Declared Plant Policy

Tree Heath (*Erica arborea*)

Tree heath is a shrub growing up to 5m tall with fine sclerophyll foliage that makes it resemble a native plant. It is naturalised from garden escapes in South Australia.

**Management Plan for Tree Heath**

**Outcomes**

- Native vegetation protected from degradation by tree heath.

**Objectives**

- Prevent the spread of tree heath to uninfested areas due to planting.
- Control high priority infestations in the control area according to regional management plans.
- Contain larger and low-priority infestations of tree heath in the control area.

**Implementation**

- Biosecurity SA to publicise the new status of tree heath as a declared plant.
- Natural Resources Management (NRM) authorities to respond to any reports of sales of tree heath.
- NRM authorities in the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region to delimit infestations and prioritise those that threaten significant native vegetation sites for control action.

**Regional Implementation**

Refer to regional management plans for further details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRM Region</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges</td>
<td>Manage sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alinytjara Wilurara</td>
<td>Prevent sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyre Peninsula</td>
<td>Prevent sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangaroo Island</td>
<td>Prevent sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern and Yorke</td>
<td>Prevent sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australian Arid Lands</td>
<td>Prevent sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australian Murray-Darling Basin</td>
<td>Prevent sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>Prevent sale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Declaration**

To implement this policy, tree heath is declared under the *Natural Resources Management Act 2004* throughout the whole of the State of South Australia. The movement or transport of
Tree Heath policy

the plant on a public road, by itself or as a contaminant, or sale by itself or as a contaminant, is prohibited. In the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region, NRM authorities may require land owners to control tree heath plants growing on their land. NRM authorities are required to control plants on road reserves, and may recover costs from the adjoining land owners.

Tree heath is declared in category 3 under the Act for the purpose of setting maximum penalties and for other purposes. Any permit to allow its movement or sale can only be issued by the regional NRM Board pursuant to section 188.

The following sections of the Act apply to tree heath throughout each of the NRM regions noted below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections of Act</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>175(1) Prohibiting entry to area</td>
<td>AMLR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175(2) Prohibiting movement on public roads</td>
<td>AW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177(1) Prohibiting sale of the plant</td>
<td>EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177(2) Prohibiting sale of contaminated goods</td>
<td>KI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180 Requiring notification of infestations</td>
<td>NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182(1) Landowners to destroy the plant on their properties</td>
<td>SAAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182(2) Landowners to control the plant on their properties</td>
<td>SAMDB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185 Recovery of control costs on adjoining road reserves</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review

This policy is to be reviewed by 2020, or in the event of a change in one or more regional management plans for tree heath.

Weed Risk

Invasiveness

Tree heath takes 3-4 years to begin producing seed. It has very high seed production, millions annually from a large bush. The seeds are tiny and disperse short distances by gravity, wind, water, slashing or soil movement. Long distance dispersal is mainly dependant on human activity by planting, or accidental transport of soil containing seeds on vehicles and machinery.

Seed germination may occur in autumn or spring. Seedlings are vulnerable to dry conditions and therefore recruitment is episodic. Infestations may begin on road verges, clearings and drainage lines, later extending into adjoining undisturbed native vegetation.

Impacts

Tree heath is competitive in native vegetation, invading gaps and preventing regeneration of other shrubs due to shading and possibly allelopathic effects. It forms dense pure stands that dominate the shrub stratum in native vegetation, and have the potential to alter the composition and diversity of plant communities.

It has no known impacts in agricultural production or human health, but is unpalatable to stock except as seedlings. On roadsides it may require expensive control to maintain sight lines due to the height and density of established plants.
Potential distribution

Tree heath is native to the maquis shrublands of the Mediterranean Basin with a wide range from Madeira to Ethiopia and Greece. It requires well-drained neutral to acidic soil of low nutrient status and a rainfall over 500 mm concentrated in the winter and early spring. It can also grow under shade of moderate tree cover.

Feasibility of Containment

Control costs

Heaths are difficult to manage in native vegetation because they grow among native plants, have high seed production and may form a soil seed bank.

Burning is not recommended as it is likely to favour heaths due to their rapid regrowth. In areas that have been burnt, a follow-up treatment before the seedlings reach flowering size is important.

Hand removal of small heath plants including the root is possible in moist or light soil. Heaths are not specifically listed on herbicide labels; herbicide applied by spray, stem injection or to cut stumps according to available permits can be highly effective.

No biological control agents are available for heaths.

Persistence

Individual tree heath plants live for 50 years or longer. They develop a massive lignotuber at the base, from which new stems will grow rapidly if the top is damaged by fire or slashing.

Like other heaths, it has a deeply penetrating mycorrhizal root system that enables it to survive hot dry summers.

Current distribution

Infestations of tree heath are currently known in the Mount Lofty Ranges from Pewsey Vale to Mount Compass. It is also naturalised in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.

State Level Risk Assessment

Assessment using the Biosecurity SA Weed Risk Management System gave the following comparative weed risk and feasibility of containment scores by land use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use</th>
<th>Weed Risk</th>
<th>Feasibility of control</th>
<th>Response at State Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native vegetation</td>
<td>negligible</td>
<td>very high</td>
<td>monitor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considerations

Tree heath was introduced as a garden ornamental shrub in colonial times and first recorded as naturalised in 1931. Its wood, known as briar, is imported for making tobacco pipes and knife handles but it is not cultivated for this purpose in Australia.

Risk assessment indicates a management action at State level of monitoring in native vegetation. However, the local weed risk of tree heath is higher in high rainfall areas. In the Mount Lofty Ranges NRM region a strategy of site management by enforced control is justified.

Synonymy


Taxonomic synonyms: