

Manchurian rice grass

Zizania latifolia

Manchurian rice grass is a pest plant in Northland and cannot legally be propagated or distributed in any way, including being carried via machinery. It is probably the worst aquatic weed in Northland. The long term goal is to contain and progressively control the plant within the major infestation in the Dargaville area and eradicate all other infestations in Northland.

ORIGINS

Manchurian rice grass is native to China, Japan and Korea. It arrived accidentally near Dargaville in ships ballast in the 1890s and was first recorded in the wild in 1906. It has subsequently become abundant in the Northern Wairoa River and tributaries, spreading far along watercourses in all directions. Some of this spread has been deliberate as people once considered rice grass to be useful in binding stopbanks against erosion.

DESCRIPTION

Manchurian rice grass is a dense mat-forming perennial grass species that grows 2-3 metres high (sometimes up to 5 metres). It has deep roots and thick rhizomes (underground stems) which spread widely. The leaves are long and straight, dull grey-green, 2-3 cm wide with stout midrib, harsh, thin and papery, and taper to a sharp point. The leaves may bend over at the top, and make a loud rustling noise in the wind.

Rice grass is often confused with raupo and flax. Raupo has shorter leaves which twist upwards, dull green, 2 cm wide with no midrib, softish, much thicker and spongy. Flax leaves are similar to rice grass in that they are straight, have a midrib and bend over at the top. However flax leaves are much wider, smoother, thicker and shiny.

The rice grass seed head is very different to raupo or flax. It has a true grass-like panicle, 40-60 cm long, purplish or red-brown in colour, rough to the touch, containing many seeds and produced in November-December.



Dense growth on farmland



Note long thick rhizomes

DISTRIBUTION

Rice grass seed germinates very quickly and is carried by water movement. Birds possibly assist spread over short distances as they occasionally eat the seed. Rhizomes spread outwards and broken fragments are carried by water to new sites. However the most significant method of spread is via contaminated diggers and farm machinery as they move seed or rhizomes into new waterbodies and farms. Eel nets, boats and trailers also spread rice grass.