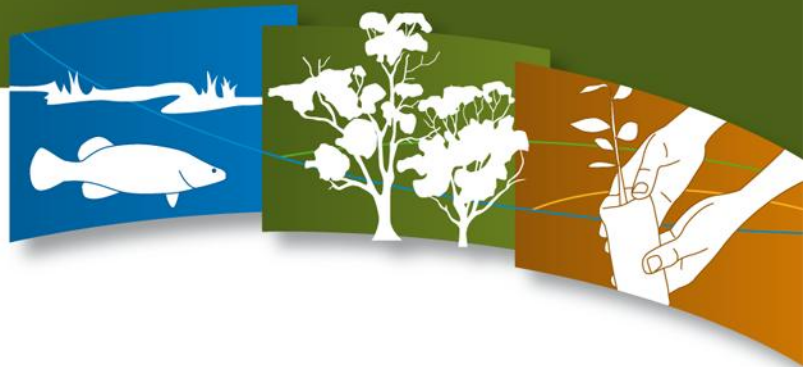


Willows...

... and their management



Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People

What is a willow?

Willows belong to the genus *Salix*, which comprises three subgenera (major groupings): *Salix*, *Vetrix* and *Chamaetia*. More than 300 taxa¹ are found across the globe, with approximately 100 of these now present in Australia. They were introduced in the 1860s by European settlers. Willows can be either trees or shrubs, weeping or upright, and single-stemmed or multi-stemmed.

Why were willows introduced?

Since the 1950s it was common practice to plant willows along stream banks to provide stability. These were selected due to their quick growth rates, ease of establishment, ability to develop root mats to hold soil together, and low maintenance after planting. This practice is no longer adopted by waterway managers. They were also introduced to provide shelter, for basket making, cricket bat production and their use as ornamental plants.

How do they spread?

Willows can reproduce asexually (don't require a male and female plant), broken-off branches/twigs can grow into new trees, or spread by suckers underground.

What's wrong with willows?

Although willows are often a familiar and well-loved icon of the Australian landscape, they are one of the most serious riparian and wetland weeds in temperate Australia. They are listed as one of Australia's 20 Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) due to their highly invasive nature and negative impacts on hydrology and biodiversity.



Source: Angela Gladman, North Central CMA

Willows have a significant impact on river health as they can increase erosion, consume substantial amounts of water from rivers, and provide very little habitat value for our native animals, fish and aquatic bugs compared to native vegetation. They create heavy shade (one of the features that appeals to many people) thereby preventing light from reaching ground cover and aquatic plants, which reduces growth. Willows are deciduous (drop their leaves all at once during autumn) creating large inputs of nutrients into the water as they decompose. They can also restrict access to waterways for recreational activities.

Alternatives to willows

There are good native alternatives to planting willows along waterways such as: *Acacia salicina*, rushes and sedges. Native, indigenous plants are the best choice and offer greater benefits to the environment than introduced species.

Willow management priorities

It is not feasible to eradicate all willows across Australia. Instead, the selective removal of undesirable willows is the goal. Prioritisation for control is dependant on if they are: female willows growing near male plants and/or producing viable seed; fragile willows (those with branches that break off easily) growing along waterways; and/or causing impacts to river health or other social, environmental or economic values.

For further information contact North Central CMA on 03 5448 7124 or visit North Central CMA's Willow Strategic Management Plan at www.nccma.vic.gov.au/Publications/StrategiesPlans/index.aspx?itemDetails=1345&cld=MasterSPR.

Information contained within this fact sheet has been sourced from: *Willows Management Guide- Department of Primary Industries*, and www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/willows/

¹ Taxa refers to a group of one or more organisms