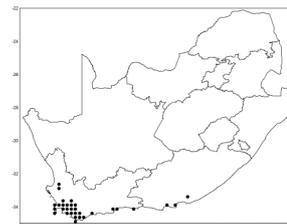


ARC-PPRI FACT SHEETS ON INVASIVE ALIEN PLANTS
AND THEIR CONTROL IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Sweet hakea (*Hakea drupacea*) is typically an erect shrub or small tree that can grow up to 6 meters high (i) and which, in open situations may branch near ground-level (ii). The plant originates from the coastal regions of south-western Australia where it occurs on granitic outcrops. Sweet hakea was first recorded in South Africa in 1850, when it was introduced for sand stabilisation and, later, was also used as a hedge. It has since become invasive in the Western Cape Province. The mature, hairless leaves are dark green to grey-green, up to 100 mm long and divided into a few upright, sharp-pointed needles that are 30-50 mm long. Between May and August, fragrant white flowers, tinged with pink (iii), grow in elongated clusters in the axils of the upper leaves. The mature fruits are woody capsules of about 25 mm long and 30 mm wide. Each fruit has apical horns, and two dehiscent valves, each of which contains a single, black, winged seed. The seeds are about 7 mm long and 3 mm wide. The fruits are a pale, yellowish brown with dark warts on the surface (iv). The fruits often occur in clusters, and fade to pale grey with age. Sweet hakea is a category 1 declared weed in South Africa. It is prohibited by law and must be controlled, or eradicated where possible.



THE PROBLEM

Sweet hakea is an unpleasant, prickly plant that forms dense impenetrable thickets. The plant is a serious invader of the floristically rich and unique mountain fynbos in the Western Cape Province. In South Africa it is restricted to the Cape Peninsula, Somerset West, Franschoek, Bot River, Hawston and the Kleinrivier Mountains. Dense infestations lead to increased fire intensities, which may kill indigenous plant species that regenerate vegetatively, and may also damage or destroy seeds of indigenous plants lying on or in the soil. The most obvious impact of dense stands of sweet hakea on the native vegetation is the reduction of species richness, as well as the altered appearance of the landscape.

THE SOLUTION

Mechanical control is very effective provided it is done correctly and that regenerating plants are removed timeously. The most successful method of controlling sweet hakea mechanically is the fell and burn technique. Although herbicides have been used for chemical control of sweet hakea, there is evidence to suggest that residues may linger in the soil and they are, thus, not recommended. So, far, no biological control agents have been used on sweat hakea infestations in South Africa, although a number of potential natural enemies have been identified in Australia and these may be tested in the future.



environmental affairs

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