

Title: Rice Grass treatment off to a flying start

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The 2023 Rice Grass spraying season is now in full swing in the Rubicon Estuary, with two teams of contractors aiming to cover a massive area of 590 hectares before the end of April, when the grass turns dormant for the winter.

Rice Grass is a highly invasive weed which was introduced into Tasmanian estuaries early last century. Once established, it rapidly spreads and out-competes native saltmarsh vegetation and seagrass beds, disturbing the natural ecosystems and threatening habitat for fish and birdlife. The plant can limit boat access for fishing, recreation and aquaculture. The Port Sorell-Rubicon Estuary which borders Narawntapu National Park has the second largest infestation of Rice Grass in the country, following the Tamar, and covers an area of more than 650 hectares forming dense meadows in the upper reaches of the estuary.

The current project to tackle the Rice Grass infestation in the Rubicon is in its third year and is being managed by Cradle Coast Authority in partnership with Latrobe Council with funding from the Australian Government.

Past spraying has been conducted on foot and from quad bikes, but this year Cradle Coast NRM is proposing a small trial of aerially spraying the dense meadows near the Frankford Highway bridge. These meadows have previously been untreatable due to the soft sediment making it inaccessible to contractors.

Aerial treatment would be conducted using specialised low flying drones, treating the plant from a low height to ensure minimal disturbance to the environment.

‘This will be a new application method for Rice Grass treatment in the Rubicon’ said Project Coordinator Claire Jinnette. ‘We are working directly with the government and UTAS to ensure best practice. Aerial treatment of Rice Grass offers exciting prospects for future management in the Cradle Coast region because it is more efficient and causes less disturbance to the ecosystem’. The herbicide used for treating Rice Grass, Fusilade Forte, is highly effective with a 90% success rate. It has a low toxicity to fish and shellfish and does not affect seagrass. There is an advised 7 day withholding period for the consumption of fish caught in the estuary post-spraying – signs will be placed at local boat ramps advising the community of these dates.

Boat users and kayakers are recommended to wash down boats and equipment after entering Rice Grass infested areas to assist in limiting the spread to other areas.

For more information on the current project, contact:

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Images:

Photo: Rice grass meadows at the Frankford Highway Bridge, Rubicon Estuary, August 2022

