

Hymenachne or olive hymenachne

Hymenachne amplexicaulis



Hymenachne was introduced to Australia from South America to provide ponded pasture for cattle. Hymenachne has become an unwanted pest of stream banks, wetlands and irrigation ditches in coastal and central areas of Queensland. In some areas it has invaded low-lying sugarcane, fish habitats and natural wetlands with high conservation value.

A national Hymenachne Strategic Plan identifies economic, environmental and social impacts with options to minimise these.

Hymenachne has been used as a ponded pasture species for cattle production but has escaped cultivation, invading waterways including drains, lagoons, wetlands, creeks and rivers. Heavy infestations can affect waterbodies in a number of ways:

Flooding

Hymenachne can increase flooding by reducing the flow capacity of the drainage networks.

Interference with irrigation and infrastructure

Under flood conditions, plant material builds up at fences and bridges, collecting other floating debris. The combined weight may cause such structures to collapse.

Water flow to irrigation equipment can be reduced due to the restrictive action of the roots, thus increasing pumping times and costs.



Destruction of wildlife habitats

Hymenachne infestations are a physical barrier for aquatic and semi-aquatic animals, restricting their territorial movements and breeding activities. Fishery biologists believe that carrying capacity and fish populations available for both commercial and recreational uses are being significantly reduced.

Recreation and aesthetics

The presence of thick areas of hymenachne degrades water quality for swimming and makes fishing impossible. The natural beauty of an open waterbody can be spoilt and further degraded as native aquatic plants, birds and animals are displaced. Hymenachne also reduces access to waterways for recreation and wildlife.

Declaration details

Hymenachne is declared as a Class 2 species under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*. A Class 2 pest is one that has already spread over substantial areas of Queensland, but its impact is so serious that we need to try and control it and avoid further spread onto properties that are still free of the pest. By law, all landholders must try to keep their land free of Class 2 pests and it is an offence to keep or sell these pests without a permit. Local governments may issue a notice upon a landholder requiring control of a declared pest.

Hymenachne has been classified as one of 20 Weeds of National Significance.

Description and general information

Hymenachne is a robust, rhizomatous, perennial grass that can grow to a height of 2.5 m. Its stems are erect and contain white pith. Roots may be produced at the lower nodes. The leaf blades are 10–45 cm long and up to 3 cm wide, and strongly clasp the stem at the leaf base.

Flowers heads are spike-like, cylindrical, 20–40 cm long and sometimes branched. Main flowering occurs from April to June.

Hymenachne is capable of growing in permanent wetlands up to 1.2 m in depth. Cases have been reported of hymenachne growing up to 3 m water depth for at least a nine-month period and up to 4 m as a floating raft.

Commonly known as ‘olive hymenachne’ or ‘olive’ (derived from the cultivar name). This helps differentiate between the native hymenachne (*H. acutigluma*), which is widespread in Northern Territory and parts of northern Queensland.

Related species

Native hymenachne (*H. acutigluma*) is found in northern Australia, Papua New Guinea, Assam, Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam and Polynesia. Care should be taken not to confuse native hymenachne with the introduced, weedy hymenachne (*H. amplexicaulis*). The introduced hymenachne has distinctive stem-clasping leaf bases, whereas native hymenachne does not.

Native hymenachne is a tropical species and does not grow south of Mackay. Native hymenachne is not considered invasive or a threat to agriculture or other areas.

In 2010, it has been confirmed that olive hymenachne and the native species has hybridised with plants found in Northern Territory and northern Queensland. This hybrid has intermediate characteristics of both the parent plants and it will be named a separate species.

Life cycle

Hymenachne grows from seed and from broken stem fragments. Two main vectors for seed dispersal are water movement and migratory aquatic birds. Stem fragments are readily moved by flowing water and, in suitable conditions, provide rapid establishment of hymenachne in new locations.

In Queensland, the main flowering period usually occurs from April to June, depending on location, with seeds set from late autumn to early spring. However, plants have been observed flowering between March and September. There is anecdotal evidence that the plant can flower and set seeds over a longer period of time in unusually wet years.

A single flower stalk can produce more than 4000 seeds and there is the likelihood of a large soil seed bank. Trial work indicates that in field conditions seed viability is still 8–24% after eight years.

Habitat and distribution

Originally from South and Central America, hymenachne was released to the Queensland grazing industry in 1988 for use in ponded pasture.

It is now found in various locations from Cape York to as far south as Casino in New South Wales and in the Top End of the Northern Territory. There is potential for hymenachne to colonise suitable habitats over much of coastal, northern Australia.

Hymenachne will not persist in water with moderate to high concentrations of salt for part or all of the year.

Control

A control program requires a realistic view of how hymenachne impacts on overall property management and the control of hymenachne should be integrated in the overall property management plan.

1. Identify and prioritise problem areas

- Map hymenachne areas on your property.
- Prioritise areas for control and identify seed sources, seed and plant dispersal routes and areas prone to weed invasion.
- Focus initial efforts on small, isolated infestations.

2. Determine control options

- Decide on the most appropriate control methods in the given situation.
- Consider integrating control techniques by using chemical, mechanical and good land management practices with regular follow-up treatments.

3. Schedule control activities

- Note essential control periods on calendar (see below).
- Consider how effective various control methods will be at different times of the year.
- Make hymenachne control a regular part of property management and allow for monitoring and follow-up after initial treatment. Ensure follow-up occurs within three months.

4. Managing existing populations

- Heavy grazing in the dry season can decrease seed production and, combined with chemical control, can be a very effective control method.
- Treat populations in flood-prone areas first.
- Use an appropriate herbicide.
- Wherever possible, treat small, actively growing plants as they should be easier to kill.

A management plan should be structured yet flexible enough to allow for uncontrollable external influences such as drought, floods or fluctuating commodity prices.

Priority times throughout the year will vary slightly by regions; however, this should occur prior to flowering, which starts in April. Therefore, surveillance and control should be conducted in March, spring and early summer following initial storm rain.

The best approach is usually to combine different control options. Whatever methods are used, always follow-up and monitor progress.

Prevention

The best form of weed control is prevention. Always treat weed infestations when they are small. Weed control is not cheap but it is cheaper now than next year, or the year after. As there is no 'quick-fix' for the control of hymenachne, developing a management plan and committing to it is essential for long-term effectiveness.

Floodwater can deposit hymenachne in dams, lagoons, wetlands, rivers and creeks. Monitoring a short time after flood events should allow identification of new incursions. Treatment of new infestations should then be carried out to prevent establishment. Also you should:

- Reduce nutrient/sediment loads entering waterbodies since hymenachne thrives under nutrient-rich conditions.
- Maintain vegetation along riparian areas since hymenachne does not like shade or competition from trees.

Mechanical/physical control

Mechanical or physical removal will not completely eradicate hymenachne because of the plant's ability to reproduce vegetatively from very small pieces. The use of heavy earth moving machinery to remove hymenachne from drains has met with some success in North Queensland.

Fire

Fire is a tool for the dry season. When integrated with other control methods, fire can improve overall results and reduce cost.

Grazing control

In western shires, constant heavy grazing in dry conditions has removed hymenachne from the ponded pasture system.

Biological control

There have been no biological control agents released for hymenachne control in Australia. Should a biological program commence, agents sought would need to be specific for olive hymenachne to ensure that there are no impacts on the native species (*H. acutigluma*) or other desirable grasses.

Herbicide control

No herbicides are currently registered for control of hymenachne; however, there are two off-label minor use permits (see Table 1).

Before using any herbicide always read the label carefully. All herbicides must be applied strictly in accordance with the directions on the label.

Spraying an entire heavy infestation can cause hymenachne to sink and result in biological hazards from the rotting vegetation. Large masses of decomposing hymenachne may use all the oxygen in the water leading to fish kills. This problem can be avoided by spraying strips of the weed.

Off-label use permit PER11540 allows the use of haloxyfop, and use permit PER13406 allows the use of glyphosate for the control of hymenachne in non-agricultural areas, native vegetation, pasture and aquatic areas.

Prior to using the herbicides listed under PER11540 and PER13406 you must read or have read to you and understand the conditions of the permit. To obtain a copy of the permits contact your local council weed inspector or visit www.apvma.gov.au

Further information

Further information is available from your local government office, or by contacting Biosecurity Queensland (call 13 25 23 or visit our website at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au).

Table 1. Herbicides registered for the control of hymenachne

Permit no.	Herbicide	Situation
PER13406 Effective 4 September 2014 to 30 June 2017	360 g/L glyphosate (includes Roundup® Biactive & Weedmaster® Duo) plus 114 g/L alkylethoxyphosphate, trolamine salt (Nufarm Bonus Adjuvant) – applied at 14 L/ha plus Bonus at 1–2 L/ha	Spot spray in aquatic and wetland areas as per PER13406 Ground and aerial application
PER11540 Effective 25 November 2010 to 30 June 2015	520 g/L haloxyfop (includes Verdict 520 herbicide) plus 114 g/L alkylethoxyphosphate, trolamine salt (Nufarm Bonus Adjuvant) – 770ml/ha plus plus Bonus at 1–2 L/ha	Apply by boom, handgun or knapsack as per PER11540

Notes

It is a requirement of the permit that all persons using the products covered by this off-label permit read and comply with the details and conditions listed in the permit. In addition, read the herbicide label carefully before use and always use the herbicide in accordance with label directions unless otherwise stated in the permit. The above permit can be used by persons generally in Queensland.

Read the label carefully before use. Always use the herbicide in accordance with the directions on the label.



Hymenachne (dark green) invading a water storage

This fact sheet is developed with funding support from the Land Protection Fund.

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