

Wyndham's

Weed Management Framework



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FOREWORD

Wyndham City has a long history of delivering weed assistance programs that equip landowners and managers to control weeds. This history was born out of the great value Wyndham City places on the health and amenity of its landscapes and environment. Wyndham also understands how quickly weeds can degrade urban, rural and industrial areas when there is no concerted effort by a united community to oppose them.

We are therefore pleased to introduce Wyndham's *Weed Management Framework 2014-2018* which will strategically chart Council's future direction in the fight against weeds. The Framework applies to all land use and tenure in Wyndham but will specifically target assistance to rural landowners on whom the impacts of weeds are most greatly felt.

Developed following extensive consultation with the Wyndham community, land managers, stakeholders and Council officers, the Framework identifies key objectives Wyndham aims to achieve over the next five years and defines the specific programs Council will implement to achieve them.

The Framework advocates the importance of increasing the awareness and capacity of the community to undertake weed control and the strengthening of inter-agency partnerships. Importantly, the Framework also highlights Wyndham City's commitment to lead by example in meeting its obligations to control weeds on land that it owns and manages.

Wyndham City is committed to delivering the programs outlined in this document and is confident we can bring our community and organisations together to achieve a cooperative approach to controlling weeds in our region.

Regards,

Councillor Bob Fairclough, OAM
Wyndham City Mayor

Wyndham City Council Weed Management Framework 2014 - 2018

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|---|
| CaLP Act | <i>The Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i> |
| DEPI | The Department of Environment and Primary Industries |
| EPA | Environmental Protection Authority |
| PPWCMA | Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority |
| DOE | The Department of Environment |
| WMFSC | Weed Management Framework Steering Committee |

For the purposes of the Weed Management Framework, the definition of a weed is taken from the *National Weed Strategy* (NRMMC 2007):

A weed is considered as a plant that requires some form of action to reduce its harmful effects on the economy, the environment, human health and/or amenity.

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The following representatives provided information and assistance towards the development of this strategic plan and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged:

| Name | Organisation |
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| Frances Overmars | Pinkerton Landcare |
| Colleen Miller | Western Melbourne Catchments Network |
| Chelsea Wardrope | Department of Environment and Primary Industries |
| Alison Head | Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party |
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| Stefanie Wabnik | Melbourne Water |
| Russell Beer | Melton City Council |
| Trevor Prowd | Wyndham City Council |
| Peter Gibbs | Wyndham City Council |
| Julie Dickson | Wyndham City Council |
| John Kelm | Wyndham City Council |
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| Charles Grech | Paddock Solutions |
| Terry Hedt | Corio Landcare Group |
| Anthony Dufty | Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority |
| Peter Sullivan | Werribee Open Range Zoo |
| Truganina Landcare Group | |
| Corio Landcare Group | |

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1 INTRODUCTION

Wyndham City Council developed its *Weed Management Framework 2014 – 2018* (the Framework) to achieve weed reduction objectives on private and public land over the next five years. As weeds pose a greater threat to rural landscapes and communities the programs outlined in the Framework target assistance to these areas. The Framework empowers the Wyndham community to control weeds through the implementation of a variety of education, incentive and partnership programs.

The Framework was prepared in accordance with relevant policy and legislation and in consultation with Wyndham City Council officers, the local community, and other key stakeholders. The development of the Framework was overseen by a steering committee and sits under the *Wyndham City Plan 2013-2017*.

1.1 VISION

The vision of the Framework is:

Wyndham City Council will reduce the impact of weeds on our local economy, society and environment by empowering the Wyndham community, land managers and stakeholders to implement effective weed control.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

Four objectives and related programs have been developed to achieve the vision:

Objective 1: Increase weed control awareness and accountability.

Objective 2: Increase capacity for on-ground weed control.

Objective 3: Improve weed control partnerships.

Objective 4: Implement effective weed control on Wyndham managed land.

1.3 CONTEXT

Wyndham is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria and Australia and this expansive urban growth is likely to continue for at least the next 20 years. Spanning 542 square kilometres on a volcanic and coastal plain on the western fringe of Melbourne, the City is home to a diversity of land uses, expanding residential developments, strong industrial and technology districts, intensive vegetable growing areas, dryland farming areas, rural residential zones and conservation reserves.

Land degradation caused by invasive weed species is a significant issue in much of Wyndham. The volcanic plains west of Melbourne support conditions for many highly invasive grassland weeds. Established weed species such as South American needle grass species Serrated Tussock *Nassella trichotoma* and Chilean Needle-grass *Nassella neesiana*, infest large areas of Wyndham and pose a significant threat to the region's agricultural and biodiversity assets. African Boxthorn *Lycium ferocissimum* and Artichoke Thistle *Cynara cardunculus* are two other Regionally Controlled Weeds that have spread

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throughout rural Wyndham. Blanket Weed *Galenia pubescens* is not listed as a noxious weed in Victoria but is well established in Wyndham, frequently infesting roadsides and rural land. New emerging weed threats in the region include African Love-grass *Eragrostis curvula*, African Thistle *Berkheya rigida* and Cane Needle-grass *Nassella hyalina*.

Melbourne's explosive population growth in recent decades has led to many rural properties bordering the urban growth boundary to be bought up by property speculators. Such properties which used to be actively farmed are now often left fallow with weed infestations being allowed to spread unchecked. As many speculators do not live on or near these rural properties the likelihood of inducing behaviour change through community engagement activities is decreased. This trend towards increasing absenteeism is therefore proving to be substantial barrier limiting how weed issues in Wyndham's rural areas can be addressed.

Another significant change to rural farming in Wyndham will occur over the next 30 years as the State Government begins to publicly acquire properties for the future Western Grassland Reserve. Fifteen thousand hectares of rural land on the western outskirts of Melbourne have been identified for the Reserve, 79% of which falls within Wyndham's dryland farming district.

The circumstances surrounding the acquisition of their land has left many landowners disillusioned and unwilling to undertake weed control activities on their properties. Additionally, State Government changes to Wyndham's planning scheme has meant that certain weed control activities such as boom spraying and pasture improvement may not be allowed in these areas without a permit. Therefore empowering landowners to control weeds in these areas will remain a significant challenge long into the future.

Wyndham City Council has traditionally employed a range of programs to empower rural landowners to control problem weed species. From 2000 to 2010 Council implemented its Land Management Rate Rebate Scheme that provided an incentive (in the form of a 20% reduction in their payable property rates) for landowners to create and implement property management plans requiring target weed species to be controlled on their property. Participation in the Scheme was voluntary and only available to properties that satisfied Council's eligibility criteria.

Since 2010, Wyndham has been assisting eligible landowners to control weeds and undertake other land improvement works through the Land Protection Grant Scheme. Council empowers landowners to overcome weed issues through the Scheme by contributing 75% of project costs, performing all administrative duties and organising contractors to carry out weed control works. To date the Scheme has had limited uptake and is mainly utilised by lifestyle property owners.

Council also undertakes weed control of noxious and environmental weeds on land that it owns and manages. The majority of Council managed land includes urban open space and linear reserves along waterways and roadsides.

1.4 WYNDHAM WEED RESPONSIBILITIES

Wyndham City Council is responsible for:

- Managing regionally prohibited and regionally controlled weeds and established pest animals on roadsides that are included in the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) approved *Wyndham City Roadside Weed and Rabbit Action Plan* (Wyndham City 2014).
- Meeting all other responsibilities as a land manager in relation to declared weeds and pest animals.

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- Ensuring that its actions do not spread or exacerbate weed and pest animal problems.

Wyndham City Council can also add value by:

- Providing education and incentives to improve land management in the municipality.
- Being an advocate for effective weed management.
- Assisting with any enforcement orders sought by DEPI by providing information on weed control programs in the area, current levels of infestations and landowners who are not cooperating. Note that Wyndham City does not have powers to enforce noxious weed control under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act)*.
- Enforcing penalties for the illegal dumping of garden refuse. This should be targeted in high value asset areas.
- Involvement in weed management policy planning by state government and other agencies.

1.5 STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

A Weed Management Framework Steering Committee (WMFSC) was formed to guide the development of the Framework. The WMFSC members include Nanette Griffiths (Truganina Landcare), Alison Head (Serrated Tussock Working Party), Chelsea Wardrope (DEPI), Peter Gibbs (Wyndham City Council), Trevor Prowd (Wyndham City Council), Julie Dickson (Wyndham City Council), Anthony Dufty (PPWCMA) and Luke Hynes (Beacon Ecological). The WMFSC met at key milestones to review the consultation process and guide the development of the Framework.

1.6 CONSULTATION PROCESS

During October and November 2013, Wyndham City Council undertook consultation with key stakeholders and the community to provide input into the Framework. The consultation process included workshops with key stakeholders and local Landcare groups, listening posts at public locations and a survey that was made available both online and to rural landowners through a postal mail out.

The results of the consultation period are documented in *Wyndham Weed Management Framework. Consultation Report - January 2014* (Beacon Ecological 2014). This document is available for download on the Weed Management Framework page of the Wyndham City Council website.

OBJECTIVE 1:

INCREASE WEED CONTROL AWARENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

There are many landowners within the Wyndham community who have a great passion for weed control. However there is capacity to increase the wider Wyndham community understanding of the threat weeds pose to the environment and improve weed identification skills and knowledge of appropriate control methods. Further, it is vital that all landowners take responsibility to control and prevent the spread of noxious weeds on their property in accordance with the *CaLP 1994* particularly with regard to Serrated Tussock, African Boxthorn and Artichoke Thistle.

Properties belonging to landowners not controlling weeds can impact compliant neighbours undertaking effective control leading to tension between landowners and/or agencies. Landowners need also be aware that weeds can decrease property values, reduce agricultural productivity, degrade the natural environment and impact on social wellbeing. There are also significant economic, environmental and social benefits in controlling weeds.

The Wyndham community requires a strong knowledge of weeds, their impacts and control methods in order to adequately respond to weed threats as they arise. Educated landowners are more likely to undertake effective weed control and inspire their neighbours to do the same.

Wyndham City is well placed to deliver local education programs through brochures, online content, workshops, field days and community events. Where possible such programs should be developed and implemented in partnership with others organisations including DEPI, landcare, developers and the community itself.

OBJECTIVE 2:

INCREASE CAPACITY FOR ON-GROUND WEED CONTROL

While many Wyndham landowners have an understanding of the impacts of weeds, the Framework consultation process indicated that not all have the capacity to adequately manage weeds on their property, particularly due to a lack of time, resources or physical ability. Such landowners can benefit from incentive and support programs such as small grants to assist with labour and equipment costs or assistance with the management of weed contractors. Providing assistance to control significant infestations can also reduce weeds to a manageable level so that landowners are then able control them on an ongoing basis or potentially eradicate them entirely.

Wyndham City Council has delivered the Land Protection Grant Scheme since 2010. This scheme has offered assistance to landowners through a 75% contribution for contractor works to control weeds. Modification of the program outlined in this Framework will provide opportunity to increase weed control capacity across Wyndham. This will be achieved through financial assistance being provided to landowners who have the capacity to undertake weed control themselves but are restricted by the costs of doing so.

Another addition to the Scheme will be the development of land management plans for participating properties which will identify problem weeds and potential control options.

OBJECTIVE 3:

IMPROVE WEED CONTROL PARTNERSHIPS

Three important levels of partnership at Wyndham include Community, Organisations and Government as detailed below.

Community: During the consultation process many community members expressed concern that the sense of community in rural Wyndham could be diminishing. It is believed that this in part is due to the recent trend of land being purchased by absentee landowners or lost to urban growth. At a community level, landowners working together can foster a greater sense of community and social cohesion. Communication between landowners about locally prevalent weeds and best-practice control methods increases local knowledge and raises peer pressure to undertake control.

Wyndham City can assist landowners to openly discuss weeds more often by facilitating events with a weed related focus.

Organisations: Partnerships between organisations and community groups can result in a more effective use of resources, and should be encouraged where possible. This has particular relevance to widespread and highly invasive weeds such as Serrated Tussock.

Opportunities exist for Council to work with landcare groups, community conservation groups, the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party and local and state government agencies in applying for grants to fund a weed extension officer as part of a community led program to control Serrated Tussock. Council will also participate in, and facilitate, collaboration between organisations where required for effective weed control partnerships.

Government: An ongoing commitment to lobby state and federal government is important to ensure agencies that determine weed policy and provide weed extension resources are aware of, and respond to, Wyndham's local weed issues.

Further, Wyndham City will continue to work in partnership with DEPI to assist with compliance and enforcement where possible. This will be through maintaining partnerships with DEPI officers, reporting known locations of noxious weeds and assisting DEPI as required.

DEPI is committed to providing enforcement action on widespread weeds and pests where it can achieve the greatest public benefit. In line with this approach, DEPI considers providing enforcement action to support sustained community-led action where a group of landowners have taken coordinated action over a number of years to achieve a common standard of weed and pest control. DEPI also considers enforcement action to support the protection of high value catchment assets and where there is a significant impact on the wider public through a landowner failing to act on their legal responsibility to control weeds or pests on their land.

OBJECTIVE 4:

IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE WEED CONTROL WITHIN WYNDHAM MANAGED LAND

Wyndham City is the owner and in some situations committee of management for many reserves and roadsides across the municipality. As a landowner and manager, Council must abide by legal obligations of the *CaLP Act* with respect to control of listed noxious weeds. Council managed land requires ongoing effort to control environmental and noxious weeds. Further, Wyndham City vehicles and machinery, including slashers, have the potential to spread weed material between sites and along roadsides. This is a particular problem with regard to Chilean Needle-grass spread on roadsides.

Prioritisation, planning and monitoring of weed control works is to be undertaken to ensure effective use of resources. Systematic processes relating to weed hygiene of Council's plant and equipment must be put in place to ensure they are not transporting material and establishing new infestations elsewhere. Prevention of new weed incursions as opposed to controlling established infestations is the most effective use of resources.

Wyndham City can also lead by example by endeavouring to control environmental weeds where appropriate. Wyndham's Conservation Team will take steps towards this by formulating weed action plans for all Wyndham's Conservation Reserves. These action plans will identify environmental weed threats specific to each site and outline how these threats will be addressed over the next five years.

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IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

Council seeks to achieve the Framework visions and objectives through the implementation of the four programs listed below.

1. Community Education Program

Community engagement and education is an important activity for Wyndham City Council. An active and aware community can respond to weed issues more effectively at a landscape and local level.

2. Community Capacity Program

Council funded incentive programs that provide assistance to landowners can significantly increase weed control on private land. These programs assist landowners to reduce infestations to manageable levels and allow for discussion between landowners and Council officers increasing understanding of local weed issues for both parties.

3. Partnerships Program

Wyndham City Council values maintaining and promoting partnerships between relevant agencies, community groups and the wider community. Integrated weed management across land tenures is a priority as well as supporting the community and ensuring an ongoing commitment is achieved.

4. Wyndham City Council Weed Control Works Program

The Wyndham City Council manages various land types including roadsides, parks for recreation and conservation areas. Noxious weed control must be implemented in these areas to meet legislative requirements.

All programs described above must include monitoring and evaluation to ensure that resources are being used effectively and projects are adapted to meet targets. Project summaries and targets for the four programs are detailed in Table 1 below. The target demographics of each project are detailed in Table 2 ensuring that all sectors of the community are targeted effectively. The responsibility within Council to deliver the majority of these programs lies with its Environment Unit. For more information on each project see *Programs Descriptions - Wyndham City Weed Management Framework* (Beacon Ecological 2014). This document is available on the Weed management Framework page of the Wyndham City Council website.

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Table 1. Wyndham Weed Control Programs

| Programs | Projects | Annual targets | |
|------------------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| | | # of participants | Hectares controlled |
| Community Education Program | Weed Information dissemination: Online and mailed education campaign using weed brochures and fact sheets. | 300 | N/A |
| | Weed identification and control workshops: Targeted workshops and field days using expert presenters to promote awareness and capacity to respond to weed threats. | 80 (four events) | N/A |
| | Profile Raising: Activities to raise the profile of weeds in Wyndham to the local community and government agencies. | 20 | N/A |
| Community Capacity Program | Land Protection Grant Scheme: Modified grant scheme that offers: 1. Contractor Grants to cover 75% of weed contractor costs, and/or 2. Self-managed Grants to assist with landowner costs of undertaking their own weed control activities. The addition of the Self-managed Grants should lead to greater face to face communication between landowners and Council officers regarding weed management on private land in Wyndham. It is also anticipated that more landowners will be empowered to control weeds through the program. | 100 | 4,000 |
| Partnerships Program | Advocating for a Serrated Tussock Extension Officer: Working with local landcare groups and government agencies, funding will be sought for an extension officer to promote the control of Serrated Tussock across the municipality. If funding was attained the extension officer would undertake site visits to select parts of Wyndham to promote weed control and sustainable land management practices directly to landowners. The officer would also promote other Wyndham weed programs. | 40 | 1,200 |
| | Annual Weed Expo Event - Linking Communities for Weed Control and Awareness: The facilitation of community gatherings that increase local partnerships, knowledge and resilience and promote sustainable land management practices and integrated weed control. | 80 | N/A |
| | Enforcement: Wyndham environment officers will work closely with DEPI officers to assist with compliance programs where necessary and report offending properties. The customer complaint process will assist with compliance reporting on private land. | N/A | N/A |
| | Advocacy: Wyndham officers will lobby government for state and federal policies to be pertinent to Wyndham's weed issues, for an ongoing commitment to help address these issues and for Wyndham not to be overlooked regarding the allocation of weed extension/compliance resources. | N/A | N/A |
| | Improving Weed Control Alliances: Council participation in or facilitation of workshops with local land managers and agencies to ensure information sharing and cross tenure approaches to weed control result in the most efficient use of resources. | N/A | N/A |
| | Spray Unit Rental: Corio Landcare group has a herbicide spray unit for hire. Council will assist the group to increase its use through promotion and will also encourage other local groups to provide this type of service. | 20 | 200 |
| Wyndham Weed Control Program | Controlling Weeds on Roadsides and Council Managed Land: Continuation of the successful weed control program on Council managed land. This program fulfils Wyndham's legal obligations with regard to weed control. | N/A | N/A |

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Table 2. Program target demographics

| Category | Residential | Rural Residential Properties | Larger Farm Properties | Developers | Absentee Landowners | Government Agencies | Community Groups / Organisations |
|--------------|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| Education | Weed Information and dissemination | | | | | | |
| | | Weed workshops | | | | | |
| | Profile raising | | | | | | |
| Incentive | | Land Protection Grant Scheme | | | | | |
| | | Contractor/Self-managed | Contractor/Self-managed | Contractor | Contractor/Self-managed | | |
| Partnerships | | Spray unit rental | | | | | |
| | | Advocating for a Serrated Tussock Extension Officer | | | | | |
| | | Annual Weed Expo - Linking communities for weed control | | | | | |
| | | Enforcement | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Improving Weed Control Alliances |

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