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.

Dense Waterweed

*Egeria densa*

**WHAT IS IT?**

- A submerged, aquatic perennial herb that thrives in shallow, nutrient-rich, slow-moving or stationary water
- Forms dense stands of vegetation that exclude aquatic flora and fauna
- Native to parts of South America, it was introduced to Australia by the aquarium trade
- Also known as: Brazilian waterweed, elodea, anacharis, egeria
- Synonyms: *Elodea densa*, *Anacharis densa*, *Philotria densa*, *E. canadensis* var. *gigantean*

**WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?**

- Can form dense stands that restrict water movement, trap sediment, and cause fluctuations in water quality
- Blocks light penetration in water bodies, adversely affecting aquatic wildlife
- Eutrophication from decomposing plants can occur in warm conditions when water levels drop
- Dense beds interfere with water supplies, irrigation projects, and the navigation and recreational use of waterways

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*Image: Dense waterweed - Robert Videki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org*
DESCRIPTION
Minutely serrated leaves occur in whorls of 3-8 on long cylindrical stems growing to 1.5 m long, which form dense submerged leaf masses. White 3-petalled flowers are 2 cm in diameter, and float on the water in warmer months. Dense waterweed can be confused with *Elodea canadensis* and *Hydrilla verticillata*.

HOW IT SPREADS
Spread occurs vegetatively. Plants take root at the nodes, and stem fragments break from parent colonies through actions such as boat wash and mechanical harvesting as well as natural means like water currents. Plant fragments caught on boat trailers, fish traps and other equipment, survive long enough to cause infestations when equipment re-enters water. Introduced through the aquarium trade, the major means dispersal, and has spread from commercial harvesting purposes, ornamental plantings, and careless disposal of unwanted plants.

HABITAT
Dense waterweed prefers warm-temperate and cool subtropical climates where the water temperature rarely exceeds 30°C. Habits preferred are shallow and slow-moving bodies of fresh water, including rivers, lakes, ponds and dams, to depths of 7 m. As it is more cold tolerant than many other aquatic weeds, it can thrive in southern Australia.

ORIGIN
Native to eastern South America (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay).

DISTRIBUTION IN AUSTRALIA
Current: Naturalised in WA, Queensland, NSW, ACT, Victoria, and Tasmania. It is the dominant plant along 150 km of Hawkesbury-Nepean River system in NSW. It is known as a cultivated pond or aquarium plant in SA and has naturalised in the lowest part of the River Torrens in metropolitan Adelaide.

Potential: Dense waterweed could grow in any permanent, static or slow-moving freshwater body in southern parts of South Australia.

HOW IT GOT HERE
Introduced to Australia through the aquatic trade for aquarium and ornamental pond plantings. Still sold as an aquarium plant in Darwin and pet shops in Queensland.

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](http://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](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity) (phone 08 8303 9620) or [www.weeds.org.au](http://www.weeds.org.au).

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