

Vallisneria australis

COMMON NAMES

Eel grass

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Monocots

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Perennial submerged aquatic plant with long ribbon like leaves that emerge from the rooted base. New plants are formed vegetatively from rhizome extension.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The leaves are thick and strap-like and arise from long creeping stems. Leaves are up to 3 m long and between 0.5 and 5 cm wide. The leaf tips (when not browsed) are obtuse to acute, with fine toothed margins towards the apex. Male plants are only known from Lake Pupuke, with female plants also confirmed there. Male flowers (a translucent sheath surrounding many tiny yellow flowers) being produced in the leaf bases. All other naturalised populations are female, the female flowers are green and cylindrical borne on long, often spiral, filamentous stalks arising in the leaf bases and extending to the waters surface.

SIMILAR TAXA

Sagittaria subulata, *S. platyphylla*, and swamp lily (*Ottelia ovalifolia*). The submerged leaves of these species look similar to the submerged leaves of eel grass; however, eelgrass never has emergent leaves or conspicuous white flowers.

DISTRIBUTION

Locally naturalised in North Island and Marlborough in the South Island.

HABITAT

Moderately fast flowing to still water bodies. Colonises lake-bed sediment in water up to 9m deep.

GENUS

Vallisneria

FAMILY

Hydrocharitaceae

AUTHORITY

Vallisneria australis S.W.L.Jacobs & Les

SYNONYMS

Vallisneria spiralis, *V. gigantea*, *V. americana*

FLOWERING

Summer to autumn



Vallisneria gigantea. Photographer: Auckland Regional Council, Licence: Public domain.

FRUITING

Viable seed not produced in NZ (only male plants present here).

YEAR NATURALISED

1897

ORIGIN

Australia.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental aquarium plant

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Notify regional council if found

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Spread by stolon fragmentation. There is no evidence of viable seed production in New Zealand. A potentially important submerged weed; poor dispersal capacity has limited current spread.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

australis: Southern

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication.

<http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species>

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

Coffey BT, Clayton JS (1988). New Zealand water plants: a guide to plants found in New Zealand freshwaters. Ruakura Agricultural Centre. 65pp.

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/vallisneria-australis/>

PDF DATE

08 June 2026