

Final Report “Ragwort Raid” 2017

Report prepared by:

Tamar NRM (TNRM) for the Tamar Valley Weeds Working Group.

Now in its 18th Year, the Ragwort Raids continue to attract community groups, service clubs, landholders and the general public who join together during late January to keep Ragwort at bay. The event is supported by City of Launceston, West Tamar and George Town Councils, Landcare groups and volunteer fire brigades.

During January 2017, TNRM conducted three Ragwort Raids covering the three partner council areas. Saturday 21st Jan 2017 East Tamar, Sunday 22nd Jan 2017 West Tamar and Saturday 28th Jan 2017 dealt with the Launceston area.

Ragwort, (*Jacobaea vulgaris*, syn. *Senecio jacobaea*), is a serious weed in Tasmania and is poisonous to stock. It has the potential to infest at least 64,600 ha in the municipalities with potential costs to the grazing industry of over \$2M per annum in lost pasture production alone.



Flowering ragwort

There would also be significant control costs for the whole community if Ragwort became heavily established. In the Tamar Valley and surrounds its invasion is contained by a team of dedicated volunteers which “Raid” every year. Details about the species appear in Appendix 1.

Funding over the 18 years has been underwritten by the Launceston, West Tamar and George Town Councils with specific funds provided again this year by the Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania.

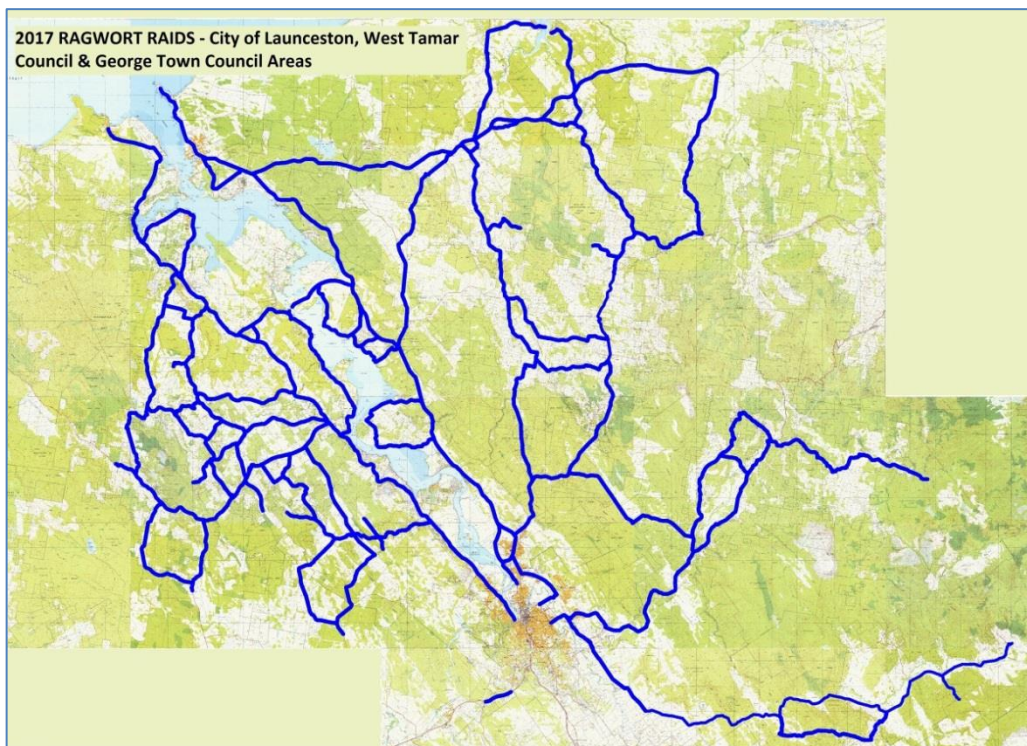


Figure 1: Map showing the significant roads patrolled for ragwort, minor roads also patrolled, but not marked.

This year, Ragwort Raid coordinator Jayne Shapter and TNRM staff undertook the initial planning for the three “Raids” which are organised within each council area. Volunteers travel rural roads within the 3 municipalities (see map above) at their own expense, pulling the plants before they seed, with all plant material collected and securely disposed of courtesy of the municipality waste management facilities. These “Raids” (patrols) have been running for 18 years and over that time the weed prevalence has been greatly reduced, to the point where today, Ragwort collected amounts to utility loads rather than truck loads. The West Tamar area provided the greatest amount of material collected in 2017.

It was generally accepted that due to the wetter winter of 2016, ragwort prevalence was greater in 2017. The Ragwort hotspots noted, such as at Glengarry and Nunamurra, have been documented, with some follow up by community groups and the TNRM Works Team over February. A table of the infestation hotspots (including private lands) has been forwarded to the appropriate management bodies.

There were 16 reported sites in need of further follow up on roadsides where the amount of Ragwort exceeded the volunteer's capacity to remove it. Consequently Land Management North will be engaged to spray the major infestations in late 2017 prior to flowering.

There were 19 reports of properties needing control and containment of ragwort. Private land infestations were observed adjacent to roadside hotspots and it is recommended that steps be taken to encourage all landholders, but these landholders in particular, to undertake Ragwort control.

The “Raids” suppressing this weed are responsible for preventing the wide scale invasion of all rural areas. Collectively, compliance measures, public education and the Ragwort Raids combine to be an effective control.

The necessary follow up and attention by agencies/council staff of landholder compliance on private lands, needs to be better coordinated and policed.

Costs and Potential Impacts:

Table 1: Ragwort Raid Statistics

Municipal Area	Patrol Base Location	Number Volunteers	Labour Hours Donated	Length of Significant Roads Patrolled	Land Under Invasion Threat (Ha)	Production Losses Prevented (\$ per year)
Georgetown (21 st January)	Pipers River Fire Station	11	96	220 km	17000	\$533,000
West Tamar (22 nd January)	Winkleigh Hall	22	162	235 km	15600	\$488,000
Launceston (28 th January)	Waverley Lakes	9	84	206 km	32000	\$1,001,900
Total for all councils		42	345	661 km	64600	\$2,022,900

TNRM Actions:

- Continue the Ragwort Raid activity on an annual basis, co-ordinating volunteers and obtaining permits and approvals.
- Prepare mapping and report on control of Ragwort in the Tamar Valley.
- Facilitate the introduction of biological control agents to heavy inaccessible areas where traditional control methods are impractical.
- TNRM is also active in other weed management activities such as Boneseed, Blackberry and Gorse.

Tamar NRM continues to facilitate the Tamar Valley Weeds Working Group comprising the 3 councils - City of Launceston; George Town; West Tamar; TNRM; NRM North; DPIPWE; DIER (Dept. State Growth); TFGA; Parks and Wildlife; community and industry representatives.

The group aims to coordinate the efforts of organisations managing weed issues within the Tamar Region. As such they are interested in furthering the conversation on areas of shared responsibility to maximise effort and minimise the use of resources for all, with particular emphasis on cooperation across land tenures.

Council Actions:

- Councils continue to facilitate the “Raids” with in-kind support.
- Roadside mowing/vegetation management be scheduled so as not to compromise Ragwort Raids and other management actions.
- That follow up on hot spot property infestations as appropriate under the Weed Management Act 1999 be undertaken.
- Severe roadside infestations should be sprayed in December when plants are easily seen, with clopyralid (Lontrel™), see Hot Spot table below.
- Road making and maintenance activities should specify soil which does not introduce new species to an area, with the liability on the supplier to eradicate introduced species.
- Tender and contractor specifications should require the use of clean machines and vehicles at the commencement of every job.

State Growth (DIER):

- Issue permits for roadside collection of Ragwort
- Provide roadside mowing schedule
- Provide advice and support for Ragwort control

Volunteer Support:

Volunteers travel the roads in their own vehicles at their own expense, including pre "Raid" event scouting and follow up raiding. For instance, volunteers were still pulling Ragwort in early March on the Ben Lomond Road travelling over 100 kms to deal with an infestation. Likewise, the regional understanding of the potential for Ragwort to become a serious issue for the region, motivates Landcare groups, Friends groups and landholders to target the weed as and when they see it.

During this year's "Raid" volunteer support was strong for the West Tamar (22) and East Tamar (11), and a small but improved number of people attending the Launceston "Raid" (9). The attendance of Alderman Simon Wood, Julia and Jane representing RACT, two family visitors from Switzerland, and the TNRM Works Team supervisor helped bolster the Launceston numbers this year.

Table 2: Community Groups supporting the "Raids" in 2017:

West Tamar Landcare Group	Friends of Punchbowl Reserve
East Tamar Landcare Group	Piper's Brook Fire Brigade
Lilydale Landcare Group	TNRM Works Team

** Note: Ragwort Raid organisers acknowledge the contribution of community groups and landholders who control Ragwort on an ongoing basis and are either unknown to us, and too numerous to list.*

Communication:

A media release was issued in early January and promotion through websites, Facebook and through TNRM's email distribution list. An ABC Rural radio interview and City Park radio interview were used in promoting the 2017 "Raid". The key messages for the "Raid" are that it saves \$2m in lost income to agriculture in the Tamar Region and is a successful demonstration of community driven regional weed management.

The final report will be distributed to RACT, State Growth (DIER), Tasmanian Fire Service, DPIPW, TFGA, NRM North, three councils, and TNRM stakeholder group. It will also feature as an article in the TNRM newsletter "Naturally Yours" in March.

Work Health and Safety:

In 2017, each volunteer completed an induction for "Working On or Near Roadsides" and a checklist was completed before commencing work on the 2017 Ragwort Raid removing the weed from roadsides.

The Checklist comprised instructions for parking on roadsides, vehicle warning devices provided, appointment of spotters, timeframes for roadside works, sign off after completion of works, snake bite first aid and working on slopes in wet weather instruction.

TNRM staff member, Greg Lundstrom, conducted the induction and observed compliance of teams working on roadsides. It formed part of the Ragwort 2017 WHS Report and demonstrated WHS compliance as listed in the induction sheet provided to participants prior to works. In particular the following operations were audited in the field:

- Flashing light in operation
- Spotter in place
- Vehicle parked in appropriate safe location

Sites that were identified by event participants as areas that were too large to be weeded within the required timeframes, as required in the WHS guidelines, were noted for later follow up.

Hotspot locations where herbicide control would be beneficial:

There were 16 reported sites in need of further follow up on roadsides, nine of these sites identified as too large an infestation to be hand weeded and needing to be sprayed.

Table 3: The main ragwort sites identified as needing herbicide control.

District	Location	Comment
Nunamara	Hunting Ground Road	Ragwort (all stages) on both sides of road from Tasman Highway junction to Red Banks Rd junction
Nunamara	20 Bingham's Rd	Power easement, extending along drain and into bush above
Nunamara	Diddleum Road	Near the Hut on both sides of the Road
Blessington	Deddington Rd (C420) approximately 1km S from Blessington Main Rd junction	Follows a water course from above road to below along a line of willows.
Blessington	Ben Lomond Road (C432)	4kms from the main Blessington Road intersection and extends for 4kms toward Ben Lomond
Blessington	Corner Hayes Rd and Evandale Rd, Blessington	Large patches need spray
Targa	Tasman Highway, St Patrick's River bridge "start of Sidling".	Extensive ragwort on northern verge of highway extending for 500m. Significant infestations on properties nearby
Lebrina	Golconda Road and Second River Road, Lebrina	Check land tenure
Glengarry	Near corner Glengarry and Frankford Road, Glengarry	Large patches

Conclusion:

2017 once again demonstrated the benefit of a community driven weed control program. While overall abundance of Ragwort has been reduced in the region, anecdotally the prevalence of Ragwort was up on the previous year, so it was an important year to be actively targeting the weed.

Collectively, compliance measures, public education and the Ragwort Raids combine to be an effective model that other regions could pick up and implement.

There are a surprisingly large number of residents from our municipalities who clean roadside areas of Ragwort. These people have often started as Ragwort Raid participants and we can't know all of them, but we know they exist! They have learnt the skills, understand the safety practices needed and then keep a roadside area clear on their own initiative, even though they are not involved in an official "Raid".

This work is a community partnership which builds capacity and awareness. It also builds community confidence that we can manage weeds, "something can be done!".

Acknowledgements:



Our appreciation goes to the Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania who made a grant of \$2,000 available, which enabled the project to support volunteers in their efforts.

Appreciation also goes to:

- David Armstrong (AK consulting) for mapping products.
- Participating Community Groups (see Table 2).
- And a big thanks to all volunteers.



West Tamar Ragwort Raiders: John Thorp, Roger Tyshing, Maree Taberner, Megan Rodger, Norma Cormican, Helen Eastburn, Paul Searle, Peter Rodger, Rose Searle, Peter Voller, Ross Eastburn, Jim Lyall, Jo Lyall, Ted Binns, Luke Vandenburg, Greg Lundstrom (taking photo)



East Tamar Ragwort Raiders: Roger Tyshing, Brian Baxter, Ian Sauer, Craig Ringswandl Sally Sauer, Di Taggart, John Thorp, Greg Lundstrom (taking photo)



Launceston Alderman Simon Wood said he enjoyed pulling Ragwort



Di Taggart pulling Ragwort on the Scottsdale Road



The Tamar NRM Works Team Van gets some weekend work too

Appendix 1

Ragwort Profile

Description

The plant is biennial or short-lived perennial herb to 0.8 (rarely to 1.8) m high. Stems often branched towards apex. Basal leaves mostly 5–20 cm long and 4–6 cm wide, in a rosette, withering in flowering plants; stem leaves with upper surface dark green, underneath lighter in colour. The 300 mm flower head is golden yellow, made up of small flowers

Spread of ragwort

- Spread of Ragwort is by seed. The majority of seeds are deposited within 20 m of the parent plant but may be dispersed up to a kilometre or more by strong winds.
- Seeds can also be spread along road corridors, on the coats of animals, on farm machinery, logging equipment, trucks and other vehicles, in contaminated hay and along water courses.

Avoid the introduction of ragwort

- Preventing the introduction of Ragwort to Ragwort free areas is the best means of control. Good hygiene practices are vital.
- Farm machinery, logging equipment, trucks and other vehicles can carry Ragwort seeds. Thorough cleaning of cultivation, harvesting, slashing and road-grading machinery which has been working in infested areas will greatly reduce the risk of spread into other areas.
- Hay and crop seeds can contain Ragwort seed if they have been sourced from infested paddocks.
- Obtain Wash-down Guidelines for Weed and Disease Control for detailed information on how to wash-down equipment and personnel to reduce the chance of spreading Ragwort.



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