

# Water lettuce

## Water lettuce

Water lettuce is a free-floating weed that, as its name suggests, looks like (small) floating heads of lettuce. It was introduced to Australia for aquariums and garden ponds but has since spread into waterways.

Water lettuce is a restricted invasive plant under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* (Qld). It must not be given away, sold, or released into the environment.

### How does it spread?

Water lettuce can be unintentionally spread into previously uninfested water bodies by:

- > water birds
- > from contaminated boats and fishing equipment
- > through the disposal of water and plant fragments from fish tanks or garden ponds
- > overflow from infested on-property dams.

### Fitzroy River catchment infestation

In 2024, water lettuce was found upstream of Rookwood Weir (Managibei Gamu). Although water lettuce and water hyacinth are already present in the lower reaches of the Fitzroy River catchment near Rockhampton, this is understood to be the first time water lettuce has been found in its upper reaches.

During late 2024, the Fitzroy River experienced extended low flow and warm weather conditions which are believed to have contributed to rapid water lettuce growth in the upper catchment.

### A multi-agency approach

At a workshop in February 2025, concerns were raised that broadscale application of herbicide to aquatic weeds often results in a reduction in water quality and impacts local aquatic habitat. Workshop participants – Sunwater, the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), CSIRO, the Darumbul people, and the Rockhampton, Central Highlands and Livingstone regional councils – agreed that existing biological control agents should be increased to achieve sustainable management of water lettuce in the upper Fitzroy River catchment.

The use of water lettuce weevils (*Neohydromonus affinis*) as a biological control was recommended to gradually reduce and maintain water lettuce growth to manageable levels while minimising negative impacts on the environment.

### Biosecurity management

Sunwater's contribution to water lettuce management will be captured in the Rookwood Weir Water Supply Scheme Biosecurity Management Plan.

As one of the many stakeholders responsible for controlling water lettuce in the Fitzroy River catchment, Sunwater will regularly review this plan in consultation with DPI, councils and relevant stakeholders. This will help assess the effectiveness of the biocontrol program in reducing the extent of water lettuce in the upper catchment.

### Sunwater biocontrol rearing facility

Sunwater is contributing to water lettuce management by establishing an on-site rearing facility to breed and release water lettuce weevils.

The facility will comprise three 2000-litre tanks with room for expansion, if necessary. It will support and enhance Rockhampton Regional Council's (RRC) existing weevil release program.

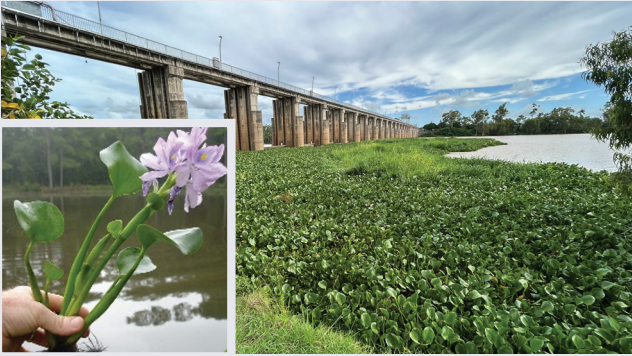
RRC is providing weevils to Sunwater to commence the breeding program. These will then be released at strategic locations to ensure rapid population growth and the establishment of a permanent weevil population in the upper catchment.

Sunwater will replenish Fitzroy River weevil populations from its facility after spill events to ensure populations continue to keep water lettuce under control.



A tank at the on-site weevil rearing facility

## Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*)



Water hyacinth is a free-floating waterweed which was introduced to Australia in the early 1900s as an aquatic ornamental plant. Today, water hyacinth is one of the world's worst invasive aquatic plants.

The fleshy plant can grow up to 65cm tall, with extensive, feathery root systems up to 1m in length and light purple flowers formed as a dense spike above the plant.

Water hyacinth is a major pest of creeks, rivers and dams.

Source: <https://www.business.qld.gov.au>

## Water Lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*)



Water lettuce is a free-floating waterweed found in tropical countries worldwide and was introduced to Australia as an aquarium and water-garden plant.

Water lettuce resemble small, floating, open heads of lettuce with feathery roots up to 80cm long

Water lettuce seeds germinate into seedlings which can eventually form dense infestations that cover the surface of entire rivers, dams and irrigation channels.

Source: <https://www.business.qld.gov.au>

### For queries relating to water lettuce, please talk to the pest management team of your local council:

#### Rockhampton Regional Council

☎ 07 4932 9000

@ enquiries@rrc.qld.gov.au

🌐 [www.rockhamptonregion.qld.gov.au](http://www.rockhamptonregion.qld.gov.au)

#### Central Highlands Regional Council

☎ 1300 242 686

@ enquiries@chrc.qld.gov.au

🌐 [www.chrc.qld.gov.au](http://www.chrc.qld.gov.au)

#### Livingston Shire Council

☎ 1300 790 919

@ enquiries@livingstone.qld.gov.au

🌐 [www.livingstone.qld.gov.au](http://www.livingstone.qld.gov.au)

### For queries relating to customer water supply, please contact Sunwater:

#### Sunwater

☎ 13 15 89

@ customersupport@sunwater.com.au