

Surf Coast Shire Council

Annual Progress Report 2022/2023 – Pest Plant & Animal Management Strategy

This annual Progress Report has been prepared in accordance with Council’s Pest Plant & Animal Management Strategy 2020-2023. The Report outlines the key actions and outcomes that Council has undertaken in the 2022/23 year to implement the five goals of the Strategy and ensure Council meets its legal obligations under the *Catchment & Land Protection Act 1994*. The Report also outlines Council actions to support community and land management agencies (Goals 4 and 5). Copies of both the annual Action Plan and Progress Report will be posted on Council’s website www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au.

Goal 1: Prevent new and emerging pest plant & animal infestations within Surf Coast Shire			
Action	Timing	Location/s	Outcome
Cape Tulip - survey and treatment on municipal roadsides and Council owned/managed land	Late winter/early spring	Winchelsea, Buckley, Barrabool Hills, Modewarre, Moriac, Paraparap, and Bellbrae	Completed and ongoing. Annual comprehensive treatment across multiple years is required for control. Some Council owned/managed sites are now free of the weed, and at other sites, the reduction in weed numbers is indicative of progress. Being highly toxic to both humans and livestock, the extent of infestation on some private properties remains a concern.
Chilean & Texas Needle Grass – survey and treatment on municipal roadsides	Autumn/& early spring	Winchelsea, Gnarwarre, Barrabool Hills, Torquay, Connewarre	Completed and ongoing. Due to the extremely wet spring, the work was carried out in conjunction with the Serrated Tussock control program in late October/November 2022 with follow-up in June 2023.
African Weed Orchid – survey and treatment on municipal roadsides and Council owned/managed land	Spring	Airey’s Inlet, Bambra, Bells Beach, Bellbrae, Freshwater Creek, Paraparap, Lorne, Winchelsea.	Completed and ongoing. Annual treatment across multiple years is required for control. It is listed as a very high risk, and highly invasive species in the Advisory list of environmental weeds in Victoria. Each plant produces tens of thousands of minute dust-like seeds and seeds remain viable for several years.
Rural roadsides - general surveys for any other new and emerging weeds on municipal roadsides	Autumn & spring	Across the Shire	Completed by all our contractors in conjunction with grassy and woody weed programs. These surveys in previous years have informed our list of the new and emerging weeds requiring control, and their extent e.g., African Weed Orchid.

Goal 2: Minimise the impact of established pest plants and animals on high value assets owned or managed by Council

Action	Timing	Location/s	Outcome
<p>RABBITS</p> <p>Continue ongoing implementation of the Rabbit Management Plans for former hotspot sites on Council owned/managed land.</p> <p>Actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-works spotlight count & warren mapping & input on Rabbit Scan. • Rabbit control works as required. • Post-works spotlight count & site inspection (warren re-openings/new warrens) – all sites. 	<p>January-June</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freshwater Creek Recreation Reserve • Mt Moriac Recreation Reserve • Modewarre Recreation Reserve • Pettavel & Dickins Road reserves • Loutitt Bay Road/Woodland Road reserves 	<p>Completed. All sites were visited and assessed by Council’s independent rabbit consultant, who commented generally on the effect of three wet summers in a row sustaining rabbit populations and resulting in increases in both spread and density of rabbits across the region. Low rabbit activity was noted at Pettavel Rd, Mt Moriac, and Loutitt Bay/Woodland Roads whilst there is increasing rabbit pressure on the sites at Modewarre and Dickins Road from the adjoining land (both these sites had been zero to low in previous years). Freshwater Creek had 4 rabbits spotlighted. Use of this area by the public continues to cause some issues with rabbit control, such as the propping-open of rabbit-proof gates. Cultural heritage restrictions also limit mechanical warren removal/excavation at this site.</p> <p>Generally, results post-works showed an improvement in rabbit numbers, especially when works had also been undertaken by the surrounding private landowners.</p> <p>Actions undertaken included removal of rabbit harbour at multiple sites, warren destruction using a small excavator, additional netting to repair breaches by rabbits, and fumigation.</p>

NATURE RESERVES			
<p>Ongoing rabbit management work across key sites, including survey and monitoring of rabbit activity (mapped on Rabbit Scan); removal of rabbit harbour; warren destruction (where possible); and fumigation.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moonah Woodlands • Dans and Rice Nature Reserves • Greenfields • Fairylands • Giddings 	<p>Contractors fumigated rabbits in Moonah Woodlands, Dans, Rice and Fairylands Nature Reserves.</p> <p>As rabbits had continued to be found in high numbers in Giddings Road Nature Reserve, this year Council engaged a contractor to collapse warrens with an excavator after initial baiting (using bait stations to avoid off target fauna deaths). These works have resulted in significantly reduced rabbit activity though some re-openings have been observed. These will receive follow up fumigation.</p>
<p>Weed management across all nature reserves in accordance with the Pest Plant & Animal Strategy Weed Matrix (site & species prioritisation)</p> <p>Note: Weed management at nature reserves includes weed treatment on a reserve specific basis and seasonally triggered weed control e.g., Wild Watsonia & Serrated Tussock. Actions reported here cover a selection of priority nature reserves in terms of weed control.</p>		<p>Reserve specific and seasonal weed treatments have been undertaken at all of Council's nature reserves.</p>	<p>Examples of specific works include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serrated Tussock treatments Deep Creek and Moonah Woodlands • African Weed Orchid at Winchelsea Common, Painkalac Creek and Bells Beach • Follow up weed work in controlled burn areas of Grasstree Park • Italian Buckthorn and Boneseed removal at Spring Creek • Gorse removal at Dans and Rice • Cape Tulip at Mellors and Winchelsea Common • Post burn and strategic fuel break weed control at Moggs Creek, Bristlebird, Anglesea Lookout and Fairyland • Blackberry control at Deep Creek and Painkalac • Woody weed work in reserves such as Coogoorah Park and Bells Beach
<p>HIGH CONSERVATION MUNICIPAL ROADSIDES Weed management – survey and control.</p> <p>Note: Treatment includes both declared noxious weeds and some environmental weeds, such as Bluebell Creeper & Sweet Pittosporum, when treatment coordinated in partnership with other land management agencies</p>		<p>As required, including Bellbrae, Bells Beach, Paraparap, Gherang, Aireys Inlet and Bamba</p>	<p>Included roadsides in Bellbrae, Freshwater Creek, and Winchelsea (Cressy Rd). Work has continued to support our partnership with Parks Victoria to control Bluebell Creeper on roadsides in Airey's Inlet and Gherang.</p>

Goal 3: Ensure that Council meets its legal obligations regarding pest plant & animal management			
Action	Timing	Location/s	Outcome
Catchment & Land Protection Act 1994 Declared noxious weeds & established pest animals.		Various sites	Addressed by work under previous goals.
ROADSIDE WEEDS & PESTS PROGRAM			
Liaise with Agriculture Victoria regarding 2022 – 2023 Control Plan priorities	September-October 2022		Completed. Priorities remain unchanged: Serrated Tussock containment line (north of Winchelsea through to Bellbrae), rabbits in Thompson/Freshwater Creek priority area, Gorse and Blackberry in Deans Marsh, and Cape Tulip in Winchelsea/Buckley area.
Deliver approved Roadside Weeds & Pests Control Plan works for 2022/23:			
Serrated Tussock – herbicide	Late Oct & June	Serrated Tussock containment line (north of Winchelsea through to Bellbrae)	Completed
Rabbits – warren and/or harbour removal	February - June	Thompson/Freshwater Creek priority area	Completed
Gorse and Blackberry – herbicide	April/May	Deans Marsh	Completed
Cape Tulip – herbicide	Sept	Winchelsea/Buckley	Completed
Complete acquittal report on 2022/23 program and submit to Local Government Victoria	June 2023		Completed

Goal 4: Coordinate and collaborate with community groups and land management agencies on pest plant and animal management			
Action	Timing	Location/s	Outcome
<p>RABBITS - Torquay Continue to collaborate with GORCAPA, The Sands & Parks Victoria and coordinate rabbit management work for Moonah Woodlands /The Sands/Whites Beach and Karaaf wetlands</p>	Mar-May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whites Beach area, Moonah Woodlands, The Sands & Karaaf Wetlands 	<p>Council has continued to liaise with GORCAPA and The Sands golf course on the timing and implementation of rabbit control works. For Council this has included fumigation in the autumn and spring. Additionally, we retrofitted two sections of post and wire fencing with wire netting to reduce rabbit movement between the Karaaf and the golf course and Council managed land. 1.34kms of netting was installed.</p>
<p>RABBITS - Winchelsea Implement the Rabbit Management Plan for Council owned/managed land within Winchelsea Township</p>	Feb-May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reserves including Bennett, Napthine, Barwon River, Mathison, Platypus, Beal-Trebeck Richmond/Lauder Lane continuation 	<p>Sites were surveyed for rabbit warrens and fumigation works were undertaken as required across all sites. Previous investment in warren destruction and rabbit harbour removal by Council, combined with the work of Winchelsea Land & Rivercare encouraging private landholders to do rabbit control works has led to improved results in reducing rabbit numbers.</p>
<p>RABBITS – Cultural Heritage Continue to seek clarification from the relevant Registered Aboriginal Party as required, the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, regarding rabbit management in areas of high cultural heritage significance such as the Freshwater Creek Rec Reserve & share any such clarification with Landcare partners and other relevant land management agencies.</p>			<p>Council officers will continue to identify opportunities to partner with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) regarding rabbit management in areas of high cultural heritage significance.</p> <p>Note: Officers have discussed with WTOAC’s Gobata Dja (Taking Care of Country) team what interest they might have in undertaking rabbit management work on sites with cultural heritage significance. They’ve advised they don’t have capacity as a new team to undertake rabbit management work at this time, but may into the future.</p>

Goal 5: Support Landcare and community pest plant and animal management initiatives and capacity building			
Action	Timing	Location/s	Outcome
RABBITS Support the promotion of Landcare community rabbit control programs	December	Barrabool Hills	Council helped to support the Barrabool Hills Landcare Group's printing of the December newsletter edition containing their upcoming rabbit program information
NATURE RESERVES Support Community weeding & planting events on Council owned/managed land.		Council has supported community works in Council reserves in all districts	Examples of community support include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing seedlings for planting days e.g., Winchelsea, Jan Juc, Allen Noble Sanctuary, Buckley, Bells • Providing mulch for planting sites e.g., Jan Juc, Buckley. • Providing guards and stakes for plantings on Council land. • Preparing sites for planting on Council land by brush cutting and spraying. • Maintaining sites post planting e.g., ongoing weed control, removal of guards and watering. • Hosting corporate weeding days e.g., Rip Curl staff at their Planet Days at Grasstree Park.
Purchase & supply of locally indigenous plants to community groups for revegetation works on Council owned/managed land.		All seedlings used in revegetation projects on Council owned or managed land are purchased from local nurseries.	Reserves where community plantings were undertaken in this financial year include Allen Noble Sanctuary, Painkalac Creek, Jan Juc Creek, Grasstree Park, Barwon River, and Bells Beach.
PROJECT SPONSORSHIP		Powerful Owl Project	Deakin University Powerful Owl Research Program PhD project. This very important project is collecting the movement data of Powerful Owls in the Great Otway National Park to help identify more effective and targeted ways to conserve this threatened species.

Rip Curl staff weeding at Grasstree Park:



Jan Juc Coast Action planting along Jan Juc Creek

D23/4032

CASE STUDY - Council's Partnership Project with the Surf Coast Energy Group (SCEG) and others, on the "Ridgeline Trail" – Great Ocean Road Service Road (Torquay to Bellbrae) - Year 1

SCEG is taking the lead, involving other environmental groups and stakeholders in local action to protect and enhance the biodiversity within the Spring Creek valley and the ridgeline. The ridgeline 'greenway' trail covers 3.7km of wide road reserve and includes a section of the original Great Ocean Road and an informal track.



There is varying land management and maintenance responsibilities, multiple services situated within the road reserve, emergency management vehicles and private properties requiring access.

Weeds are a major threat to the biodiversity values within this area and include a variety of declared noxious weeds (e.g., Blackberry, Gorse, Broom) and environmental weeds such as Sweet Pittosporum, and Bluebell Creeper.



Council's contractors have been busy making a start on Blackberry, Gorse, and Broom control on the land that Council manages.

Selected areas along the trail have been weeded, mulched, and planted by volunteers including Bellbrae Primary School students and parents.

This is an ongoing partnership project which will deliver multiple community benefits including protecting remnant vegetation.