

# Alinytjara Wilurara Landscape Board and Indigenous Rangers protecting millions of hectares of pristine desert from Buffel Grass invasion

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**Summary** The Alinytjara Wilurara (AW) Landscape Board region in north west of South Australia covers more than 280,000 km<sup>2</sup>, stretching from the Northern Territory and West Australian 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, Yalata, 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 species that has emerged as a significant threat to the culture and safety of remote communities in the region. This unwanted invader has colonised large areas of the APY Lands. It outcompetes native grasses, shrubs and threatens woodlands, communities and infrastructure with destruction caused by high fuel load fires. Heavy infestations prevent traditional hunting, foraging and cultural activities. It establishes a dense monoculture, unsuitable as habitat and unpalatable to wildlife. It's now recognised as one of the worst environmental threats in Australia's arid rangelands. The Great

Victoria Desert (GVD) is the largest desert in Australia and contains significant biodiversity and cultural assets. Early intervention in Buffel grass control has ensured that it remains one of last desert regions in the rangelands to have a limited distribution of buffel grass. This is both a challenge and opportunity for all stakeholders including Indigenous ranger groups. Project coordination has many challenges due the area's vastness, remoteness, weather dependencies combined with minimal resources to undertake the work. Increased regional collaboration and the establishment of indigenous ranger groups has led to AW Landscape Board committing to new Buffel Free GVD project to be funded over the next 3 years. This presents the means to implement a coordinated approach across WA, NT and SA and apply the lessons learnt from the last 10 years to reduce the spread and to control/eradicate Buffel grass in the GVD. This presentation will discuss this new planned approach.

**Keywords** Buffel grass, *Cenchrus ciliaris*, Great Victoria Desert, Oak Valley Rangers, Maralinga Tjarutja, traditional hunting, cultural activities, Alinytjara Wilurara