

New Zealand Christmas Tree, an invasive species in the Overstrand area

(Metrosideros excelsa)

Species fact sheet and invitation to stakeholders

SANBI hereby invites stakeholders to attend an information-sharing session and mini-workshop. We wish to create an opportunity for those interested, to share their views and for us to develop objectives for a management plan for New Zealand Christmas Tree in Betty's Bay and the Overstrand.

Date	Friday, 11 December 2015
Venue	Nivenia Hall, Harold Porter Gardens. Betty's Bay
Time	10:30 (tea); Meeting 11:00 - 13:00
Lunch	Light lunch will be served at 13:00

What does the plant look like?

Metrosideros excelsa is an evergreen multi-stemmed tree with a dome-like spreading form, branching close to the ground, usually 5 - 6m high (up to 25 m) but stunted 1.0 - 1.5 m where it grows in windy sites. Flowers are bright red and abundant, smothering the tree in December, hence its common name.



Photos: Attractive flowers of the New Zealand Christmas tree (left) and a young plant (right)

Where does it come from?

New Zealand Christmas tree is native to New Zealand, where it is one of the best loved trees of that region. In its native range it is found mainly along the coastal fringe, often on rocky cliffs. Here, the hard wood of the New Zealand Christmas tree is utilised for a number of purposes (e.g. carved ornaments and boat building) and has for centuries inspired rich symbolism and the tree is considered sacred by the Maori.

Why is it problematic in South Africa?

The species was introduced to South Africa for ornamental purposes and for hedge planting in coastal areas of the Western Cape. It has since started to spread vigorously in and around the town of Betty's Bay. The plant is able to self-fertilise and produce thousands of very small seeds which germinate once they come into contact with moist soil. Fortunately the seeds do not seem to survive beyond one year. According to literature on the species, mature plants resprout when cut and they will therefore require herbicide for effective control. However, there is no herbicide registered for use on this species in South Africa and control will require careful experimentation with various methods. Fire kills the plant. *Metrosideros excelsa* is also invasive in Japan, Spain, England and Ireland.



Photos: Metrosideros excelsa is popular as an ornamental and for hedging (left) but has become invasive in Betty's Bay and Kleinmond areas (right)

How is it viewed by SA legislation?

According to South African legislation directing action towards invasive species (the National Environmental Management of Biodiversity Act, no. 10 of 2004 and associated regulations passed during October 2014), *Metrosideros excelsa* is listed as a Category 1a species in the Overstrand area. Species listed as '1a' require compulsory control and attempt at eradication where feasible. A structured risk assessment done for the species confirms that it is a high risk invader in South Africa. At the same time, the National Resources Heritage Act (Act no. 25 of 1999) makes provision for the protection of heritage objects (including trees) when they are considered to be of cultural, social, aesthetic or spiritual value to a community or cultural group.

The situation in Betty's Bay and Kleinmond

Metrosideros excelsa was introduced to Betty's Bay in the 1960s and is now invading fynbos on moist peaty soils at Betty's Bay and Kleinmond. Recently, many residents have expressed concern as they observe the

spread of the plants in and around these towns. At the same time, some residents enjoy the ornamental and other benefits provided by New Zealand Christmas trees and do not want trees on their properties removed. Since there may be widely divergent views on the removal of this species, SANBI's Invasive Species Programme would like to conduct a stakeholder engagement process whereby SANBI and stakeholders can share views about the New Zealand Christmas tree infestation in Betty's Bay, and SANBI can share information about the legislation affecting the New Zealand Christmas trees in the Overstrand area.



Photo: Some areas of Betty's Bay are heavily invaded by New Zealand Christmas tree.

Towards a management plan and SANBI's role

SANBI's Invasive Species Programme is mandated by the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act to assess and attempt to eradicate small, localized populations of invasive alien plants (Category 1a species) as a preventative strategy in dealing with invasive alien plant infestations. The Programme forms part of, and, is funded by the Natural Resource Management Programme of the Department of Environmental Affairs.

We acknowledge that plans for the removal of New Zealand Christmas tree in the Betty's Bay and Kleinmond areas will probably invite both support and opposition. We would therefore like to take into account

various views and to design a management plan for the species in collaboration with stakeholders.

Invitation to a stakeholder meeting

We invite stakeholders to attend an information-sharing session and mini-workshop. We wish to create an opportunity for those interested, to share their views and to develop objectives for a management plan for New Zealand Christmas Tree in Betty's Bay and the Overstrand.

If you would like to let us know your view outside of this gathering, please feel free to contact Ernita van Wyk, via e-mail at er.vanwyk@sanbi.org.za or cell: 0781077284.

Please RSVP to Ernita van Wyk by DATE for catering purposes.

References

Attwell T. (2015). Your place in the Kogelberg. The Botanical Society of South Africa. Cape Town.

Van Zyl (2012). Problem Plant Control Compendium. A guide for the chemical control of certain declared weeds, invaders and other problem plants. 1st Edition. Published by AVCASA (Association of Veterinary and Crop Associations of South Africa).

Bergin and Hosking (2006). Pohutukawa: Ecology, Establishment, Growth and Management. New Zealand Indigenous: The Bulletin Series, No 4. Available online: <http://www.nzffa.org.nz/system/assets/1707/pohutukawa.pdf>

Schmidt-Adam G., Murray B.G. and Young A.G. (2009). The relative importance of birds and bees in the pollination of *Metrosideros excelsa* (Myrtaceae). *Austral Ecology* 34: 490-498.

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