



PROGRESS REPORT 2022 - 2023

Victorian
Serrated Tussock
Working Party (VSTWP)

The Community Led Approach has been implemented to allow concerned communities to take ownership of the problem and to take real steps towards effective control without complete reliance upon Government legislative enforcement..

VISION

To reduce the impact of serrated tussock on Victoria's economy, environment and communities.

THE VICTORIAN SERRATED TUSSOCK WORKING PARTY

The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) was launched in 1995, representing the first community led approach of its kind. The intention was to create a cooperative model of governance between community, Government, and other key stakeholders to deal with the threat of serrated tussock.

The cooperative governance approach to the strategic management of invasive species involves a range of stakeholders to increase participation in decision making and allow for shared responsibility.

The VSTWP has delivered a wide range of serrated tussock programs, including research into management practices, production of appropriate extension materials, provision of incentives to land managers and community groups and comprehensive mapping, extension, monitoring and extension campaigns.



SERRATED TUSSOCK

Native to South America, serrated tussock (*Nassella trichotoma*) is a highly invasive, tussock forming grass that is capable of growing in a range of climates and soil types.

Serrated tussock is a declared noxious weed in Victoria and is a Weed of National Significance (WoNS) due to its highly invasive nature, its negative impacts on agricultural production and its threat to biodiversity. Each mature serrated tussock plant can produce more than 100,000 seeds in a year, which are mostly dispersed by wind. Seeds can also be carried in fodder, vehicles or livestock and transported over vast distances.

The occurrence of serrated tussock in Victoria was first documented in 1954 at a site in Melbourne's north. The estimated area of serrated tussock in Victoria is 250,000 hectares, but its potential distribution has been predicted to cover 4.6 million hectares in Victoria or one-fifth of the state.

The distribution map in figure 1 shows where serrated tussock is currently found in Victoria. If left unmanaged it is estimated that serrated tussock has the potential to infest roughly two-thirds of arable and grazing land in Victoria (figure 2).

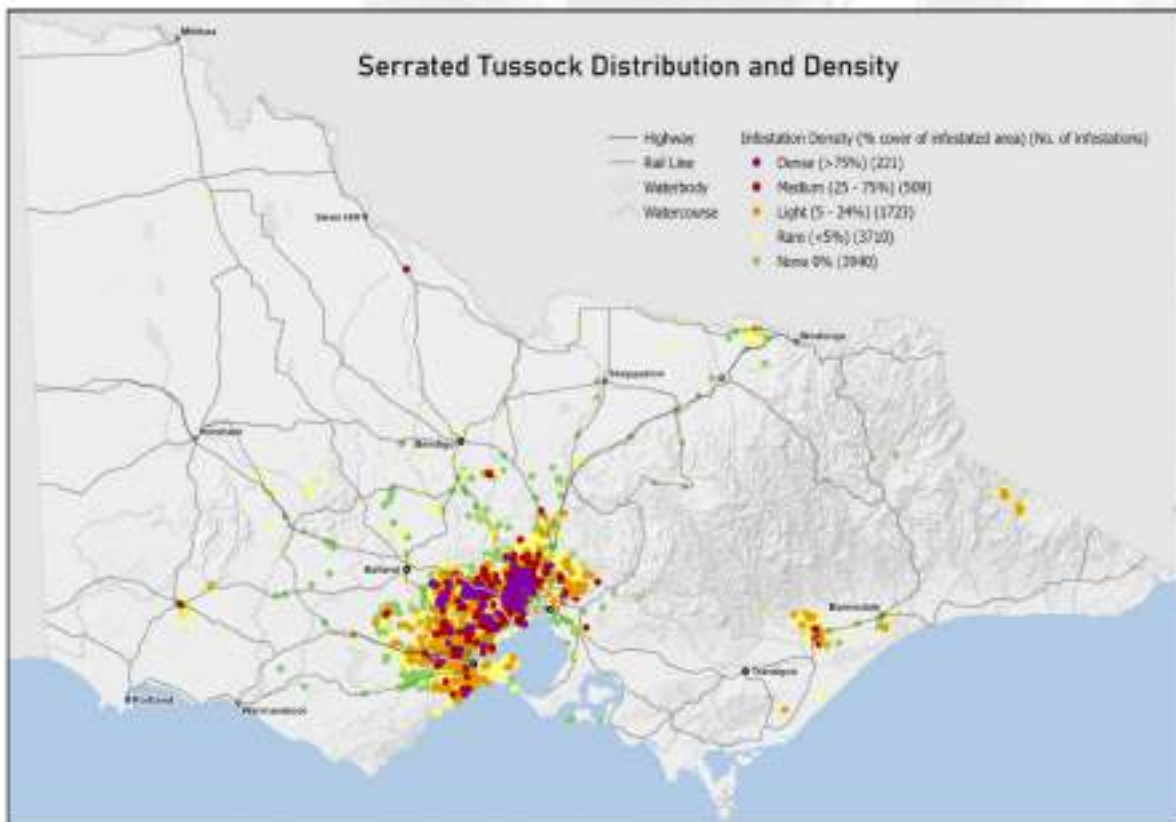


Figure 1: Distribution in Victoria as of September 2023

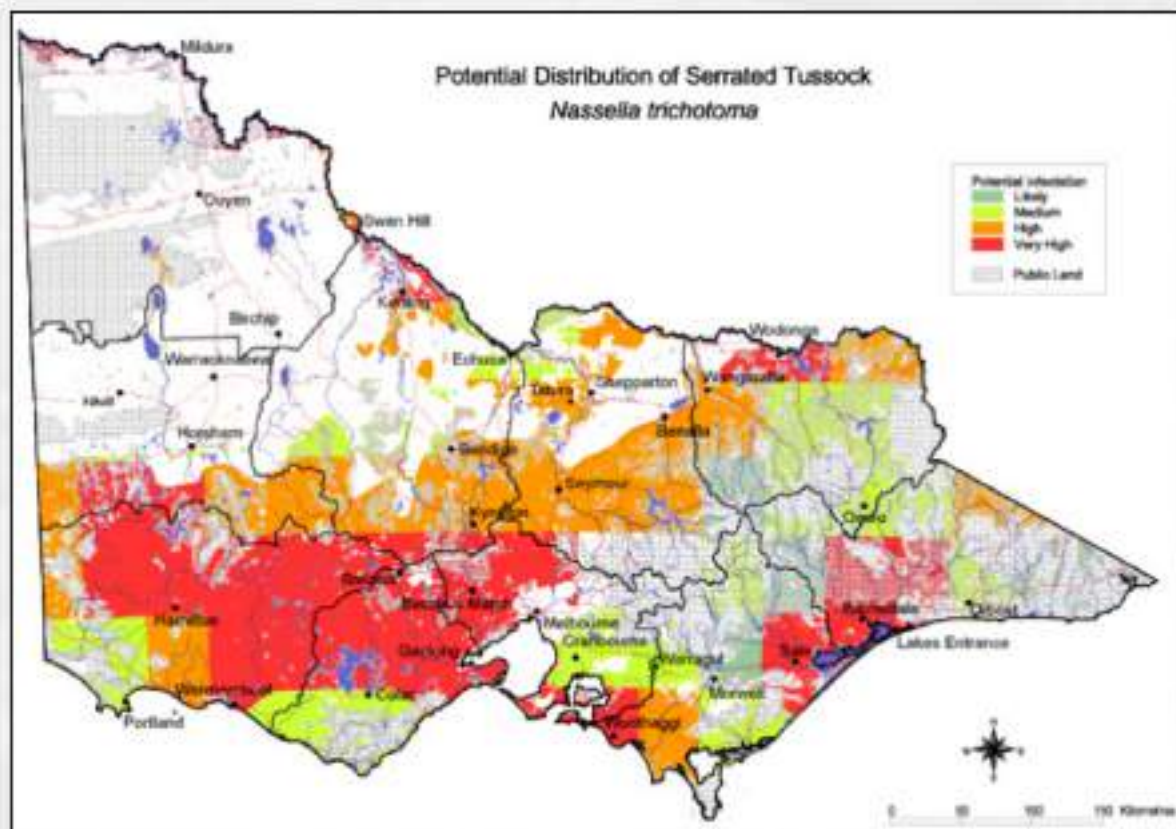


Figure 2: Potential distribution in Victoria

VSTWP MEMBERS 2022 - 2023

Lance Jennison	Chairperson
Bruce Boddington	Deputy Chairperson
Joe Lesko	Treasurer
Martin Deering	Secretary & Executive Officer (Agriculture Victoria)
Peter Lindeman	Community Representative
Lachlan McIntyre	Community Representative
Topsy Baulch	Community Representative



CHAIRPERSONS REPORT

This year, our Extension Officers reached out to landowners in the Romsey West Stage 2 and Beveridge areas, helping them to manage serrated tussock on their properties. They visited a total of 122 properties, covering an area of 5,036 hectares.

We also continued to spread the word about the threat of serrated tussock through various media channels, including print, social media, and radio. We shared stories, advice, and resources to raise awareness and encourage action.

The VSTWP members were essential for the success of our programs. They not only provided effective governance through various meetings and workshops, but also worked hard behind the scenes to manage a range of VSTWP activities. They also represented us at key agricultural shows and field days across the state, and shared their personal stories in a new video that showed the emotional toll of serrated tussock on landowners.

In April 2023 the VSTWP attended the Australian Biosecurity Awards in Canberra and received a community award for their work in the Weeds and Rabbits project, along with three other community pest management groups. The project, funded by the Federal Government and supported by Agriculture Victoria, aimed to improve the management of invasive pests and weeds in Victoria by engaging and educating landholders. The project ran from 2016 to 2021 and reached around 6500 people. The award recognises the group's contribution to Australia's biosecurity and environmental protection.

We also held meetings with New Zealand and Tasmania to share our experience in managing serrated tussock. It was a rewarding to be able to support the Tasmanian Government whilst they set up the state-wide network for invasive perennial grasses. - *continued over page.*



CHAIRPERSONS REPORT *Continued*

However, we also faced some challenges this year. The Future Directions report, which reviewed Agriculture Victoria's approach to managing established invasive species, proposed some changes that affected our funding and Executive Officer services. We are working with Agriculture Victoria and other stakeholders to adapt to these changes and ensure that we can continue our important work in managing serrated tussock across Victoria.

The VSTWP also completed a significant project with a consultant to develop a benefit:cost analysis for serrated tussock in Victoria. This project was long-awaited and we hope the findings will help to guide our work into the future.

We look forward to implementing our 2023-2028 strategy, which will integrate these changes and reflect our vision and goals. The VSTWP work closely with a variety of stakeholders.

We thank all our partners, stakeholders and supporters for their ongoing collaboration and commitment to controlling serrated tussock across Victoria.

Lance Jennison

VSTWP Chairperson



Lance Jennison,
Chairperson of the VSTWP

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The VSTWP leads the fight against serrated tussock in Victoria by guiding and community-led efforts to control this invasive weed. The VSTWP works with various stakeholders, such as government agencies, industry, research institutions, Landcare, and the wider community, to achieve its strategic goals.

The VSTWP Strategy 2018-2023 outlined how the VSTWP would support communities affected by or at risk of serrated tussock infestation. It also addressed how to prevent and reduce the spread of the weed, how to maintain awareness and motivation among stakeholders, and how to foster collaboration and innovation.

VSTWP Chairperson Lance Jennison said, “We are proud of what we have accomplished with the 2018-2023 Strategy. We are now reviewing it and developing a new one for 2023-2028”. The review recognised that serrated tussock had a widespread distribution in Victoria and that many communities could benefit from the VSTWP’s support. Figure 3 shows the group’s overall progress against the strategic actions.

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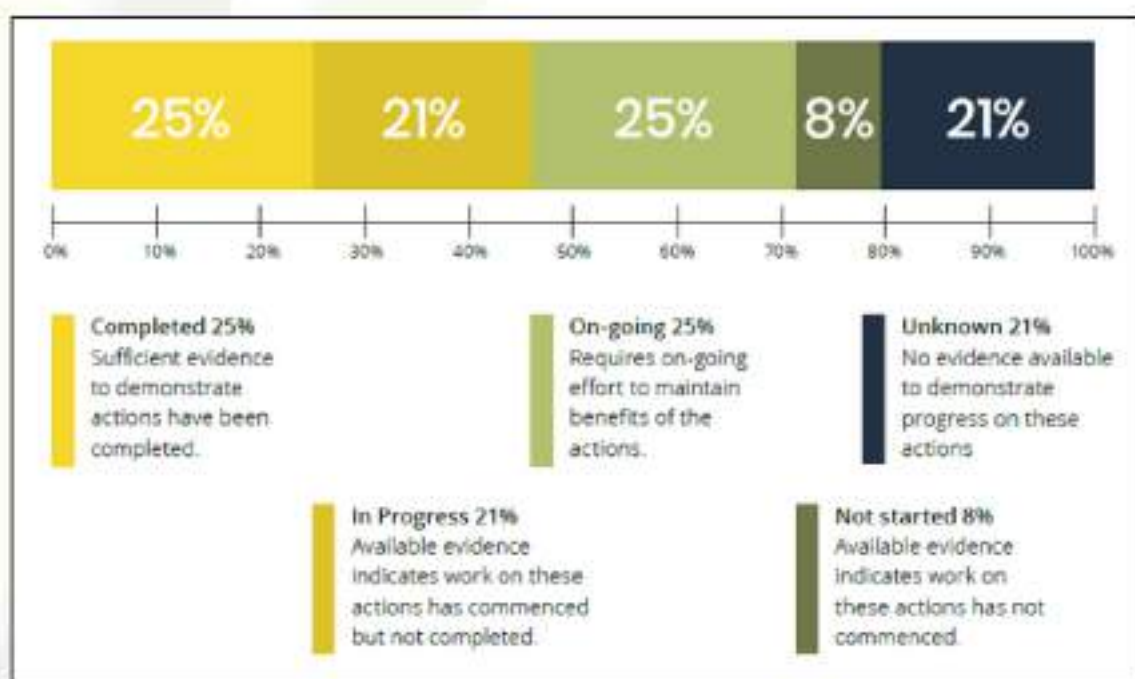
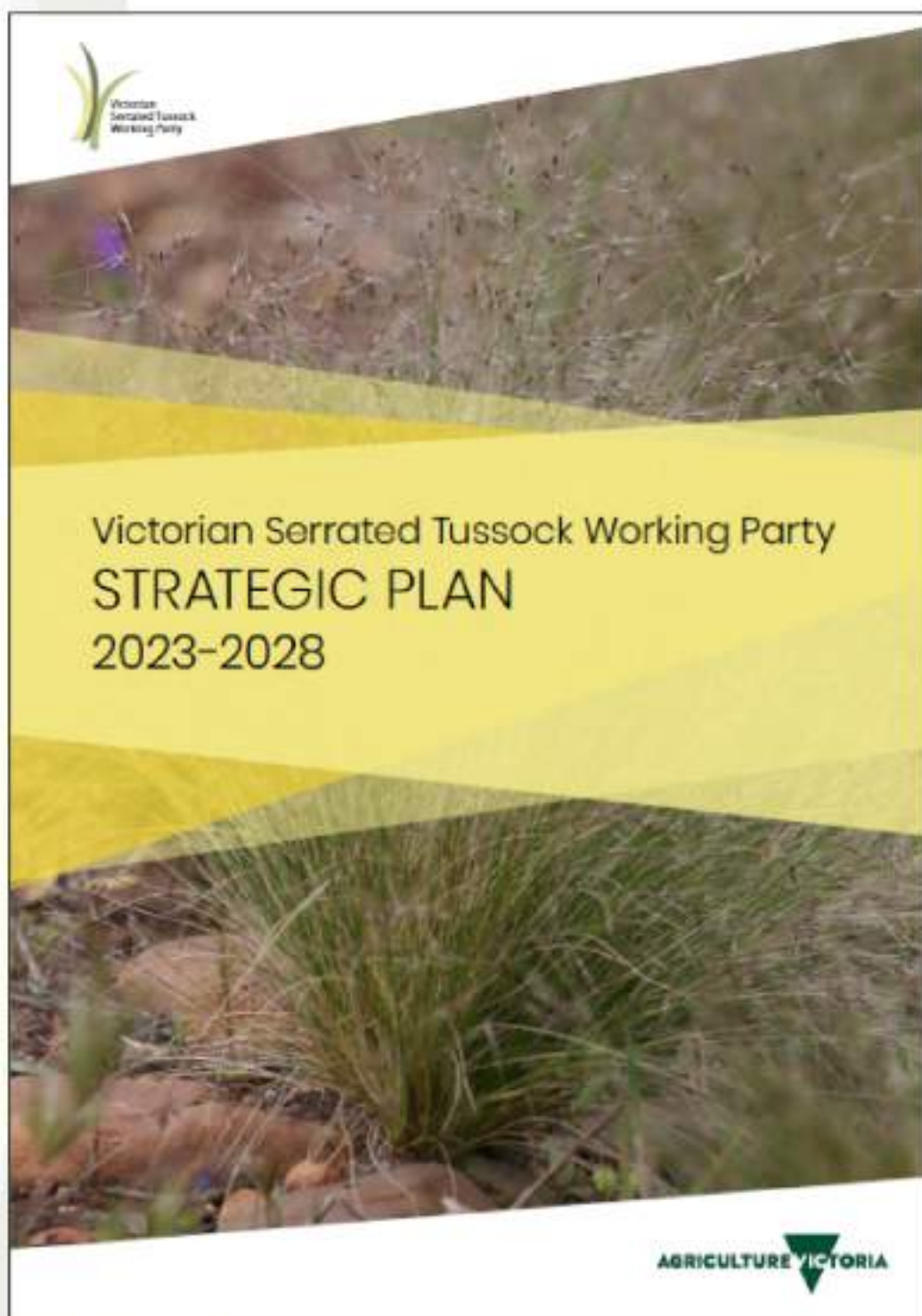


Figure 3: Overall progress against strategic actions between 2018-2023

STRATEGIC DIRECTION - continued

"The VSTWP Strategy 2018-2023 was a milestone in our journey to protect Victoria from the threat of serrated tussock. We achieved many of our objectives and learned valuable lessons along the way. We are now ready to embark on a new phase with a new Strategy for 2023-2028 that will build on our strengths, address our challenges, and seize new opportunities."



VSTWP EXTENSION PROGRAM

The VSTWP has found that the most effective way to reduce the spread of serrated tussock from the core infestation is through its extension (educational) programs. At the heart of these programs is their community focus to work with landowners and empower them to voluntarily achieve high levels of serrated tussock control.

The VSTWP engages experienced Extension Officers to work with landholders within defined project areas, offering tailored serrated tussock identification and management advice. Providing expert one-to-one advice is recognised to be most beneficial to landholders and forms the foundation of success. The broader project also sees the Extension Officers develop partnerships with various stakeholders including private landowners, Landcare, Local Government, and Agriculture Victoria.

Landholders in the extension areas receive the following services:

- An invite to an information day to launch the extension project,
- A landholder information package with serrated tussock identification, control, and management options,
- Individual property visits to inspect for serrated tussock,
- Property maps containing mapped serrated tussock infestations,
- Technical advice on serrated tussock control and management for each situation,
- Information on the local Landcare group,
- Rapid Appraisal Management Plan, if required.

VSTWP EXTENSION PROGRAM - *continued*

The VSTWP also delivers a second season of inspections for landowners that have not adequately controlled serrated tussock. Where these extension efforts are unsuccessful in convincing landowners of their obligations to manage serrated tussock a small number of properties will be referred to Agriculture Victoria.

In 2022 - 23, our Extension Officers delivered projects in the following areas:

- Romsey West Stage 2, in the Macedon Shire
- Beveridge, in the Mitchell Shire, Hume City, and City of Whittlesea

The VSTWP Extension Officers also delivered follow-up inspections for 11 properties in the Romsey Stage 1 extension area. All the follow-up properties were found to have undertaken sufficient serrated tussock control.

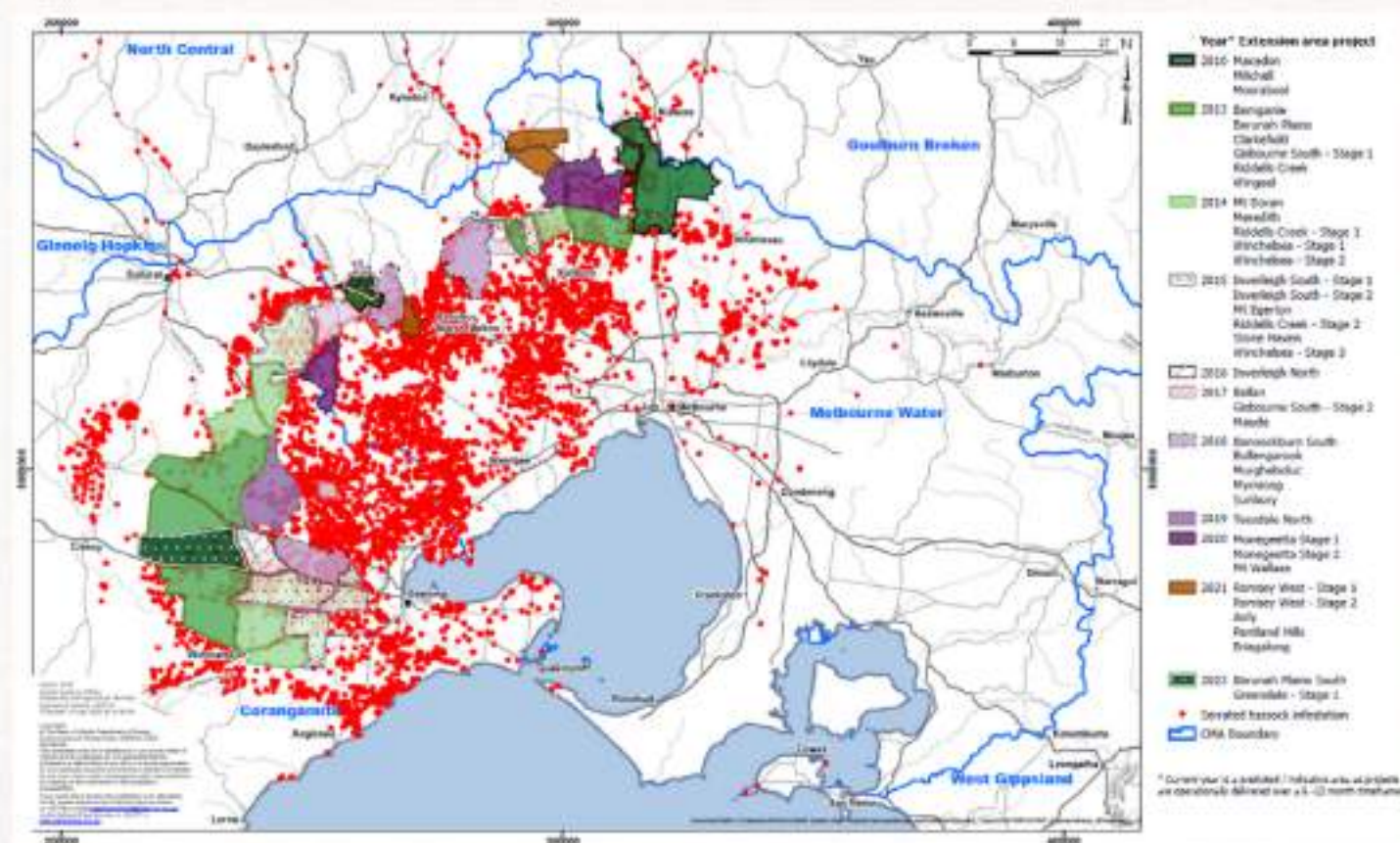


Figure 4: VSTWP Extension Areas 2010/23 (DEECA 2023)

ROMSEY WEST STAGE 2 EXTENSION AREA

The Romsey West Stage 2 extension area was delivered by Ivan Carter at IC Consulting and included 204 properties across 5,247 hectares.

The Romsey West Stage 2 target area lies within the Upper Deep Creek and Jacksons Creek Catchment and is the second part of a two-stage extension project around Romsey and Heskett.

This catchment area is known for natural temperate grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains and high ecological values. The land systems in this target area contain a mix of mostly cleared land and feature high rainfall area that have been used for agricultural production and hobby farm purposes, with some important waterways. Much of the land has been farmed for many years, and the remainder is heavily treed, with a variety of invasive plant issues existing across the target area, including blackberry, gorse, and Chilean needle grass. There are large subdivisions occurring in the region and lots of vacant land are in the process of being sold.

Serrated tussock was found scattered in very low numbers throughout the east of the target area towards Romsey, with mostly roadside infestations in south and west of the target area. The majority of landowners were found to be actively managing serrated tussock.

Despite a very successful project and much education delivered, there were a small number of landowners who were difficult to contact, all with small infestations not fully treated or adjoining a roadside infestation. The landowners were not able to be contacted, despite numerous visits, letters and calling cards. These properties will need to receive another year of extension from the VSTWP.

Key Achievements



**4,481 hectares
assessed**



**111 properties
assessed**



13 hectares infested



10 hectares treated





ROMSEY WEST STAGE 2 EXTENSION AREA - continued

"It was wonderful to be able to show many landowners live plants for identification purposes, even if they didn't have serrated tussock on their property. This prepares them well for future incursions" – Ivan Carter, VSTWP Extension Officer

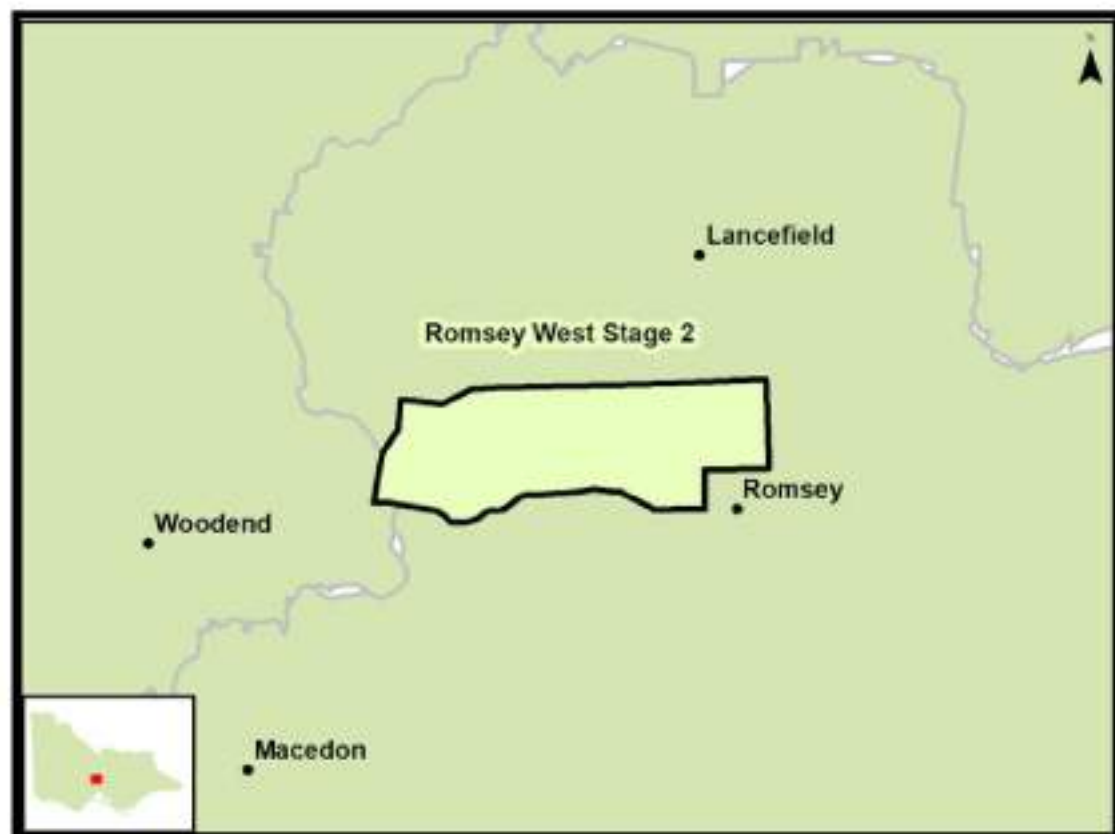


Figure 5: Romsey West Stage 2 Extension Area

BEVERIDGE EXTENSION AREA

The Beveridge extension project was delivered by ID Ecological Management and included 66 properties across 4,896 hectares. The area is situated on the northern fringes of Melbourne and retains large agricultural properties intermixed with lifestyle properties and areas of heavy construction and large-scale high-density subdivision.

Merri Creek runs through the eastern reaches of the target area, while Kalkallo Creek lies directly to the west and runs through several properties. Small pockets of intact vegetation can be found across several reserves within the townships and roadsides.

Stakeholder partnerships were developed early in the project to help promote awareness and gain knowledge of possible serrated tussock infestations within the area. Stakeholders included Agriculture Victoria, Mitchell Shire Council, Hume City Council, City of Whittlesea, Yarra Valley Water, Merri Creek Management Committee.

Awareness raising activities consisted of the initial letter distributed to all landholders in December 2022 by the associated councils. This letter included the project details and maps of all three target areas and an invitation to the project launch. A webinar was held for the project launch, in lieu of having a face-to-face field day or community market stall, which occurred approximately 3 weeks following the letter distribution, in mid-January 2023. Promotion of this project launch included information within the initial letter mail out and via communication with stakeholders.

There was very low engagement despite numerous attempts to contact landowners. Face to face communication were hindered because many properties did not contain residential dwellings. Several properties were also under construction activities for high-intensity subdivisions.

Key Achievements



**555 hectares
assessed**



**11 properties
assessed**



0 hectares infested



BEVERIDGE EXTENSION AREA - continued

“THE PROJECT AIMS TO RAISE AWARENESS, PROMOTE BEST PRACTICE MANAGEMENT AND ENCOURAGE COMMUNITIES TO VOLUNTARILY MANAGE SERRATED TUSSOCK”

– Antares Fuhrmann, VSTWP Extension Officer

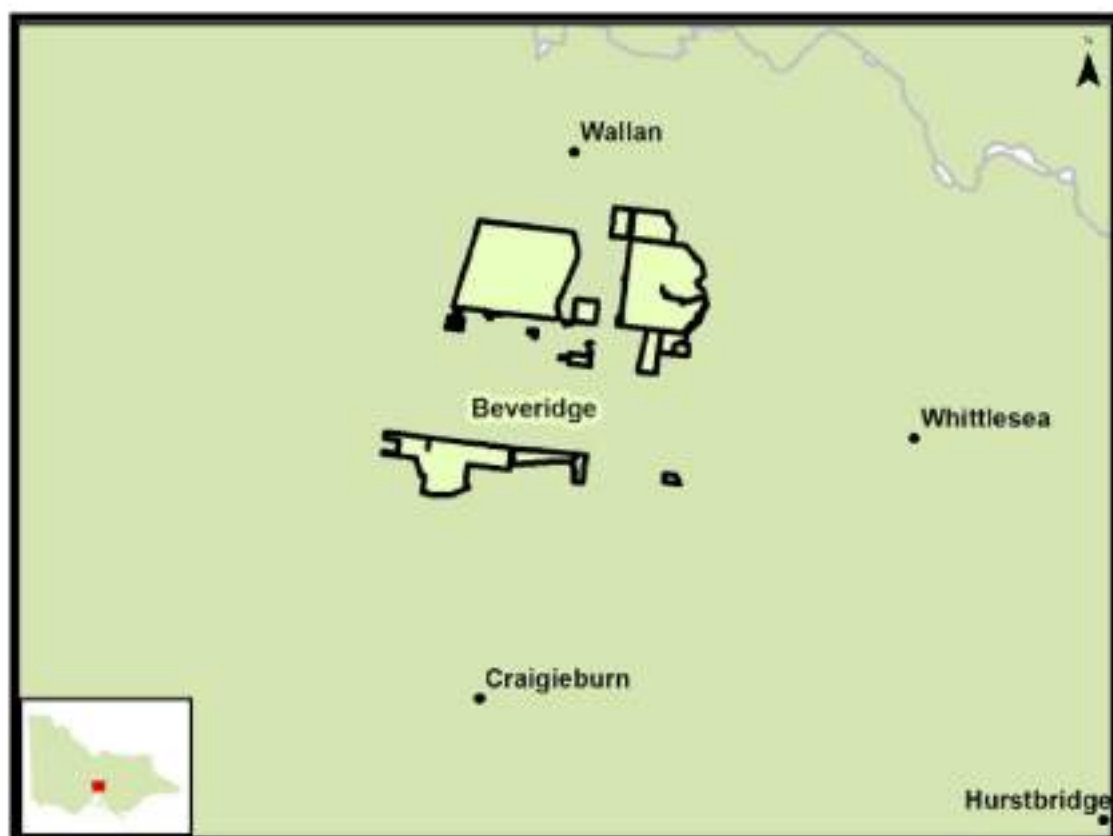


Figure 6: Beveridge Extension Areas

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

- The VSTWP attended five field days across the state, providing a range of brochures and best practice advice.
- Interviews on ABC Ballarat, ABC Gippsland, Apple FM and 3CR FM.
- Community service announcements on five community radio stations.
- Distribution of four editions of the Tussock Times newsletter delivered to 325 subscribers via e-news.
- Produced 2 videos on the mental toll of serrated tussock, which are available on the website and YouTube channel, with 15,000 views all up.
- The publication of serrated tussock media articles in eight Local Government newsletters across the state, and 10 Landcare newsletters, promoting the VSTWP and serrated tussock control before seeding.
- VSTWP Facebook page gaining 626 followers, an increase of 5% over 12 months.
- Major Facebook boost campaign for two months, highlighting new videos, 2000 views.
- Promotion of Instagram channel and engagement with a wider audience.
- Serrated tussock signs displayed on landowner gates at crucial sites.
- Distribution of 200 landowner brochures through local government and Landcare.
- Over 3,000 pieces of extension material distributed through field days and extension projects.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The VSTWP thanks the large number of Landcare groups, municipalities and other organisations that continue to support our projects.

Thanks also to the VSTWP Committee. Without you, our serrated tussock projects would not be as effective as they are today. We greatly appreciate your time, dedication and involvement in managing serrated tussock.

The VSTWP acknowledge the support received from the State Government of Victoria through the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

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