Mossman river grass is native to Central America and southern North America. It is a widespread and common pest, particularly in sandy soils and at the beach. Mossman river grass competes for moisture, nutrients and light in tropical and subtropical crops. The burrs can reduce wool value and make shearing hazardous. The spines of burrs penetrate hides decreasing the value.

Mossman river grass is an invasive plant which can disrupt native flora communities and ecosystems.

**Description**

Mossman river grass or Mossman burr grass (*Cenchrus echinatus*) is an annual grass with prostate or erect stems forming loose tufts. Seedlings are erect, robust, hairless and have bright mid-green leaves.

The leaf sheaths are purplish-red, especially in older seedlings. Mature plants form prostrate or ascending tufts with stout stems up to 90cm, but mostly up to 60cm.

The leaves are flat and rather stiff, tapering towards the tip. They are 5–25cm long and 3–12mm wide.

The ligule (where the leaf blade becomes the leaf shaft to wrap around the stem) is a rim of short hairs, with a few scattered hairs on the leaf margin at the leaf base. The joints along the stems are hairless.

Seed heads, borne on several stems per plant, are spike-like clusters of 12–14 burrs. Each burr (0.5–1cm across) is a ball of stout, broad, spiny bristles that are joined together at the base. The burrs fall off readily when ripe and cling tightly to clothing, animal hides and human skin. They can also penetrate bare feet.

**Management**

The most effective control method is to kill young plants before they set seed. This can be done by cultivation, pulling by hand, or burning off with heat using flame throwers or steam jets.

If you would like further information on weeds look at the A–Z Listing of Weeds at Queensland Government Website.

**Reference:** The State of Queensland, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, 2010, "PP28, Weed Busters Fact Sheet".