

## The weed potential of *Erica* species for Tasmania and other areas of southern Australia

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**Summary** The plant genus *Erica* contains species found mostly in South Africa, but also Europe, Macaronesia and other parts of the world. There are approximately 820 *Erica* species, none are native to Australia. These shrubs and small trees often have attractive flowers and have been introduced to Australia via the ornamental plant trade. Two *Erica* species, Spanish heath (*Erica lusitanica* Rudolphi) and tree heath (*Erica arborea* L.), are recognised globally as the two most widespread invasive *Erica* species to date. Both these are unfortunately naturalised in southern Australia, including Tasmania. There are up to 18 *Erica* species naturalised in southern Australia. At least six of these are naturalised in Tasmania. Besom heath (*Erica scoparia* L.) was first recorded as naturalised in Tasmania (and Australia generally) in 1983, and it

is proving to be a particular concern. In Tasmania it shows every sign of being at least as bad an invasive as Spanish heath.

In preparation for potential weed declarations, the Tasmanian Government risk-assessed besom heath and 15 other *Erica* species considered to pose a potential risk. Results indicated each of those species assessed are of weed concern to Tasmania. Of particular concern are those *Erica* species of European origin. Investigation of the biology of these plants indicates just how well suited to naturalisation and spread as invasive species many *Erica* species are. Climatic and other physical similarities between their places of origin and southern Australia adds to their suitability here.

**Keywords** *Erica*, heath, naturalised, weed, invasive, species.