

# ANDROPOGON GAYANUS

## GAMBA GRASS

### What is Gamba Grass?

Gamba Grass is an introduced perennial grass from Africa which can grow in thick tussocks, individual plants being up to 0.75 m wide and 4 m tall. The grass was introduced to tropical parts of Australia in the 1930s for its value as a vigorously growing, high biomass pastoral grass. However, if left un-grazed this high biomass creates high fuel loads, causing a major fire hazard.

*Mature, unmanaged Gamba Grass in the dry season.*

### Why is it bad?

Gamba Grass is a fire climax species and an ecosystem transformer. The grass does not cure readily and fall over like native annual grasses. As a result, when infested areas burn during the dry conditions of the annual fire season, flame heights reach up into tree canopies instead of staying relatively close to the ground. Gamba Grass fires are much more intense than normal landscape burning in the north Australian savannas, causing habitat alteration and resulting in biodiversity loss. Fire promotes Gamba Grass spread and dominance, removing competing plants and creating bare soil which suits Gamba seed germination. When Gamba Grass fires occur annually in a woodland, the habitat can be transformed into a grassland in eight years.

### How does it spread?

Gamba Grass annually produces light, fluffy seeds which can be moved easily by natural means such as windy weather at seeding time in the early dry season, fire updraughts, water, and animals' coats. Gamba Grass seeding occurs just at the point in time when the country has dried out enough after wet season for people to be moving around and carrying out activities on country. Long distance spread is closely linked to human movements and activities in the landscape, because seeds get caught easily in crevices of machinery, vehicles and equipment, and are thereby carried to new places.

