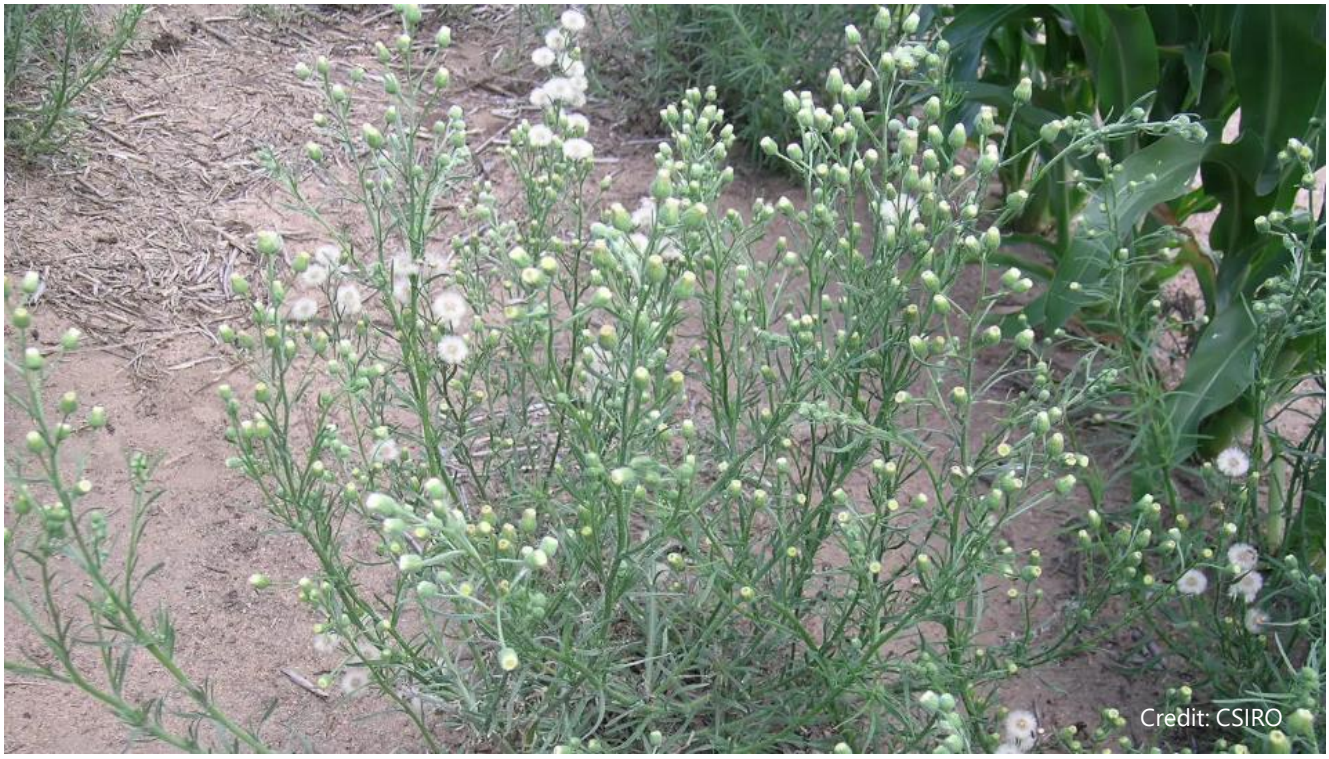
LANDSCAPE SOUTH AUSTRALIA NORTHERN AND YORKE

Flaxleaf fleabane

Flaxleaf fleabane (*Conyza bomaniensis*), a problem weed across Queensland and northern New South Wales, has recently emerged as a difficult-to-control weed in South Australia and Victoria.



What does it look like?

Flaxleaf fleabane is a short-lived herbaceous plant that starts with a basal rosette. It later produces hairy serrated leaves and a single upright stem with several branches relatively close to the ground. Plants can grow up to 1.5m tall but are usually less than 0.5m in height on footpaths. Seeds germinate from autumn to spring with a flush in late winter to spring. Active growth starts in spring to early summer and it flowers over a long period from September to April. It becomes semi-dormant or dies in winter.

Flaxleaf fleabane is covered with grey-green leaves and produces fluffy, cream-coloured seed heads. Each plant can produce up to 110,000 seeds.

Why is it so invasive?

Wind, water, animals and vehicles easily disperse its tiny seeds over substantial distances, explaining its rapid spread into cropping regions in recent years. Populations of flaxleaf fleabane with resistance to glyphosate have been confirmed, particularly where the weed is well established. Widespread use of glyphosate in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors has caused glyphosate resistance in this weed.

Flaxleaf fleabane emerges when temperatures are between 10°C and 30°C, with the optimal temperature between 20°C to 25°C. Although it grows slowly above ground over winter, the roots continue to grow strongly, absorbing available water.

What is its impact?

Flaxleaf fleabane has several impacts dependent on the land use it grows in. Its main economic impact is its use of soil moisture over summer, with the plant reducing moisture available for both summer and winter crops. This use of available soil moisture is associated with yield reductions in a range of cropping situations. Fleabane also impacts amenity and urban situations, with dense stands growing alongside trails and roadsides where water drains. The plant restricts the movement of people through these spaces when fully grown, and its appearance reduces the value of amenity sites.

Where is it found?

Flaxleaf fleabane is a widespread plant found on council reserves, roadsides, former grazing land and parks.

What can you do?

Flaxleaf fleabane plants feature hairy leaf surfaces, which affords the weed a natural tolerance to herbicide. The best time to control is when plants are young in the rosette stage. Once adult leaves and stem elongation begins, it becomes more difficult to control via spray methods. When managing flaxleaf fleabane – as with any problem weed – the focus should be on driving down the weed seed bank. This requires a strategic approach targeting all stages of the weed's life cycle.

Some considerations for control are:

- Use an integrated weed management (IWM) strategy and focus on running down the weed seed bank.
- Target young, small weeds (seedlings and young rosettes); herbicide efficacy decreases as flaxleaf fleabane matures.

Key messages

- Each plant can produce up to 110,000 seeds.
- Fleabane can be easily spread.

Fleabane on Horrocks Highway

- Early intervention is always the most effective for control.

Acknowledgements

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More information

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