such as crops or native vegetation, and can be harmful to animals
DESCRIPTION

A mid-summer growing perennial herb 50 cm high. Flowers are white and papery in globular clusters. Green spear-shaped leaves are arranged along hollow stems growing 10 m long in water. On land, stems modify to become thickened roots reaching a depth of 1 m in the substrate.

HOW IT SPREADS

Spread occurs vegetatively when stems of the parent plant form roots, and break away forming 1 m thick buoyant mats, as the hollow stems aid flotation. These stems are transported through commercial and recreational activities. Plants are sourced from the aquatic trade, dumping of unwanted plants or deliberate planting, for example when it has been mistaken for the leaf vegetable mukunawanna.

HABITAT

Alligator weed tolerates a wide range of conditions on land and water. Optimum growth occurs in nutrient rich fresh water. It grows in brackish or slow-moving fresh water and moderately saline waterways, such as rivers, lakes, reservoirs, rice fields, swamps, irrigation systems, and shallow drainage ditches. Once established on land, it will survive extreme dry periods.

ORIGIN

Native to the Parana River floodplains of northern Argentina and adjacent countries in South America.

DISTRIBUTION IN AUSTRALIA

Current: Alligator weed has naturalised in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, but is present in all states, with infestations occurring in cool, warm temperate and subtropical climates.

Potential: Many wetlands and fresh water bodies in Australia are vulnerable to infestation. In SA, it is a threat to the River Murray and smaller streams in the Mount Lofty Ranges, Kangaroo Island and the South-east.

HOW IT GOT HERE

It was first recorded in the 1940s in Newcastle in New South Wales where it was growing on ballast dumped by wartime shipping.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Be on the alert for this plant using this Fact Sheet as a guide. If you see a suspicious plant that may be this State Alert Weed, please report it to your local Natural Resources Management (NRM) Board (contact details at www.nrm.sa.gov.au). For more information on weeds, including Alerts, contact your local NRM Board or visit either www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity (phone 08 8303 9620) or www.weeds.org.au.