



1. Infestation at Stretton in Brisbane. 2. Seed-head with numerous spreading branches. 3. Habit in flower. 4. Close-up of stems and leaf bases.



Lax Panic Grass (*Steinichisma laxa*)

Introduced

Not Declared

Lax Panic Grass is a short or long lived species that is native to parts of Central and South America. It forms a thick mat of vegetation in wetter habitats and has the potential to become an environmental weed in northern and eastern Australia.

Distribution

Lax Panic Grass was first detected in Australia in 1983. It was recorded spreading quickly and forming a thick mat of vegetation along water channels in the Mena Creek area near Innisfail in northern Queensland. There were no further records of this species in Australia for the next 30 years. However, several large clumps of this species were reported from wetland areas along the upper reaches of Scrubby Creek in Stretton in Brisbane in early 2013.

It is also a widespread weed in tropical Africa, where it is known to form dense pure stands, and has become weedy in south-eastern USA (i.e. Florida) in recent years.

Description

Lax Panic Grass is a short-lived or long-lived plant generally growing up to 80 cm tall. It is usually somewhat tufted in habit, at first, but it spreads quickly and forms a mat of vegetation when established in suitable habitats. The lower parts of its stems produce roots where their joints come into contact with the soil. Its alternately arranged leaves consist of a sheath at the base, which clasps the stem, and a spreading leaf blade. The leaf blades are long and narrow (5-30 cm long and 3-13 mm wide) with pointed tips. They are bright green in colour and mostly hairless.

The seed-heads are produced at the top of the slender stems and have numerous small spreading branches (up to 10 cm long), which reduce in size towards the top of the seed-head. These branches bear numerous tiny seeds that are 1-1.7 mm long. The lower seed-head branches occasionally also have short side-branches near their bases.

Quick Facts

- > A tufted or spreading grass usually growing less than 80 cm tall.
- > Its lower stem joints produce roots where they contact soil.
- > Open seed-heads with numerous short branches up to 10 cm long.
- > These seed-heads bear large numbers of tiny seeds about 1.5 mm long.

Habitat

Lax Panic Grass seems to prefer warmer and wetter habitats. It has so far only been recorded in wetlands, near waterways and along drainage channels in the sub-tropical and tropical regions of Australia. It has also been recorded in similar habitats in Florida and Africa, as well as along roadsides and in forest clearings.





1. Spreading stems and leaves. 2. Close-up of tiny seeds.

Reproduction and Dispersal

This species produces large numbers of tiny seeds, and also spreads laterally via its rooting stems. As it often grows in wetter habitats, its seeds and stem fragments may be washed downstream during floods. The seeds may also be spread in mud that becomes attached to footwear, clothing, vehicles and animals.

Why is it an Emerging Threat?

Lax Panic Grass has been described as spreading quickly and forming a thick mat of vegetation when growing in wetter habitats in northern Queensland. Therefore, it has the potential to replace native species in these environments and become an environmental weed in the coastal districts of northern and eastern Australia. Populations should be monitored, as it has already spread substantially in Florida since it was first recorded there in 2005.

Control Methods

Lax Panic Grass is usually found growing in swampy or muddy habitats, which often makes control more difficult. Isolated plants may be removed by hand, ideally prior to seeding, but care should be taken to remove all of the rooted stems. Any mature seed-heads should be collected, bagged and disposed of in a sanitary manner. Muddy footwear and clothing should also be cleaned before moving off site, in order to prevent the spread of seed.

No chemicals are currently specifically registered for the control of Lax Panic Grass in Australia. However, within Queensland, the control of invasive grasses in non-crop areas is permitted under the conditions outlined in APVMA off-label permit 11463 (<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER11463.PDF>). This temporary permit allows for the spot spraying of grass weeds in bushland areas with certain herbicides (e.g. glyphosate, fluzifop and haloxyfop). However, if the weed is growing near a waterway then only products registered for use in aquatic situations should be used (e.g. Round-up Biactive or Weedmaster Duo). Always read and follow the conditions on this permit carefully before using this method and, unless otherwise stated in the off-label permit, the use of the product must be in accordance with the instructions on its label.

Look a-likes

Lax Panic Grass can be easily confused with several native Panic Grasses (i.e. *Panicum* species). Two-coloured Panic (*Panicum simile*) and Hairy Panic (*Panicum effusum*) grow in a variety of habitats, but can be distinguished by their hairy stems and leaves. Black-seeded Panic (*Panicum bisulcatum*) and White Water Panic (*Panicum obseptum*) grow in wetter habitats, but have slightly larger seeds (2-3 mm long).



Top. Hairy stems and leaf margins of Hairy Panic.
Bottom. Tufted habit of Two-coloured Panic.

The control methods referred to in Weed Watch™ should be used in accordance with the restrictions (federal and state legislation and local government laws) directly or indirectly related to each control method. These restrictions may prevent the utilisation of one or more of the methods referred to, depending on individual circumstances. While every care is taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, Technigro does not invite reliance upon it, nor accept responsibility for any loss or damage caused by actions based on it.

This information has been developed with the assistance of Dr Sheldon Navie. Photographs are also courtesy of Dr Sheldon Navie © Technigro Australia Pty Ltd 2013