

Bitou Bush: Invasion of Our Coastline

What is Bitou Bush?

Bitou Bush (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera*) is a highly invasive coastal weed, originating in South Africa. It was introduced to Australia at Stockton in 1908, but didn't spread significantly until the 1950's, when it was used to stabilise sand dunes after mining. Since then, it has spread prolifically, occurring almost continually along the Australian coast from south-eastern Queensland, to Tathra on the south coast of NSW. It is estimated that Bitou Bush has invaded 70% of the NSW coastline, and occupies over 70,000 ha Australia-wide.

Bitou Bush is a perennial, dense, sprawling shrub that can grow up to 3m high. It has rounded, fleshy leaves and produces yellow daisy-like flowers in May-July. Bitou Bush has an enormous capacity for seed production, with a single plant able to produce 50,000 seeds in one season. Seeds are dispersed by birds, foxes, other animals and by human activity.

Why is Bitou Bush a Problem?

Due to the extent of the impacts that Bitou bush has on native biodiversity, it has been declared by the Commonwealth Government as a *Weed of National Significance* and is also listed as a *Key Threatening Process* under the Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995. In the Port Stephens area, Bitou Bush is a declared noxious weed, category 3.

Some of the impacts of Bitou bush include:

Aggressively Invades Native Vegetation

Once established, Bitou Bush forms dense stands, excluding the growth of native species.

Bitou Bush has become the dominant plant in many coastal environments, affecting vegetation communities such as Banksia woodlands and Coastal Heath.

Loss of Habitat for Native Fauna

Native fauna rely on a variety of plant types (shrubs, trees, and herbs) for food and habitat.

The invasion of Bitou Bush greatly reduces this vegetation diversity and consequently the available habitat for many native birds and small mammals.

Dispersal of Seeds by Pest Species

Dense thickets of Bitou Bush are favoured by a number of pest species such as foxes, rabbits, currawongs, and other introduced birds.

These animals feed on seeds and fruits of Bitou Bush, dispersing the seeds and expanding the infestation.



Above: Bitou Bush has bright yellow, daisy-like flowers.
Below: Boneseed flower has fewer petals



Bitou Bush vs Biodiversity

The invasive nature of Bitou Bush is threatening the biodiversity of our coastlines. By excluding other species, it creates a monoculture, taking over native vegetation and reducing habitat for native fauna.

It is so important that we recover our coastlines from the stronghold of this invasive weed, and bring back the diversity of native flora and fauna that thrived in these environments prior to the introduction of Bitou Bush.



Left and Below: Bitou Bush has invaded large areas of beach dunes in Port Stephens.



Left: Vegetation communities such as Banksia Woodlands and Coastal Heath have been displaced by Bitou Bush.

