

Alligator Weed in NSW Northern Rivers

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Alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*) is a Weed of National Significance and potentially could have devastating impacts on both agriculture and biodiversity in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. It is such a serious threat that it's declared a W1 Notifiable Weed, meaning that identified infestations must be reported to Far North Coast Weeds and an eradication strategy implemented.

Alligator weed is a perennial plant that grows in or near water or establishes in seasonally wet areas. It is a native of South America and was first found in Australia in the 1940's growing on the banks of the Hunter River near Newcastle NSW. It does not produce viable seed in Australia and is spread by the movement of plant fragments.

It could potentially become Australia's worst aquatic weeds due to its rapid growth, ability to choke waterways and difficulty to control. It threatens the biodiversity of waterways and poses a significant threat to agriculture, particularly crops reliant on irrigation.

The majority of its distribution in Australia is limited to three core infestation areas in Barron Box Swamp near Griffith NSW, Hawkesbury/Nepean catchment west of Sydney and the Hunter river floodplain. Smaller infestations are located in the NSW Northern Rivers, Murray region, and South East Queensland. It has also mistakenly been planted as a food plant and was grown in many backyard situations, mostly in Melbourne and Sydney.

Only two infestations have been found in the Northern Rivers. An infestation in Byron Creek (90 sites along 40km of stream), which could spread further downstream in the Richmond River Catchment, and a backyard infestation that has been reported at Byron Bay in December 2003. Both of these infestations are being treated by the Far North Coast Weeds.

A major concern is there could be other alligator weed infestations in the Northern Rivers that are yet to be discovered. Such infestations could stay undetected for years and only be discovered once they are well established and beyond eradication.

Early detection of alligator weed is critical for eradication and all environmental/resource management employees from the Northern Rivers can help lend a hand. All it takes is a bit of time to learn how to identify the plant, keep an eye out for it when near waterways and report any infestations to weeds officers.

Such vigilance may save help save the Northern Rivers from one of Australia's most devastating aquatic weeds.