

## Turf weeds across north Australia

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**Summary** The north and northwest of Australia is developing rapidly, spurred on by massive investments in oil and gas, along with an increasing military presence. With this development comes the need for recreation areas – open space, parks, home lawns and sporting ovals.

Although amenity horticulture was recently valued at over \$60 million annually in the Northern Territory, almost no turf research and development has ever been done in the region. In addition, there are no suggestions, let alone firm recommendations, for specific weed management.

In the region, most major regional or national standard sports fields have used couch (*Cynodon dactylon*) and several use zoysia (*Zoysia japonica*).

Broad leaved carpet grass (*Axonopus compressus*), sometimes used as a home lawn species, has increased substantially as a weedy species due to high rainfall, wet soil conditions and overwatering. Repeated use of organic arsenicals has not solved the problem and more radical solutions are needed. Significant control of broad leaved carpet grass in fine turf is an acute problem for which there is no current adequate solution.

*Sporobolus virginicus* is emerging as a serious weed problem across most better managed turf areas in the region. It is particularly troublesome on cricket wicket squares. Labour costs are likely to inhibit control in most areas, without a solution emerging. Spot spraying with glyphosate is not cost effective for larger areas.

The most serious widespread weed in managed turf is probably *Chrysopogon acidulatus*. The most commonly used turf is bahia grass (*Paspalum notatum*), where Argentine is the preferred cultivar, but

cv Pensacola is also common. It would be rare to see a significant turfed area of bahia grass without the presence of this weed.

Unfortunately *Chrysopogon acidulatus* spreads rapidly, and probably most commonly via use of poorly-managed outsourced mowing contractors, with little routine attention to biosecurity. The weed chokes the bahia grass, eventually dominating the site, with considerably reduced amenity of the turf surface. The rapid growth of sticky, spiky seed heads is irksome to any user of the area. The domination of the site by this weed tends to reduce the turf quality and density, renders the area far less attractive, and increases water demand.

There is currently no suitable herbicide to use in bahia grass to control this weed species. However, a more detailed appraisal of older products has commenced. Sulfometuron shows promise. Organic arsenicals and quinclorac can be used in couch and zoysia to achieve control but cannot be used in bahia grass areas.

Annual grasses are a considerable problem at establishment but there are some management and herbicide solutions emerging.

Turf weeds in north Australia have generally been ignored. While there are often options with some of the lesser used turf species, based on information from elsewhere (recommendations available), there is relatively little information for the main problem weeds in this region.

However, with increasing use of turf in the region, some work has now commenced on the major problem species.

**Keywords** Bahia grass, *Chrysopogon acidulatus*, *Sporobolus virginicus*, sulfometuron.