

# Against the Odds - Policy Challenges for managing buffel grass invasion in non-pastoral arid lands

Jeffery Foulkes<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resource Management Board, Australia  
([adam.wood3@sa.gov.au](mailto:adam.wood3@sa.gov.au))

**Summary** The Alinytjara Wilurara (AW) Landscape Board region covers the north-west of South Australia covering more than 280,000km<sup>2</sup>, stretching from the NT and WA borders south to the Great Australian Bight. The land is mostly dedicated to conservation and traditional Aboriginal use and occupation. This includes Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, Maralinga Tjarutja Lands, Yalata Lands, and co-managed parks and reserves. Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris* and *C. pennisetiformis*), or mamu tjanpi/tjanpi kura (Pitjantjatjara: devil grass/bad grass) is an introduced perennial tussock grass that has emerged as a significant threat to the culture and safety of remote communities in the region. It was introduced for dust suppression in central Australia in the 1960's. It has since colonised large areas of the APY Lands. It outcompetes native grasses and shrubs; threatens woodlands, communities and infrastructure with destructive high fuel load fires. It establishes a dense monoculture, unsuitable as habitat and unpalatable to wildlife. Heavy infestations prevent traditional hunting, foraging and cultural activities. It's now recognised as one of

the worst transformer weeds in Australia's arid rangelands. In some parts of northern Australia it is considered a reliable fodder grass and not a "weed". The negative and positive aspects of Buffel grass compromises definitive policy developments and there isn't a National strategy for sustainable management of Buffel grass. South Australia is the only state to have it declared under the Landscape South Australia Act 2019 and a state-wide Buffel Grass Strategic Plan. Control and eradication is one of the highest management priorities for AW Region. This is mirrored in the Healthy Country Plans and Indigenous Protected Area Plans of the remote aboriginal communities in the AW region. The AW Buffel Grass Operational Strategy 2018-2023 was developed to guide strategic management approaches. A key program is to eradicate where possible and otherwise control it in southern AW region by 2025 as its distribution is currently limited.

**Keywords** Buffel grass, *Cenchrus ciliaris*, Environmental Weed, Alinytjara Wilurara, traditional hunting, cultural activities