

# Buffel grass

Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) is a summer-growing, deep-rooted perennial grass that outcompetes native species, can cause poisoning in ruminants and has a high fuel load. It is a declared weed under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*.



## What does it look like?

Buffel grass grows 0.2 to 1m high. The grass forms dense tussocks of tough, branched stalks with swollen bases. Appearance varies seasonally; following summer rain and active growth the leaves are green, and in dry times when the plant is dormant the leaves are straw coloured.

Seed heads are spike-like in appearance, up to 15cm long and are covered in clusters of bristles looking dense and fluffy. Seed heads vary in colour from white to purple and appear in November to May, or sporadically following rain. Seeds are enclosed in small burrs, 4-5cm long, each carrying 1-3 seeds.

Buffel grass survives and persists in harsh conditions and seeds can persist in the soil for up to 5 years.

## Where is it found?

Buffel grass populations can be found across SA, but populations are focused along

water courses and transport routes, including road and rail corridors. In arid and semi-arid areas it can be found on pastoral lands, riparian sites and alluvial flats.

## What is its impact?

Buffel grass out-competes native species causing dense single-species stands that transform the landscape, threatening the native vegetation structure and presenting a significant fire risk across pastoral districts.

Buffel grass stands have a high fuel load and its dry foliage forms a continuous, flammable ground layer that can cause more intense and widespread fires.

It recovers its biomass very rapidly post-fire and can burn when partly green, so it can carry fire at much shorter intervals than native understorey. More frequent, hot fires change the native plant community structure because established trees and shrubs are more often killed and juvenile plants are destroyed before they have produced seed.

Following a fire, buffel grass is also quick to recover, leading to bigger populations and area covered.

Buffel grass can be a problem for livestock, because it contains oxalates and can cause acute oxalate poisoning in ruminants, most often in young hungry sheep. It has a high demand for available soil nitrogen and phosphorus, leading to depletion and pasture 'run-down' as plant growth declines. This can be associated with a decline in cattle live-weight gain.

Buffel Grass ( <i>Cenchrus spp.</i> )					Declared SA
	SUMMER	AUTUM	WINTER	SPRING	
GERMINATION					
ACTIVE GROWTH					
FLOWERING					
SEED FORM/DROP					
SEASON CONTROLS					
KEY	• Spray	• Spray		• Spray	
	General	Possible			

## What can you do?

Control is difficult and costly, but early intervention has a high potential for success. Chemical and mechanical methods, and in some situations fire can be used in an integrated control program for buffel grass. All control programs require several years of follow-up treatment and monitoring.

### Hygiene

Prevention is the best control strategy. Continue to monitor your property for new outbreaks to prevent establishment. Use vehicle wash-down facilities to actively prevent introduction and spread of seed on contaminated vehicles. Monitor movement of produce, animals and soil.

Fluffy burrs are dispersed by wind and water, and attach to the coats of animals and other fibrous material.

### Mechanical

Locate and remove small, isolated infestations before plants set seed. Be sure to remove the entire tussock and destroy through burning or deep burial. Soil disturbance caused by large scale mechanical removal can promote new germinations. On-going mechanical and



chemical follow-up control is required for re-growth and new germinations.

### Chemical

Herbicides can be used as an effective control method as long as follow-up treatments are done. The two techniques for chemical application are through weed spraying (spot or boom) and via a wiper between November and March while actively growing.

Consult the PIRSA SA Weed Control Handbook for these control options and application rates.

Contact us for a copy or find it online at: [https://pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds/managing\\_weeds](https://pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/weeds/managing_weeds)

## What are your responsibilities?

Buffel grass is declared under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*. This means it is illegal to transport or sell this plant and all property owners have a responsibility to control it on their property.

The SA Arid Lands Landscape Board can provide identification and control advice for your property.

## More information

Email: [saal.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au](mailto:saal.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au)

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[www.landscape.sa.gov.au/saal](http://www.landscape.sa.gov.au/saal)