**GIANT RATS TAIL LEAF SMUT FOUND IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**A potential new biocontrol agent for *Sporobolus natalensis* and *S. pyramidalis***

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**SUMMARY**

A survey of northern New South Wales (NSW) giant rats tail grass (GRT) infestations was undertaken in November 2021 for the African leaf smut, *Ustilago sporoboli-indici*. The aim was to determine whether the disease had spread to NSW from Queensland since its’ discovery in Australia in 2017. The pathway of introduction of the leaf smut into Australia is unknown, and its impact on introduced and native Sporobolus grasses is still being evaluated. Seven sites from Grafton to the Queensland border were checked for the characteristic sooty black fungal lesions on leaves and stems of known hosts *Sporobolus natalensis* and *Sporobolus pyramidalis*. One site west of Casino was found to have the leaf smut. This discovery was significant because it was an extension of the smut’s southerly range from the Queensland Sunshine Coast’s hinterland. Giant rats tail grass is increasing in density and extent within NSW and this discovery may, with further research into its’ host specificity and in field infection requirements, provide the first biological control method for this weed.

**Keywords:** Survey, GRT, range extension, *Ustilago sporoboli-indici*, biological control