

To Mount Alexander Shire Council from Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Submission on the Council's 2023-24 Draft Budget

Needle Grasses (*Nassella* species) are highly invasive weeds that threaten natural ecosystems. They also have a significant impact on the agricultural industry by lowering the productivity of pastures since they are not palatable and by causing animal health and welfare issues due to seeds penetrating the skin and tissue of grazing animals. Outbreaks of these weeds have been identified along roadsides in the Castlemaine area and in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens. Because of their ability to stick to clothing, animals and machinery, the seeds are easily spread and create new infestations.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club (CFNC) has for many years supported the long-term volunteer program led by Margaret Panter (a CFNC member) to control Needle Grass (stipoid) weeds in two ways – managing funding for contractors to remove outbreaks of Needle Grass on Council land provided through Community Grants and Landcare grants; and through members volunteering for stipoid weed removal in the Botanical Gardens.

Margaret Panter has made a remarkable voluntary contribution to Council's environmental program of weed removal for well over a decade, mapping stipoid weed outbreaks, collaborating with Council staff, coordinating the contractor's work and the contributions of volunteers for weed removal in the Botanical Gardens in consultation with Gardens staff. However, she is unable to continue to the same degree. Over the past year or so she has helped train some of the Parks and Gardens staff in Needle Grass identification and removal, but the detailed work of surveying and mapping that she has done, and the coordination of the contractor's work must be taken over by Council staff after the completion of the current (final) 2022-23 funding round managed by CFNC. We specifically ask Council to provide adequate funding to allow Council staff to undertake this work into the future as failure to do so will allow these weeds<sup>1</sup> to proliferate and spread, thus undoing the years of voluntary weed control that has been undertaken by the community. In making this request we note that Council has legal responsibility under the Catchment and Land Protection Act ([CaLP Act](#)) to prevent the growth and spread of regionally controlled weeds on their land.

We also strongly recommend that Council provide funding for a Weeds Officer working under the supervision of the Natural Environment Officer. This position would be additional to the current Natural Environment Officer and other parks and gardens positions. Margaret has indicated that she will be happy to assist with the transfer of her expertise and of her maps of the Needle Grass weed locations. A Weeds Officer would also work across the Shire on the identification and control of other major weed infestations.

The Draft Budget does not address these issues directly, but we are concerned that's the proposed budget for the environmental aspects of Council's responsibilities appears to be unchanged from 2022-23.

We request that the Council's 2023-24 budget addresses the need for this new position as well as adequate ongoing funding for the weed removal program.

Peter S Turner, President CFNC

**Reference:** Talia Humphries and Singarayer K. Florentine 2021. A Comparative Review of Six Invasive *Nassella* Species in Australia with Implications for Their Management

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8223965/>

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<sup>1</sup> Chilean Needle Grass is listed as a noxious weed that is a restricted weed in all Victorian catchments. Texas Needle Grass and Cane Needle Grass, while not currently listed have many of the same biological attributes and impacts. All three species can be found in the Castlemaine area.