

South Gippsland Landcare Network

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Fish Creek Ragwort Field Day - Thursday 24 August 2017

Ragwort Trial to evaluate various control options in pasture

About this plant:

Ragwort Senecio jacobaea (family Compositae) is a perennial herb and a native of Europe.

Plants can produce over 200 000 seeds, these remain viable in the soil for up to 15 years. (Clover seed is viable for 12 years, barley grass 3-4 years, thistle seeds last 30-40 years).

Ragwort leaves and stems contain an alkaloid that is toxic to cattle, sheep and horses. The plant is toxic when both fresh and dry, including when fed in silage or hay.

It is an herbaceous biennial or perennial herb, reproducing from crowns, roots and seeds.

Most seeds fall near the parent plant ie within 20 metres, but may also be spread by wind, water, animals, farm implements, agricultural produce including hay, on clothing and even the farm bike or ute.

In its first year a ragwort seedling grows to form a rosette, in its second year some plants mature and flower while some plants may be up to five years old before they flower.

Fortunately many plants die as rosettes - it is at this time when they are most vulnerable to competition particularly if they are in a pasture maintaining dense ground cover.

Seedlings appear mostly in autumn and spring and grow as rosettes until spring of the following year when more upright foliage (referred to as the 'cabbage' stage) is produced. Flowering stalks develop later in spring and over summer, with peak flowering from late January to March. Some odd plants may flower at any time. After seed set the plants turn brown and die.

Ragwort prefers humid temperate areas, and is usually found on heavy soils with moderate fertility, it is common in poorly managed or degraded pastures. It is also found in natural areas often near the coast. Ragwort is tolerant of frost and has some drought tolerance.

The Ragwort Control Project:

The aim of the project is to evaluate some practical control options for ragwort growing in established pastures that are appropriate for the region, including determining the cost-effective outcome of these options for landowners.

The various treatments being evaluated are:

- Spray applications: Organic herbicide
 Selective herbicide
- > Steam treatment
- ➤ Plant nutrients and/or lime depending on soil test results
- ➤ Control untreated

It is recognised that part of the trials effectiveness will rely on developing and maintaining high ground cover.

The demonstration trial activities will be recorded and mapped against the treatments. The results will be available to the farming community in the region at a trial site 'paddock walk' in January 2018 and the field day in early March 2018. Information will also appear in Landcare newsletters and the local newspapers.

Data collection summary:

Soils: Complete soil analysis 0-10cm depth core samples. Soil carbon 30 cm depth cores
Complete soil analysis 80-90 cm depth cores.

➤ Pasture: Composition – grass/clover/weeds/bareground

➤ Plant Tissue: FeedTest analysis

➤ Grazing: Intervals and stock numbers recorded

Note: All soil and plant data will be collected from permanently marked sampling transects within each treatment area to ensure maximum opportunity for comparison of data collected.

To complete the project all the results will be collated for each of the treatments and presented in tables and graphs plotted against time.

The legacy of the project will be the summarised results and the many discussions about the current state of Ragwort control options, their likely effectiveness and related costs.

It is important to acknowledgement the enthusiasm and generous support provided by Tim Farrell for this project on his farm.at Fish Creek.

More Information:

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