

NASSELLA: FINE STEMMED NEEDLEGRASS/MEXICAN FEATHER GRASS AND NASSELLA TUSSOCK

Nassella tenuissima and *Nassella trichotoma*

Management programme

Exclusion	Eradication	Progressive containment	Sustained control	Site-led
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Impacts

Economic	Biodiversity	Soil resources	Water quantity/ quality
Human health	Social and cultural wellbeing	Amenity/recreation	Animal welfare

Objectives

Reduce the level of infestation of fine stemmed needlegrass/Mexican feather grass and nassella tussock within the Waikato region to zero density to prevent adverse effects and impacts.

Introduction

Fine stemmed needlegrass/Mexican feather grass is native to parts of Argentina, Mexico and the southern United states, and has been incorrectly sold in New Zealand nurseries as a native grass. Nassella tussock, originally from South America, is thought to have been introduced to New Zealand accidentally during the 1860s but wasn't formally identified until the 1930s. Nassella invades pastures, grasslands, disturbed sites and private gardens and can become dominant on grazed sites. It is indigestible to stock, and forms balls in their stomach.

Why is it a pest?

Nassella forms dense colonies, producing masses of highly viable, well dispersed seeds that last a long time in the soil. Stock cannot digest these grasses, and they form balls in their stomach, causing ill-thrift. The plants tolerate a wide range of climates and conditions and are a threat to tall and short tussock-lands in New Zealand, where they out compete native species.



Responsibility for control

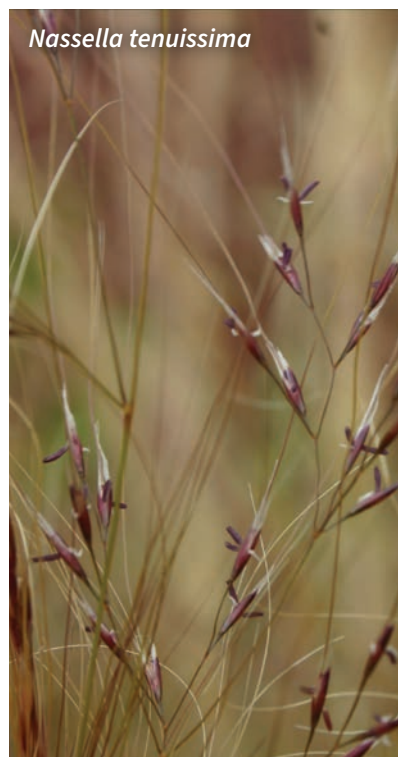
Waikato Regional Council is responsible for the control of fine stemmed needlegrass/Mexican feather grass and nassella tussock within the Waikato region. If you think you've seen them, call us.

- All occupiers are encouraged to report sightings of fine stemmed needlegrass (rule NAS-1 of the *Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032*) and nassella tussock (rule NTU-1), and to liaise with Waikato Regional Council in areas where control programmes are in place.
- If fine stemmed needlegrass/Mexican feather grass and/or nassella tussock is present on a property that is to be subdivided or developed, there are additional rules and requirements that apply under section 6.6 of the RPMP 2022-2032.

Fine stemmed needlegrass/Mexican feather grass and nassella tussock are banned from being sold, propagated, distributed, or included in commercial displays.

What do they look like?

Fine stemmed needlegrass/Mexican feather grass and nassella tussock are densely tufted grasses that are practically indistinguishable except for their flowers and flowering heads.



Fine stemmed needlegrass/ Mexican feather grass

Flower

- Flowers with drooping feathery flower heads occur between October and December.
- Flower clusters only partially protrude from the plant

Fruit/seed

- Abundant seeds appear in spring and are purplish-pink.
- Seeds are readily distributed by stock and clothing.
- Can last in the soil for four years.

Leaves/stems

- Very fine stems that are rough when rubbed towards the base of the plant.
- Leaves do not break when pulled.
- Stems swollen just above ground level – like a shallot.



Nassella tussock

Flower

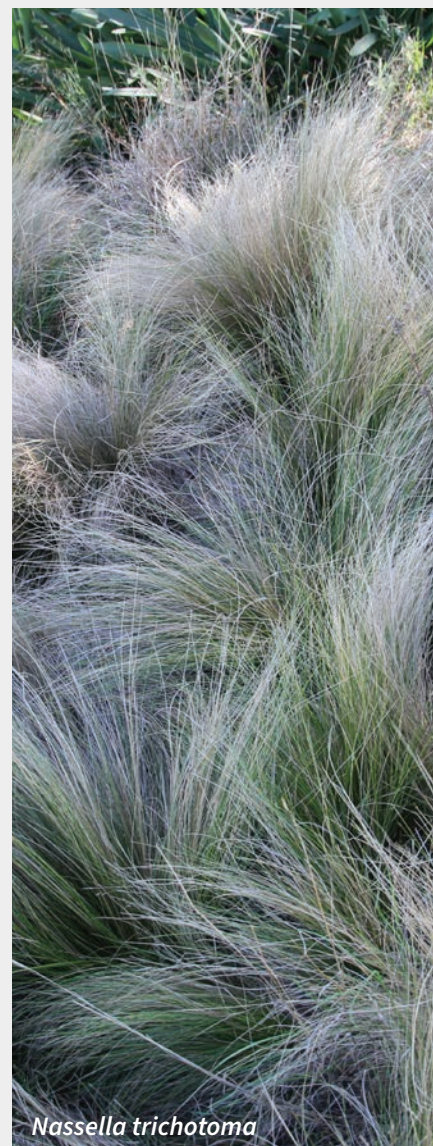
- Up to 2000 seed bearing panicles can be produced each season.
- Panicles fully protrude from the plant and detach at maturity.
- The majority of flowers produced in New Zealand are non opening and automatically self-pollinate (cleistogamic).

Fruit/seed

- Each plant can produce up to 100,000 seeds per year.
- Seeds can last 20 years in the soil
- Seed heads are branched, 25cm-95cm long and purple; they can give the plant a purplish tinge.
- Seeds can be blown long distances in strong winds, over 8km in some cases.

Leaves/stems

- Light green to yellow green leaves are thin and tightly rolled.
- When fingers are run down the leaf towards the base, the leaves feel tough and needle like.
- Stem is swollen just above ground level – like a shallot.



More information

Publications

The following publications are available from the Waikato Regional Council. Contact us to request a copy (freephone 0800 800 401).

- National Pest Plant Accord (manual of plants banned from sale, propagation and distribution) (free)
- Plant Me Instead! (Plants to use in place of pest plants) (free)

Web

- Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032 – waikatoregion.govt.nz/RPMP
- Waikato Biosecurity Strategy 2022-2032 – waikatoregion.govt.nz/biosecurity-strategy