Canterbury Regional Pest Management Plan

Review ---- July 2017

Submission from Robert H M Johnston MNZM

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Occupation Retired Farmer & Ecan Councillor

Background----- I have lived and farmed all my life at "Ashley Gorge" , a 1630 ha property comprising approx 1200 ha of hill country and 430 ha of flats
I served as a grower representative on the NZ Wool Board for 2 terms and also served 3 terms as an elected Councillor representing North Canterbury from 1998 until 2007 when I retired.

Positions held.--- While a Councillor I was Chair of the Pest management Portfolio and Chaired the Board of Inquiry which set in place the framework for Environmental Pest Management.
I was Deputy Chairman of the Council in my last term 2004/2007

Knowledge & Experience As a Councillor and Chair of the Pest Management Portfolio for 9 years , I built up an intimate knowledge of the administration of pest management from the Council's perspective and broadened my knowledge and understanding of many of the pests (both plant and animal) that I was not familiar with .

General Comment As a farmer I have had a long experience with some(but not all) of the weeds and pests contained in this review The ones I have a good knowledge level of include Gorse & Broom ,Blackberry , Old Man's Beard ,Nodding Thistle & Rabbits. Fortunately we have no Nassella Tussock or Wallabies on this property
However as a general observation I would offer a few comments which seemed to have escaped the narrative that I have seen,

(a) Not enough account is taken for the effect of wind on seed spread also birds . I have wilding pines (only a few) on Ashley Gorge which could only have become established from wind blown seed from Lees Valley 6km to the north-west. Similarly with broom on the back of the property ,which clearly came from wind blown seed on what is now DOC land of Mt Oxford about ¾

km westward and upstream . And on my flats I am infested with Old Man's Beard in a new plantation from wind borne- seed from the Crown riverbed (LINZ) where no control is or has ever been undertaken

Property owners downwind of established seed sources should not be held responsible for infestations they have no control of particularly if the source is from Crown Land being neglected

(b) The viability of seed , particularly Gorse & Broom (G&B) is amazing. We still have an active control programme on a 30ac block of broom I started attacking in 1963. There are literally millions of viable seeds still there waiting for the right conditions to germinate . That block has been sprayed 5/6 times in 55 years. As many will testify , sheep are a marvellous control mechanism on young germinating seedlings

(c) There is no place for goats on hill country if they have access to G&B seed heads .My neighbour's once clean tussock higher slopes is now infested in broom caused by escaping goats with a belly full of broom seeds from lower down ,which they passed in their dung -15 years later it is wall to wall broom,

(d) The enforcement division need to have regard for the prevailing economic circumstances and ability to pay..On this property we have had a very active control programme over the decades when it has been affordable . there have been periods eg mid 60's till 1972 when wool prices hit rock bottom and again from 1985 through to the late 1990's when hill country farming went through a deep trough and there was just no discretionary money to spend on G&B control ... I recommenced helicopter spraying on the hill country in 1998 and have continued every year since and have spent over $250,000 in the past 20 years and am only just holding the line . But every property is different and there needs to be some flexibility and understanding about enforcement

(e) Having said that ,there needs to be more <u>consistency</u> with enforcement ------there are properties near or neighbouring this one where no enforcement was done and now it is wall to wall and now compliant, whereas if we get seedling re-growth we are non compliant and have to take control action. And there should not be arbitrary boundaries determined in the office with no consultation which allows some (in this case the Crown) to get off scott free with OMB infestations in the riverbed . If they are under budget constraints ,so too are most farmers!!

Programme Descriptions The subdivision of the various pests into one of the 5 programmes seems to be pretty much a continuation of previous policy and is sensible and supportable but I do not see **Nodding Thistle** mentioned. This is a mistake and this thistle should be put back on the list particularly if the region (or the property) has a history of small seeds production.
That they got away in South Canterbury is really a reflection on the policy of 40 metres from the boundary or road or river and lack of proper enforcement that was undertaken . The weevil is I understand having some effect but it will never exterminate them
On this property I have a whole property ban on Nodders which the lessee is responsible for and which I enforce . A 40 metre boundary zone is totally ineffective if they are seeding and you get a 'nor –west gale

Omissions As mentioned above, Nodding Thistle, but also I believe that **Burdock** should be included in the sustained Control Category. It is a prolific seeder , deep rooted and can get easily established around yards hay barns, sheep camps etc I also have a whole property ban on Burdock as well. It is a huge problem and very wide spread in the open range country of western Canada
Blackberry This seems to be omitted as well . What is the reason ?
It is widespread , or is it too wide spread to cope with? Serious consideration should be give to including this plant.
Council Reserves ---these are not mentioned ,but are widespread throughout Canterbury ---mostly old gravel pits, which are now infested with G&B , blackberry& nodding thistles . I have several adjacent to my property

Further comment on specific pests and rules
(a) Gorse & Broom Where a property owner is or has undertaken a control programme on a(compliant) block of G&B they should not be penalized if they missed a few plants (now non compliant) The enforcement division should be seeking to achieve a no net gain position on each property and to work with the farmer and not hammer them . The funding formula should be adjusted to provide more general rate contribution to inspections and farmer liaison.
(b) Nassella tussock. The funding formula should be left where it is and has been for a very long time .Those properties who have nassella have a huge annual cost which they have to meet year after year and must be a great

imposition for them. The proposed alteration to the funding formula as I understand it **is not supportable the status quo should remain.**

(c) Rabbits The introduction of RHD has had a huge beneficial impact across all rabbit prone regions in Canterbury ,, also Otago and Marlborough as well. My understanding is that the effectiveness of the virus is lessening but another one has been identified and may well be introduced . My plea is to do everything in your power to encourage this introduction to hopefully give an enhanced level of rabbit control once again and out into the future

Small Blocks The funding formula should be adjusted to provide for Council funded control activities on these small blocks (4ha) of which there must by now be somewhere near 9000 or more throughout the region. These small property owners haven't really got shooting as an option and probably can't or won't get involved with poisons. But many have a significant rabbit problem The introduction of **a targeted rate** on these small blocks to fund this activity should be considered and recommended..

Old Man's Beard No one questions the devastating impact this plant can have on both exotic and indigenous vegetation . But if the region is to have a policy it should be fair to all parties and implemented accordingly . the private land owners should not be hammered on the one hand while the Crown agencies in the riverbeds are allowed to escape enforcement and provide seed source for further contamination of private land . And what about OMB in residential city areas? Who monitors that?.

And the local office (Amberley) should not be able to arbitrarily draw a line down a road ,dissecting a property and then leave the adjacent (infected) riverbed out of contention.---plainly not fair.

I submit that all OMB control should be funded by the Council General Rate. The Crown's good neighbour approach is a start but not nearly enough.

Meulambeccia There are many varieties, mostly indigenous. This plant is as voracious and devastating to both native and exotic forests, woodlands and gardens ---arguably much worse than OMB.. It is not on any radar simply because it is an indigenous plant and therefore has special status!.

The strategy should be consistent include Menlambecia along with OMB or delete both . ---They are of equal menace . The fact that one is indigenous is quite irrelevant in my view.

Boundaries In general terms I support the current boundary rules as they apply to G&B and Roadsides . The current 40 metre boundary rule for nodding thistle is not practical and other "distance" thresholds should be carefully examined to take account of wind which is far more of a factor than is appreciated.. Again ,if it is to be included it should be enforced Ecan have been unwilling or unable to enforce G&B boundary rules on part of my property which meant I had to spray the offending fence line myself and at my expense (two loads with the helicopter--- $800 -- and no thanks)

Roadsides The rules here are (almost) fine but only if there is even enforcement throughout the region. Otherwise a return to the recommendations of the 2006 review would be my preference.. ----that is to hand over the responsibility for roadsides to the local District Councils . (Hurunui D C take charge of theirs now and it works well.) Enforcement in this Waimakariri District by Ecan is very patchy and inconsistent EG making farmers cut their gorse fences before the end of January (before Gorse flowers) is quite silly Cutting gorse fences is a job for the winter months not busy summer time, and gorse usually flowers twice a year anyway And having a 4 or 5 year interval between inspections seems too long .

Enforcement & Recognition of Efforts I believe a whole property approach should be standard practice for larger properties with efforts being made appropriately recognised. In our case on this property since we started spraying again in 1998, we have spent in the region of $270,000 on gorse and broom control on the hill country 4 yrs @$6k then 3 yrs @$7K , 5 yrs @ $10 K ,5 YRS @ $20 k and then $22k+$28K+$25 in the last 3 years ---a lot of money and it is on going if the country is to be kept (relatively) weed free.. This commitment and expenditure should be acknowledged and recognised when enforcement officers start exercising their authority.
(Note)---On this property hill (aerial) G&B control started with fixed wing aircraft in the mid 1950's then graduated to using helicopters. The level of annual spraying reflected the buoyancy of the wool market . EG In the late 1950's / to 1964 an annual programme until wool prices crashed -- then nothing Wool prices rose in 1972and from 1973 through to 1979 used 4 X 200 litres of chemical for 2 years , then 3 X 200 litres for 2 years then 2 X 200 litres for 2 years then 1 X 200 litres for next year then very little But you could

buy a 200litre drum then for $500 –it later became $12,000 and isnow back to about $5500 Come 1984/85 and Rogernomics and spraying stopped for 3 reasons (a) we had a fatal helicopter crash on the property while spraying (b) we couldn't afford it anyway and (c) with the previous investment there wasn't really the need.----That is until 1998 , by which time G&B was really starting to take hold again and urgent attention was needed ..

Also , the Council needs to be careful in setting out to be the guardian of economic values on hill country properties as the raison d'etre for the continued inclusion of some plant pests . With respect the Council have very little understanding of the economic environment faced by most hill country farming operations. For example the level of G&B expenditure on the hill country on this property could not be sustained by the hill country revenue . it is heavily cross subsidised form the revenue stream from the flats .

As pervades all Councils , there is always an assumption of economic well being and ability to pay which in many cases and periods of time is not the case at all.

Wallabies I support the continuation of the current policy of containment to those more southern geographical areas and to the level of numbers as has been established. . It would be a mistake to allow them to spread any further than their current range

Funding Never forget that after the restructure of Local Government and the dissolution of the old Pest Boards all those Pest Board assets were sold . During the 1990's and early 2000's all the houses and depot assets in Canterbury were sold and that revenue went into the general Council pot (over $3million) with none being specifically assigned to pest management per se . That in my view was wrong as those assets belonged to the rural ratepayers in the various Pest Districts . Therefore ,today, there should be recognition of that with greater funding coming from general rate.

Summary I have commented only on those pests or matters which I am familiar with or have a particular interest in as trust that my submission and thoughts will be useful in the review

I wish to be heard

Robert H M Johnston MNZM Dip VFM
Ashley Gorge 30th June 2017