



**CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

## African Lovegrass Management in the ACT

4 February 2026

### **About us**

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak body for environment and climate groups in the ACT Region. We represent close to 50 member groups, bringing together a united voice on environment and climate issues to Government, business and community.

Since 1981 we have been at the centre of the region's most important wins for wildlife, bushland, climate and communities. As a hub for the ACT Region's environment and climate movement and a not-for-profit, non-government organisation, we run campaigns, promote and upskill local groups, undertake research, advocate passionately, and engage and inform our community.

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This report has been prepared by the Council's African Lovegrass Advisory Group and was presented at the February 2026 meeting of the Nature Conservation Forum.

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## Executive Summary

African lovegrass (ALG) is now one of the Australian Capital Territories (ACT) most rapidly spreading and damaging invasive species. Its expansion is being significantly accelerated by ACT Government controlled activities – particularly mowing practices, inadequate hygiene protocols and delayed policy development. The consequences are significant, including safety (fire), environmental, economic, social and legal. The spread of ALG is not an isolated issue, it is a symptom of sustained underinvestment in weed management in the ACT, and the consequences are now urgent.

The current range and rapid spread of ALG through the ACT and surrounding regions due to mowing (when viable seed is present) and favourable growing conditions represents a foreseeable and preventable biosecurity risk under the ACT *Biosecurity Act 2023*.

This group recognises that ACT land managers understand the challenges posed by ALG and many areas have mapped, triaged and treated ALG for many years. However a significant step up in effort is urgently required, including beyond existing ‘asset protection’ areas. Expanding management practices beyond asset protection areas must not come at the expense of these priority zones, additional investment is required to ensure both are adequately managed.

Key points include:

- **ALG is a transformer species**, it transforms landscapes.
- **ALG is spreading rapidly across government-managed land**, including suburban parks, nature reserves, verges, green spaces and transport corridors.
- **ALG is now spreading from government-managed land across land tenures**, including private land.
- **Inadequate machine hygiene and mowing (when viable seed is present) are major vectors**, repeatedly identified in ACT-commissioned reports since at least 2010.
- **The ACT Government has clear statutory and common-law duties** to manage biosecurity risks, protect neighbouring landholders and avoid environmental harm.
- **These duties do not appear to currently be met in practice**, creating foreseeable and preventable harm to biodiversity, public amenity, private landholders and fire safety. The current approach is not resulting in minimising harm to biodiversity, public amenity, private landholders and fire safety.
- **Prevention** measures to stop ALG spreading to clean areas must be a priority, strategic and combined with longer-term management in areas of higher infestation.
- **Delays dramatically increase long-term costs to the government and landowners** as isolated plants become large and entrenched monocultures, growing up to 1m high.
- **A coordinated, ACT-wide ALG management policy is *time critical***, supported by long-term funding, cross-directorate governance and operational reform.

- **Territory-wide eradication is no longer feasible, but targeted localised management is possible and necessary**, including nature reserves, off-reserve high conservation areas and suburban areas. Without effective management impacts and costs will escalate.
- **Failure to manage ALG in urban and suburban areas creates a foreseeable and direct pathway for its incursion into environmentally significant areas** - inadequate control in one zone cannot reasonably be expected to prevent spread to another.
- **Updated mapping and species assessment for ALG is overdue**, with current ACT Advisory List ratings now outdated (2022), and only undertaken every 5 years (inadequate for species spreading as rapidly as ALG).

The economic and ecological cost of inaction increases exponentially each season as seed banks deepen and monocultures expand.

This document synthesises legislative obligations, scientific evidence and past government reports to support a comprehensive, evidence-based proposal for immediate action and implementation in Spring 2026.

## Context and Purpose

African Lovegrass, *Eragrostis curvula*, is a high-risk invasive weed in Canberra and the Southern Tablelands, recognised as high priority for management (NSW DPI Weedwise, 2024<sup>1</sup>; Saunders, ANPSC, 2025)<sup>2</sup>. The impacts are substantial, including elevated fire danger. Ecologists regard it as one of the greatest threats to biodiversity in grassy ecosystems (NSW DPI Weedwise, 2024; NSW Department of Planning and Environment, 2022)<sup>3</sup>. It forms monocultures by outcompeting native grasses and wildflowers, transforming landscapes into tinder fields in hot, dry months (Weeds Australia, 2024<sup>4</sup>; Rural Fire Service Monaro, 2013)<sup>5</sup>.

As a transformer species, ALG fundamentally alters ecosystem's structure, fire behaviour and land-use capacity. Its rapid expansion in urban and suburban areas now represents the dominant pathway for incursion into high-value conservation areas.

Despite repeated warnings, a coordinated, territory-wide management strategy is lacking - particularly in suburban and urban areas where government mowing practices are accelerating spread.

This absence of a unified strategy is inconsistent with the proactive nature of the General Biosecurity Duty, which requires reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable spread. This document:

1. Summarises key legislation, reports and advisory materials
2. Analyses implications for ACT and Commonwealth government and other landholders' statutory obligations and responsibilities
3. Identifies systemic gaps in current practice, and
4. Proposes development of a comprehensive cross-portfolio management framework for implementation by Spring 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> [NSW Department of Primary Industries \(2024\). "African lovegrass \(\*Eragrostis curvula\*\) – NSW WeedWise". NSW DPI](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Saunders, S. \(2025\). "The Canberra threat of African lovegrass". Australian Native Plants Society Canberra Region.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NSW Department of Planning and Environment. Abating the threat of exotic perennial grasses in native grassy communities in eastern NSW: Southern Tablelands and Slopes \(2022\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [African Lovegrass \(\*Eragrostis curvula\*\) profile. Weeds Australia – National Invasive Species Information](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Rural Fire Service Monaro \(2013\). Lovegrass Fire Demonstration, Bredbo, YouTube](#)

## Summary Table – Evidence, Analysis and Proposals

### 1. ACT Biosecurity Act 2023 – Duties, obligations and Principles ([link](#))

#### **Key information**

- General Biosecurity Duty to take reasonable steps to manage biosecurity risks

#### **Analysis**

Evidence of potential non-compliance includes:

- Mowing during seed set
- Spreading ALG from infested to clean areas
- Inadequate wash down routines
- Failure to prevent spread from government land to adjacent leased private land
- Delayed development of effective ALG policy for urban, city and suburban areas
- Failure to act despite clear evidence that existing controls are ineffective

Consequence:

- Foreseeable environmental, social, safety (fire) and economic risks
- Preventable harm to biodiversity, public amenity and neighbouring landholders
- Increased legal exposure due to foreseeable and avoidable harm

Implications for Government: these practices indicate potential non-compliance with the General Biosecurity Duty, which requires proactive prevention of foreseeable biosecurity risks.

#### **Proposal**

Develop, in consultation with this AdvocacyGroup and neighbouring local government in NSW, a comprehensive ACT-wide ALG Management Policy for implementation by Spring 2026, including:

- Consideration of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including government agencies, land managers and the community
- Prevention-first approach - stopping further spread to clean areas
- Strict mower hygiene and compliance checks
- Resourcing government on-ground biosecurity officers to undertake targeted spot-spraying with best practice approaches
- Coordination between volunteers and increased on-ground biosecurity officers
- Prevent cross-boundary spread, including via containment and edge control using Bradley Method for highly infested areas
- Land-use-specific strategies
- Restoration and native re-seeding
- Community reporting mechanisms and awareness
- Adaptive management and ongoing monitoring

Requires effective and long-term funding and cross-portfolio governance, including with portfolios responsible for biosecurity, mowing practices and fire emergency management. ALG touches on almost every part of government operations – land, transport, planning, environment, emergency service and community engagement.

## 2. ACT Advisory List of Naturalised Alien Plants – Species Assessment [\(link\)](#)

### **Key information**

- ALG is listed as highly invasive with extreme habitat range
- 2022 assessment rated impacts as:
  - Environmental: massive
  - Social: major
  - Economic: moderate
- Known to form tall monocultures, degrade social assets, reduce recreation value and increase fire danger

### **Analysis**

- Given rapid spread of ALG since 2022, ALG is likely now to meet catastrophic/massive/extreme criteria across all categories
- Lack of updated mapping limits strategic interventions, particularly in urban, city and suburban areas

Implications for Government: outdated mapping and assessment limit the government's ability to take reasonable and practical steps to prevent spread, as required under the General Biosecurity Duty.

### **Proposal**

- Prioritise immediate reassessment of ALG under the Advisory List, noting significant spread and risk posed by ALG since previous assessment
- Conduct ACT-wide mapping to establish a baseline for targeted control, including in urban, city and suburban areas
- Consider inclusion of ALG as a Weed of National Significance.

## 3. Lovegrass brochure (Southern ACT Catchment Group (SAGTCG)) [\(link\)](#)

### **Key information**

- Highlights rapid spread across suburban, rural and conservation areas
- Identifies mowing and machinery movement as major vectors
- Recommends early identification, hygiene and integrated management

### **Analysis**

- Consistent with all other evidence sources

Implications for Government: consistent external evidence reinforces the need for immediate operational reform.

### **Proposal**

- Incorporated into Recommendation 1 (Comprehensive ALG Management Policy)

## 4. African Lovegrass Field Day Report

### **Key information**

- Field Day focused on rural areas

### **Analysis**

- Need for more consistent and improved coordination of ALG management across directorates, including biosecurity
- Unclear whether ACT senior officials responsible for mowing in city, urban and suburban areas attended, or briefed regarding outcomes
- Concerning given rapid ALG spread in city, urban and suburban government-managed land (areas outside areas of high conservation value)
- The formal record of the Field Day failed to capture some key points raised by the community, including concern mowing is putting efficiency above biosecurity
- Failure to manage ALG in urban and suburban areas creates a foreseeable and direct pathway for its incursion into environmentally significant areas. Inadequate control in one zone cannot reasonably be expected to prevent spread to another.

Implications for Government: lack of cross-directorate engagement undermines the government's capacity to meet its statutory duty to prevent foreseeable spread.

### **Proposal**

- Improve cross-government coordination, ensuring all directorates adopt consistent ALG management practices, including the City Presentation group

## 5. Distribution and Abundance of ALG in the ACT (Sharp, 2011) ([link](#))

### **Key information**

Background: a study was undertaken in 2011 to survey the extent of ALG along roadsides. Over 1600km were surveyed, and maps show the distribution patterns across the landscape. Essentially, practically all lowland areas of the ACT and surrounding districts have low to very high infestations of the weed.

Key findings in the report are still highly relevant:

- Rapid expansion between 2000-2010
- Mowing / slashing identified as primary spread mechanism
- Roadsides act as invasion highways
- Vehicles and machinery amplify spread
- All land uses susceptible
- Existing control reduces abundance but not spread
- Delayed action increases long-term costs - failing to control isolated plants early leads to exponentially higher long-term costs and management difficulty

### **Analysis**

- Many recommendations remain valid and have not been implemented
- Particularly critical in urban/suburban areas

Implications for Government: long-standing recommendations remain unimplemented, increasing foreseeable biosecurity risk and long-term cost.

### ***Proposal***

- Incorporated into Recommendation 1 (Comprehensive ALG Management Policy)

## **6. The Canberra threat of African lovegrass, Journal Of The Australian Native Plants Society Canberra Region (Inc) ([link](#))**

### ***Key information***

- Reinforces high invasiveness and impacts - ALG has become a significant and spreading weed problem in Canberra, forming monocultures, displacing native species, increasing fire risk, undermining accessibility and ecological value of parks, playgrounds and grassy ecosystems
- Highlights mowing as major vector and current management efforts are insufficient - with mowing practices and inadequate machine hygiene contributing to the spread from arterial roads into suburbs, effective control requires earlier intervention, improved resourcing, upgraded mowing protocols and tailored approaches for different parts of the city
- Emphasises need for integrated, long-term management - need for stronger government efforts of policy and investment to contain and manage the weed, noting community and Landcare groups and volunteers are able to report outbreaks, remove small infestations and support government efforts.

### ***Analysis***

- Consistent with all other sources

Implications for Government: reinforces the need for integrated, prevention-focused management consistent with General Biosecurity Duty.

### ***Proposal***

- Incorporated into Recommendation 1 (Comprehensive ALG Management Policy)

## Synthesis – Cross-Cutting Themes

Across all sources, the following themes are clear:

- Mowing is a major vector of spread, especially during seed set
- Government machinery hygiene is inadequate
- Current lack of government resources to support on-ground prevention focus
- Existing approaches fail to focus on prevention (particularly in currently clean and low infestation suburbs)
- Government managed land, including in urban, city and suburban areas are now significant sources of spread to adjacent land
- Delayed action increases economic cost, ecological damage and fire danger
- Cross-directorate coordination is insufficient, including biosecurity obligations
- Monitoring, mapping and reporting are outdated, and inconsistent
- Volunteers, land managers and lessees / government action is not aligned
- Lacking community engagement, education (threats and treatment)

These findings demonstrate a clear causal chain: operational practices (particularly mowing and hygiene) are driving ALG spread; this spread creates foreseeable biosecurity risk, failure to prevent it increases potential legal exposure, and delayed action results in escalating economic, social and ecological consequences.

## Legal obligations and risk exposure

The ACT Government has a clear Duty to:

- Prevent foreseeable biosecurity risks
- Avoid causing or exacerbating environmental harm
- Protect neighbouring landholders from nuisance and damage
- Act reasonably and consider relevant matters
- Use public money responsibly

Current practices create foreseeable and avoidable biosecurity risks, indicating potential non-compliance with the General Biosecurity Duty and increasing the likelihood of administrative scrutiny or legal challenge.

## Recommendations (2026 calendar year)

### 1. Policy and Governance

- a. Develop a **Comprehensive Territory-wide ALG Management Policy**, for implementation **by Spring 2026**, in collaboration with the AdvocacyGroup and neighbouring local government areas in NSW, and aligned with ACT policy and plans addressing all weeds and pests
- b. Secure long-term funding to implement Recommendation 1
- c. Establish cross-portfolio governance with clear accountability: publish annual public reporting on ALG distribution, treatment outcomes and compliance with hygiene protocols

- d. Prioritise immediate reassessment of ALG under the Advisory List, including up-to-date mapping of ALG across the ACT – a baseline study for strategic intervention by clearly identifying current extent and distribution of the species.
- e. Adopt a staged implementation timeline: mapping completed in Winter 2026, full policy implementation by Spring 2026, annual review thereafter.

## 2. Operational Reform

- a. Enforce strict mower and machinery hygiene, ensuring mowers are washed down before moving from infested to clean areas. The current practice where mowers are cleaned about once each day at their depot is not sufficient - every urban mower usually works through both clean and infested areas during each day.
- b. In low-infestation areas, prohibit mowing during viable seed.
- c. Increased on-ground biosecurity officers, including to mark small to medium ALG outbreaks for targeted treatment
- d. In high-infestation areas, implement Bradley Method containment and edge control
- e. Continue sequencing mowing from least to highest infestation (noting that directional mowing does *not* appear to meet the threshold of reasonable measures on its own, and that sequencing does not appear to be common practice across ACT urban areas)
- f. Increase the training of mower operators to recognise ALG at all times in the year - it is a highly variable species and skill is needed to identify the different forms (eg short and tall) that infest our region. Note that appearance also varies across seasons.
- g. Tailor strategies to land-use types

## 3. Chemical and on-ground control

- a. In clean / low infestation areas
  - increase appropriately trained on-ground biosecurity officers to effectively treat and prevent spread to clean areas
  - over time, transition to resourcing rapid response team for new outbreaks
  - ensure best practice control options are widely disseminated to all stakeholders
  - continue to explore and trial varied strategies for integrated weed management
- b. In high-infestation areas
  - develop longer-term management strategies with multi-pronged approaches (effective mowing, shade, targeted spot-spraying, re-seeding etc)

## 4. Community Engagement

- a. Enable community reporting mechanism for ALG treatment e.g. option to utilise Fix my Street
- b. Provide identification resources and information regarding treatment (for private lawns and gardens)
- c. pro-actively engage with landowners with visible ALG infestations
- d. Coordinate and support volunteers with appropriate herbicides, equipment and adaptable management options. Normalise the support across CED for all volunteer

workers - presently Urban Parks and Places workers are afforded only a fraction of the support provided to Parkcare workers, and the equipment and herbicides approved and supplied is comparatively limited for UPP work.

- e. Address growing community concern about visible ALG spread on government-managed land, ensuring transparent communication about treatment schedules and responsibilities.

## 5. Regional Coordination

- a. Strengthen collaboration with NSW, especially along river corridors and highways, particularly to learn about more effective preventative and control measures, including mower hygiene improvements to stop spread from infested to clean areas.

## Conclusion

ALG is a transformer species that forms dense, highly flammable monocultures - carrying significant safety, environmental, social and economic risks and consequences. Fuel loads created by ALG now exceed those present in many areas prior to the 2003 firestorm, significantly increasing risk to communities and emergency responders. Mowing practices are inadequate and rapidly spreading ALG on government-managed land from affected to clean areas and adjacent private land. The ACT Government has both the opportunity and *obligation* to act now. Coordination with NSW agencies is vital.

There is no better time for the ACT Government to act while soil seed banks are relatively new. A coordinated, prevention-focused, territory-wide strategy will:

- reduce long-term economic and social costs
- protect biodiversity
- protect communities from fire, noting new ALG fuel load since 2003 firestorm are significant and getting worse
- meet legal and policy obligations.