



# Save the Murray

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## Introduced Flora



Introduced flora are often known as weeds. Weeds are plants that are not native to a particular place. Weeds have the potential to invade and degrade natural bushland, agricultural land, waterways and roadsides. When a plant is introduced outside its normal environment, its natural predators, competitors and disease are often absent, providing an opportunity for the plant to flourish and become invasive.

The introduction of weeds can occur deliberately or by accident. Wind, water and animals may carry seeds of weeds great distances. Many of Australia's weeds have found their way into the natural environment through human activities. People have introduced weeds by growing weedy species in their gardens and by poor disposal of green waste. The aquarium trade has been responsible for the introduction of some water weeds to natural environments. Agricultural practices can also result in the accidental introduction of weeds.

Introduced plants not only threaten biological diversity, but also ecosystem health. The most serious threats are those introduced plants that grow in sufficient numbers and abundance to alter ecological processes (at least at a local level). These weeds can also cause economic losses to individuals and the community.

The following are examples of major Introduced pest plants in the Murray-Darling Basin;

### **Willow (*Salix* species)**

More than 100 species of willows have been introduced to Australia. They are now a major pest of waterways as they have adversely affected the ecology of streams and rivers. *See fact sheet on Willows.*

### **Alligator Weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*)**

Alligator weed is a rapidly growing summer perennial plant that grows in water or wet areas. Generally found on stationary and slow moving water bodies, creeks, channels, riverbanks and associated areas that are occasionally flooded. It has spear shaped glossy green leaves and a ball shaped white flower. This weed normally grows from a small piece of stem and can grow as a free floating raft or with its roots attached to the soil.

### **Arrowhead (*Sagittaria graminea*)**

Arrowhead is an aquatic plant that is becoming an increasingly serious problem in irrigation areas. It spreads rapidly, blocks channels and greatly reduces the effectiveness of the water distribution system.

It is an emergent plant that can grow up to one metre high when mature. Its form varies with the most prominent form having lance-shaped or arrow-shaped leaves which are green.

### **Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)**

Water hyacinth is a perennial aquatic plant which is declared a noxious weed in all states in Australia. Water hyacinths spread rapidly, choking waterways. Its dense growth reduces fish populations, limits food sources and provides shelter for mosquitoes and other disease spreading organisms. Control of water hyacinth can be achieved through a combination of habitat manipulation (i.e. denying it water), biological control, or the application of approved herbicides.



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## Introduced Flora Continued

### **Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*)**

Parrot's Feather is a perennial aquatic or semi-aquatic plant that originated from the Amazon River in South America. It arrived in Australia as an aquarium and pond plant and has since spread. Parrot's Feather is dispersed through broken stem fragments. There are no male plants in Australia so seeding does not occur.

### **Yellow Waterlily (*Nymphaea mexicana*)**

Yellow waterlily is a perennial plant that causes problems by blocking waterways for irrigation and recreational uses. It is native to Europe and was introduced into Australia for its attractiveness and adaptability.

### **Egeria (*Egeria densa*)**

Egeria or Dense Waterweed was introduced as an ornamental in the aquarium trade. The plant can form dense clumps underwater effecting recreational activities such as swimming, boating and fishing. It is a noxious weed in WA, SA and Tasmania and has become a problem in Lake Mulwala at Yarrawonga along the Murray River. Egeria is a submerged attached plant with floating flowers. It is cold tolerant and survives in some areas where winter surface water temperatures are close to freezing.

### **Elodea (*Elodea canadensis*)**

Is a perennial aquatic plant is native to North America and is declared a noxious weed in some states. The plant grows completely submerged in water. It has soft green leaves, which grow in groups of three. Pieces of the plant may continue to grow while floating unattached in the water. It is generally found in stationary and slow-moving water bodies, coastal rivers and creeks, especially in colder areas, irrigation channels and drains.

It has caused major problems in Victoria and N.S.W constricting waterways. Elodea is hard to eradicate. Some of the control measures include approved herbicides and mechanical cutting.

### **Noogoora Burr (*Xanthium occidentale*)**

This plant is native to North America, Mexico and Caribbean. It was reported in the Murray Valley in the 1920s and still infests the flood plain along the Murray River and its tributaries. Noogoora Burr is a summer growing annual plant and spreads easily by wind, water, animals and clothing.

The plant is toxic to stock in its seedling stage and the burr can cause discomfort to sheep and reduce the value of wool. It can be dense enough to restrict cattle and sheep access to watering places and effect recreational activities. There are numerous ways of control including chemical (especially when plants are young), mechanical and even biological.