

Dr Ben Gooden

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In 2014, Ben completed a PhD from the University of Wollongong into the effects of alien grass invasion on coastal vegetation communities along a gradient of urbanisation. Ben's study was one of the first to explicitly examine the interactive effects of urbanisation and alien plant invasion on coastal ecosystems, and discovered that grass invasion was a stronger driver of community change than urbanisation for a variety of endangered vegetation types.

Ben is currently based at CSIRO where he coordinates research into the biocontrol of various environmental and agricultural weeds, including wandering trad (*Tradescantia fluminensis*), Cape ivy (*Delairea odorata*) and fireweed (*Senecio madagascariensis*). Ben's role is to develop and enact biocontrol release programs across Australia in collaboration with local community groups and land managers at the coalface of weed invasion.

Ben is a passionate advocate for community stewardship in weed control, and worked previously in bushcare support and restoration of weed-invaded bushland with local governments, volunteer community groups and private land holders. Ben currently holds a fellowship at the University of Wollongong, where he was a lecturer in biology from 2014 to 2017.

Ben will use the generous CAWS Travel Award to visit fellow researchers and managers in New Zealand, who have recently released the fungal biocontrol agent (*Kordyana brasiliensis*) for wandering trad (see details here: <https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/publications/newsletters/biological-control-of-weeds/issue-77/smut-for-tradescantia-soon>). Ben will visit release sites in NZ to evaluate agent establishment and spread, as well as hold discussions with local managers and researchers about their experiences and observations. Ben wishes to develop an optimal release program for *Kordyana* in Australia based on lessons learnt in the NZ context, and foster exchange of expertise and information in the field of biocontrol.

