4. Mapping and cost-benefit analyses have found the scheme to be beneficial.
5. Outcomes of independent reviews and critiques.
6. High compliance rates of between 88% and 98%.
7. The reduction in extent and severity of land degradation within the Shire.

### Applicability to other Local Government Areas

The Environmental Enhancement Policy has considerable potential applicability to other Local Government Areas. A number of municipalities have introduced schemes modelled on the one in operation in Melton. However, any scheme would need customizing to the specific circumstances of the municipality. Broad community support is essential.

### Statutory authority for the policy

The rate rebate, as provided for by the Environmental Enhancement Policy, is able to be established under Section 169 of the Local Government Act 1989.

# GROW WEST – controlling serrated tussock at a catchment scale with an integrated landscape change project

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### The GROW WEST vision

GROW WEST is a ground-breaking opportunity for communities, government and private industry to participate together in one of the largest and most exciting landscape improvement projects that Australia has ever seen. It will restore and protect 50 000 hectares of degraded land by replanting 20% of the landscape with a massive mosaic of native vegetation and farm forestry plantations.

GROW WEST will occur in the catchment of the Werribee River about 50 km west of Melbourne, which contains some of Victoria's worst land degradation including immense infestations of serrated tussock, soil erosion, rabbits, salinity, declining biodiversity and nutrient discharge into waterways. The project will centre on the Rowsley Valley and Pentland Hills near Bacchus Marsh. This area features grazing plains dissected by rugged valleys, gorges and escarpments formed by the waterways that flow south into Port Phillip Bay. Unfortunately, it is these rugged terrain features which are extremely difficult for landholders to manage and create a haven for serrated tussock. The area also features the major natural tourism and recreational assets of the Brisbane Ranges, Werribee Gorge and Lerderderg State Parks, which will be linked by the mosaic of vegetation.

Over recent years, the local landholders have recognized that an integrated landscape change project at a catchment scale is needed to simultaneously deal with all of the land degradation issues and create a long-term solution.

By progressively bringing together interested individuals and organizations, the local community has initiated GROW WEST aimed at implementing major landscape change. The project is still in the crucial planning stages but the momentum is rapidly building and the cornerstones of a successful project are being put in place. At the property scale, the project will have selected land revegetated with a practical mix of native species, long-term agroforestry and other economical land-use options, specially tailored to suit the individual landholder and site. The adoption of best practice land management techniques will be a core requirement of the project, as will the long-term maintenance and protection of these new vegetation assets.

From a broad perspective, GROW WEST will lead to a productive, sustainable and picturesque landscape and will bring an exciting range of economic, social and environmental benefits including greatly improved control over the spread of serrated tussock around and from the Werribee catchment. The massive mosaic of forestry and native trees will provide a huge barrier to the spread of serrated tussock, greatly reduce the area of terrain available to serrated tussock, and enable improved treatment of the weed on productive soils.

At the same time, the other benefits of this project will be enormous. The environment will benefit from control of weeds and rabbits, greenhouse gas abatement, creation of wildlife corridors and green links between major parks, control of soil erosion and improved protection of rivers and streams. Local communities will also benefit from improved productivity and sustainability of the land, increased employment, attraction of sponsorship funds into the area, opportunities for ecotourism, better community understanding of land and water issues and a major demonstration of why Victoria is the place to be.

### What is happening

Substantial groundwork has already been done to prepare for this project. Meetings and discussions have been held with landholders to hear their views of the project concept and to gauge their commitment to it. Landholders have welcomed the project and some have already identified areas of their land that would be suitable for large-scale revegetation through this project. Significantly, this already totals over 3000 hectares of land. The local Landcare Groups have also formally endorsed the project and are keenly involved in the planning that is under way.

Many more landholders will be introduced to the project through farm planning courses that will involve them planning the appropriate future land use for their land and their situation. But this is a big project and it needs more than just the landholders. To propel the project forward there is also a need for the involvement and financial commitment of all levels of Government, corporate sponsors, local industries and businesses, environmental

and educational organizations, community groups and many others.

Start-up funds have been contributed by key local organizations which has enabled a full-time Project Coordinator to be employed. The key roles for the Coordinator in the short term include development of a professional Business Plan, communication with the myriad of potential stakeholder groups and organizations, attracting funding for initial on-ground works, and seeking major ongoing sponsorship that will enable the project to reach its grand targets over the next 5–10 years.

This is a project that will develop and foster partnerships across many sectors of the community and will bring significant benefits for all of the partners. The scale of this work will ensure a very high public profile for the project itself and the organizations that are involved.

### What's next

An ongoing level of on-ground work continues every year in this area and is slowly bringing the landscape vision to reality. But our aim is to accelerate this process 10 fold. The Business Plan will incorporate and link all elements of the project including the land use options and revegetation technology to be used, the project administration arrangements, cost sharing arrangements and mechanisms, investment and marketing strategies and economic justifications of the project.

The communication with and participation of all of the stakeholders will also be a focus for the coming year and beyond. Major corporate, government and philanthropic sponsorship will be sought and secured, particularly focusing on the marketing advantages of this project being so close to Melbourne, Victoria's capital city and home to 3.5 million people, with major road, rail and air links from Melbourne to regional Victoria, interstate and overseas.

Then the real fun begins as, with continued hard work, the new landscape takes shape and the multiple benefits of this integrated approach are realized.

# Stipoid grasses as Weeds of National Significance

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**Summary**

The Commonwealth Government under the National Weeds Strategy, has recently implemented its Weeds of National Significance program. *Nassella trichotoma* (serrated tussock) and *N. neesiana* (Chilean needlegrass) were assessed as being two of the twenty Weeds of National Significance for Australia. In total 25 projects with total funding at just under $2.8 million have been funded for these two species under the strategy and these are scheduled to begin during 2002–2003. The development of national strategic plans for these weeds will see a coordinated national approach to control that aims at reducing their spread and their impacts on natural and agricultural ecosystems.

### The Weeds of National Significance process

The National Weeds Strategy (Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand, Australia and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council and Forestry Ministers 1997) was devised with the aim of reducing the impact of weeds on the sustainability of Australia's productive capacity and natural ecosystems. Goal 2 of the Strategy is 'To reduce the impact of existing weed problems of national significance'. Objective 2.1 of Goal 2 is to 'Facilitate the identification and assessment of weed problems of national significance' (Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand, Australia and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council and Forestry Ministers 1997). The process to determine which weeds are nationally significant began when the Commonwealth asked the States and Territories to nominate what they considered to be their worst weeds. In total, 71 weeds were nominated for assessment. Evaluation of these weeds was undertaken via assessment panels of technical experts covering the tropical, subtropical and temperate regions of Australia. Each State or Territory had representation for the regions they represented (e.g. Temperate weeds had Western Australian, South Australian, New South Wales, Victorian and Tasmanian representation). Each weed was assessed on six questions on 'invasiveness', seven questions on 'impacts' and social impacts were documented with answers on a scale of one to six and a 'don't know' category. The current and potential distributions of each weed was assessed and this information was used to help rank the different species. Through the determination of the Weeds of National Significance, *N. neesiana* was ranked 12 and *N. trichotoma* ranked 15 out of the 71 nominated species (Thorp and Lynch 2000) (Table 1). In particular, both *N. trichotoma* and *N. neesiana* were assessed as being highly invasive, high impact weeds with great potential to spread and cause a number of socioeconomic and environmental problems (Thorp and Lynch 2000). *N. trichotoma* has been described as the worst weed in NSW and potentially the most serious weed of non-arable grazing land in Victoria (Parsons and Cuthbertson 1993). Chilean needlegrass has been described as being potentially the worst environmental weed of native grasslands in south eastern Australia (McLaren *et al* 1998).

Once the 20 Weeds of National Significance were unanimously endorsed by the three Ministerial Councils on 1 June 1999 (Thorp and Lynch 2000), each State and Territory set about producing National Strategies for the Weeds of National Significance they were nominated for as lead agency. Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) was nominated lead agency for Chilean needlegrass and New South Wales Agriculture as lead agency for serrated tussock.

The strategic plans provide a blueprint for directing where investments should be made to control and monitor these weeds. The plans combined the relevant knowledge known about the weeds impacts (agricultural, environmental and social), distribution, dispersal, life cycle, regulatory controls, current management options and identified gaps in research requiring development of new or better management options.

### Strategic plans for Weeds of National Significance

National Strategic Plans (national strategies) were produced by convening national facilitated workshops with key stakeholders from community groups,