



HUME CITY COUNCIL
RE-SOURCE
Rural Environment Newsletter
Winter 2020

 hume.vic.gov.au/resource





Rushes: Native or Not?

Did you know that many rushes left behind after grazing are a native plant and protected by the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

Common pasture rushes in Hume, such as the Finger Rush (*Juncus subsecundus*), are native to Victoria. The Finger Rush typically grows 20-90 cm high in areas of damp or poorly draining clay. It grows in tussock like clumps, with smooth, hairless rounded stems growing from rhizomes.

Although it can be a nuisance in poorly drained pasture, it typically doesn't spread beyond these areas.

As a native species planning permission may be required before you can remove or destroy these species.

There is a similar but introduced species Spiny Rush (*Juncus acutus*) which can be distinguished by its much larger 1.5 metre height. This species is a noxious weed of waterways and is allowed to be control.

If you want to know if the rushes on your property are protected or if they can be removed, please send a photo of the plant to namethatplant@hume.vic.gov.au or contact Sustainable Environment Department to arrange an onsite visit on **9205 2200**.



The large Spiny Rush (*Juncus acutus*) a noxious weed of waterways (image: John Tann, CC BY 2.0)



Native rushes in a paddock (*Juncus subsecundus*).

The cover photo of this edition is of Frosty morning outside of Sunbury.

Credit to John Lakey



Is your soil at risk of erosion?

Some areas of Hume have soils that are dispersive. When these soils are exposed to excessive amounts of water flow, they can rapidly break down, causing potholes, gullies and slumping and potentially damaging infrastructure.

Because of this risk, it is important to know if your soils are dispersive. Fortunately, there is a simple test that will indicate this:

- Collect some small crumbs of soil. Ideally these should be collected from different depths, for example every 20 centimetres down to a metre.
- Place soil crumbs in clear containers with about a centimetre of distilled water.
- Leave the containers for 24 hours noting any changes after 30 minutes and 90 minutes.

If the water stays clear after this time the soil is likely stable, if the soil crumbs have dissolved and turned the water cloudy, then the soil is likely dispersive. The faster the water turns cloudy, the more dispersive the soil is likely to be.

If your property has dispersive soil it is important to implement erosion control methods, such as revegetation, maintaining pasture cover and where required applying a soil binding agent such as gypsum. Controlling rabbits that may burrow into these soils will also assist.

If you would like to know more about dispersive soils or erosion control, contact the Rural Environment Officer on iansm@hume.vic.gov.au or **9205 2200**.



Water flowing through this area of dispersive soils has caused major erosion issues.



Preventing kangaroo fence damage

Although iconic, kangaroos can sometimes be a nuisance due to the damage they can cause to fences. Fortunately, there are a few ways to reduce this damage.

The simplest method is by installing white tape or wire on top of the fences to improve the fence's visibility to kangaroos. This visibility will reduce the likelihood of a kangaroo running into it, decreasing the chance of damage to the fence as well as preventing injury to the animal.

Where grazing competition with livestock is an issue, the addition of electric outriggers to standard farm fences will discourage kangaroo attempts to cross, preventing overgrazing and reducing fence damage.

In areas where kangaroos frequently move across the landscape, access points can be installed. These points reduce damage by allowing them to pass through a fence. Two commonly used designs are swing gates, where a short segment of fence can pivot upwards; or an arch, where a tractor tyre is cut down into an arch and buried in the ground. When constructed low to the ground, these fence features will allow kangaroos to pass but will not be used by livestock.

For more information on kangaroo fencing designs, visit wildlife.vic.gov.au

Protect your animals from the winter cold

Now that winter is here it is time to ensure that your livestock are protected from the cold.

When animals are exposed to the cold, they may require up to 2.5 times more feed, they grow slower and are less productive. In addition, failure to provide proper and sufficient shelter for animals is a violation of section 9 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*.

Therefore, it is in every landholder's interest to ensure their animals have access to sufficient shelter, particularly from the wind. This shelter can be natural, such as tree windbreaks, or constructed such as fences or barns. Windbreaks are most effective when they are long and tall, to shelter as large an area as possible, as well as multi-directional to provide shelter from multiple wind directions.

If you would like assistance in designing windbreaks Contact Hume's Rural Environment Officer on **9205 2200** or iansm@hume.vic.gov.au

Making the best of a bad weed

Local landholder Len Karmel uses Chilean needle grass to his advantage.

Chilean needle grass (*Nassella neesiana*) is an invasive grass that can outcompete both native and pasture grasses. This is a problem for graziers as the grass is unpalatable in summer, while the sharp seeds can injure stock and reduce wool value. Because of this, it is best to control and eradicate the grass where possible.

But what if eradication is not viable?

Local landholder Len Karmel has been able to maintain productivity despite the widespread presence of the weed on his property through changing his management practices.

Despite its invasive nature, Len has otherwise found Chilean needle grass to be a drought tolerant grass that is palatable to stock for most of the year.

During the four- to six-week period from November, when the grass seeds and becomes unpalatable to stock, he will slash a paddock to keep the livestock during seeding, so they are safe from seed injury.

After the seed has dropped from the Chilean needle grass, livestock are returned to their usual paddocks to continue grazing.

Len has continued to successfully raise cattle and has even topped the market at the saleyard thanks to his management.

If you would like advice on identifying or managing Chilean needle grass, contact Hume's Rural Environment officer on **9205 2200**.

Does your property have a story to tell? Or do you have some land management suggestions that could help others in your rural community? We would love to write about it. Contact us on resource@hume.vic.gov.au or call the Rural Environment Officer on **9205 2200**



Patch of Chilean Needle Grass in seed.

Sign up for the RE-Source e-newsletter to get the latest news! Email resource@hume.vic.gov.au with the subject line 'Subscribe' and include your postal address to receive RE-Source as an email.

Draft Rural Strategy Consultation extension

The consultation period for the draft Rural Strategy will remain open until public drop in sessions can be held.

This release was followed by rapid changes to how Council and the community functions in the context of COVID-19.

Please register your email address for the project by emailing contactus@hume.vic.gov.au with 'Rural Strategy' in the subject line and we will keep you informed when public drop in sessions are scheduled.

You can visit hume.vic.gov.au/ruralstrategy to view the draft *Rural Strategy*, fact sheet and common community questions and responses, as well as find more information on how to make a submission. Submissions can still be made at any time during the consultation period.



Hume Enviro Champion Project Mentors opportunity

Are you interested in assisting others in developing their environmental community project?

Hume's Enviro Champions program is looking for people who have an interest in the delivery of environmental community projects to become volunteer project mentors.

This program is for people who live, work, study or volunteer in Hume to support individuals or groups who are implementing environmental projects.

If this opportunity interests you, contact the Environment Community Development Officer at job@hume.vic.gov.au or **0455 091 999**.

Conserving our Rural Environment small grants going online

The Conserving our Rural Environment (CoRE) small grant provides support to eligible landowners to manage and improve the quality of their rural property.

To be eligible, the property must be greater than 0.4 hectares and located in the Green Wedge, Green Wedge A, Rural Living and Farming zones. Small grants are not available to landowners who receive a rate reduction through the Agricultural Land Use Rebate.

In the past, landowners would receive a paper application form that needed to be completed and mailed back to Council before 31 March each year. In the upcoming application round, Council will launch a new online funding application system powered by SmartyGrants to make your application process a lot easier.

The Small Grant applications open on 1 July 2020 and can be accessed through hume.vic.gov.au/coregrant.

For any inquiries about Small Grants you can email coregrant@hume.vic.gov.au or call the Sustainable Environment Department on **9205 2200**.

Native bees workshop

Join Katrina Forstner from Buzz and Dig for an introduction to Australia's bounty of native bees. These online Zoom workshops will share lots of fascinating information about our beautiful native bees.

Introduction to native bees

Saturday 4 July, 10.30am–11.30am

Creating bee-friendly gardens

Sunday 5 July, 10.30am–11.30am

To register for this workshop visit hume.vic.gov.au/upcomingevents



Hume City Council recognises the rich Aboriginal heritage within the municipality and acknowledges the Gunung-Willam-Balluk of the Wurundjeri as the Traditional Custodians of this land. Council embraces Aboriginal living culture as a vital part of Australia's identity and recognises, celebrates and pays respect to the existing family members of the Gunung-Willam-Balluk and to Elders past and present.

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