

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT

## Tussock wars failing on all fronts

Harvey Grennan

MANY rural councils are failing to control Australia's worst perennial grass weed, the highly invasive serrated tussock, which is costing millions of dollars a year in lost production, human health and environmental damage.

NSW is losing the battle against serrated tussock, say the experts, with some councils diverting control funds to town parks and gardens, and at least one weeds authority is refusing to prosecute recalcitrant landholders.

Weed control is the responsibility of the Minister for Primary Industry, but administered by local government. It is "not high in the order of priorities" of the Division of Local Government,

says the Serrated Tussock Working Party for NSW and the ACT.

There is no accountability for public spending on noxious weed control in NSW, as the Auditor-General does not have the power to carry out performance audits of local control authorities. "Although there are some excel-

lent local authorities, there are some that have actually overseen the spread of weeds and are not doing the job, and they all seem to be immune to outside appraisal," the chairman of the working party, Peter Stark, told the *Herald*.

Local government control of weeds is an anomaly, he says, but a recent review by the Department of Primary Industries refused to align it with other aspects of natural resource and agricultural management.

Serrated tussock was introduced from South America and was first declared a noxious plant in NSW in 1938. There are 43 local control authorities in NSW - 36 councils and seven weeds county councils - covering 56 local government areas.

The New England Weeds Authority and Wellington and Cooma-Monaro councils are leaders in weed control. Problem areas include parts of the Central West and Southern Tablelands.

"Serrated tussock is a weed with no boundaries which moves on the wind, under vehicles and

### Chance to air red-tape grievances

Excessive requirements, costs and lack of staff training top the list of complaints about local government red tape in submissions received by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, which is reviewing local government compliance and enforcement.

Public submissions close on Monday. IPART's chairman, Peter Boxall, wants first-hand examples of problems experienced by builders, cafe and restaurant operators and those interacting with councils on planning and environmental

machinery, on animals and on clothing," Mr Stark said. "It has no nutritional value and animals grazing on serrated tussock can die of starvation.

"Serrated tussock continues to defy efforts to manage and control its march across the state. It

maters, companion animals, public health, parking and road transport.

"In particular, we are seeking information on specific compliance and enforcement activities that are imposing unnecessary costs on business and the community, and ideas for reforms to reduce those unnecessary costs," he said.

An issues paper can be read at [ipart.nsw.gov.au](http://ipart.nsw.gov.au). Interested parties can present their views at a roundtable in Sydney on December 4.

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devalues land and impacts on productivity and biodiversity. The long-term consequences of inadequate action are severe for the community and dire for those affected, as they have been for rabbit and prickly pear devastation in the past," he said.



Local council control... spraying serrated tussock in Melton Shire. Photo: Mario Borg

According to Mr Stark, the effectiveness of weed control varies "enormously" depending on how many farmers are on a coun-

ty, the importance of staff, place on

weed management, the resources allocated and the skills of individual weeds officers.

"There is a need for consistent performance standards across

the state, including objective measurement of weed occurrence and the effectiveness of programs. This currently does not exist," he said.