

REGIONAL BIOSECURITY UPDATE – November 2021

VELVETLEAF

Velvetleaf (*Abutilon theophrasti*) is a cropping weed that can cause significant production losses through reduced forage crop yields. Further costs apply to surveillance, treatment, and reduced value of seed exports, due to potentially contaminated supplies. Effects of this pest have been modelled by New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER) as commissioned by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) in 2017, which show that costs mostly affect the arable farming sector, and that if velvetleaf infestations were not contained, the economic impact on NZ could be a reduced value of real gross national product (GDP), of between \$294.4 and \$484.7 million, from 2017 to 2030.



A velvetleaf patch left to seed for 3 years. Photo credit: Trevor James, AgResearch

In 2016 MPI lead a Response to an incursion of velvetleaf seed through the border. As it became clear that eradication was not feasible in the short term, a collaborative process involving industry and regional councils lead to agreement to a Velvetleaf Long Term Management Strategy, to be in place from 2017-2021. The expectation of partners was that MPI lead and fund the programme for the five-year period of the strategy.

The strategy set out a programme objective of progressive containment, with a long-term vision of eradication. This management objective is on track, with progressive containment in sight due to activities delivered through the current programme, and steps toward eradication with research proposed to establish a system for proof of freedom from the pest, alongside programme management.

It is important to note that the strategy documented the following intentions.

- that long-term management, where appropriate and beneficial, would move away from specific velvetleaf focus and towards improving on-farm biosecurity and human mediated hygiene practices (providing benefits now and in the future).

- initiatives within the programme to align and incorporate with existing weed management activities, such as the Waikato long-term management plan for velvetleaf, Chilean needle grass plan, and others.
- aim to shift responsibility for long term management of velvetleaf, through supporting farmers to be responsible for control of the pest and reducing the risk of spread themselves.

The Velvetleaf Long Term Management Programme is currently running on unsustainable funding. Initially MPI lead and funded pest management activities through monies left over from the velvetleaf incursion Response, with subsequent funding through cost pressures from Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ).

Velvetleaf is noted to be a serious pest, which affects international agricultural and arable practices and impacts on trade. Velvetleaf seed has recently (August 2021) been identified through border inspections of radish seed imports, arriving from four different countries of origin, indicating the presence of this pest is increasingly widespread.

A range of options for resolving management, funding and delivery issues associated to future long-term management of velvetleaf, for sustainable solutions in the future is being considered.

https://www.farmtrader.co.nz/features/2111/help-stop-the-spread-of-velvetleaf?fbclid=IwAR24sV_1lpEjK7uv3pFJyOUb8jEqM2ovLkqgHZ_v11s6jzUo-6mnAxpQ7o

BIOSECURITY ACT REVIEW - UPDATE

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has provided representatives of the Regional Council Biosecurity Sector a Biosecurity Act 1993 (BA) review draft discussion document for feedback. Council representatives met with MPI staff and were taken through an explanation of the draft discussion document. The draft documents are currently embargoed, so cannot be shared publicly.

MPI proposals for the Act aim to:

- improve efficiency and effectiveness
- improve collaboration
- improve powers and enforcement
- better align with other legislation.

The document discusses:

- Classifying organisms
- Improved decision making
- Partnering and regulating (particularly with respect to MPI's Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership)
- Overseas risks
- Sharing and managing pest management costs
- Working relationships with other legislation

Regional Council staff were able to provide some collective feedback on the draft discussion documents, however it is unknown how much difference this will make to the final draft.

Once the discussion document has been finalised, MPI will be seeking public feedback. This is now likely to occur in early to mid-2022.

FERAL ANIMAL MANGAGEMENT

Environment Canterbury has had brief discussions with representatives of the New Zealand Game Council and Department of Conservation. The New Zealand Deer Stalkers Association has also been contacted for comment.

There is wide concern across agencies and the public alike about the increasing numbers of ungulates (hooved animals - deer pigs and goats) and the potential need for widespread control. There is agreement that a coordinated and collaborative effort over large scale areas would be needed to make any significant difference to animal numbers.

There has apparently already been some consultation by the Department of Conservation with Iwi, and numerous other partners, stakeholders, and organisations. A key part of the discussion will be with rūnanga to discuss balancing the need for mahinga kai the need to control these animals down to a level low enough which protects and enhances native biodiversity.

There is a bid before parliament for funding to enable wide scale management of ungulates with the potential for a national control strategy across NZ possibly, the under the provisions of the Wild Animal Control Act 1977, but this is in the early stages of consideration.

Given there is work already going on Nationally with a potential strategy being considered, it may be appropriate to delay a higher-level meeting to determine possible scenarios and responsibilities until at least the new year.

Much of this work to date has not been socialised widely. A summary of issues will be written to promote discussion at a future meeting.

CHECK CLEAN DRY – PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF LAKE WEEDS

Environment Canterbury partners with the National Freshwater Biosecurity Partnership (led by MPI) to promote the Check Clean Dry message, aiming to prevent the spread of freshwater pests (like didymo) caused by people moving between waterways. People are reminded to check, clean, and/or dry all gear that comes into contact with freshwater.

This is achieved through awareness, signage around popular lakeside areas, and through face to face engagement from Check Clean Dry advocates employed each year during the peak summer season for visits to lakes and rivers.

This season, Environment Canterbury has employed two advocates from November to late January. This will double the amount of contact with freshwater users over the busy season, enhancing the ability to get the Check Clean Dry message out. Advocates approach water users to discuss the need to keep boats and equipment clean and free of aquatic weeds.

Compiled by **Laurence Smith**

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ChCh/BP AREA BIOSECURITY UPDATE – November 2021

Phragmites (Eradication Programme) > Four known active sites in greater Christchurch.

These sites have been checked in February 2021 including the surrounding area and one found to be active, (Lake Rua).

Lake Rua (Roto Kohatu reserve), represents the greatest challenge as the phragmites is growing in and on the edge of the lake. ECan are currently working with MPI in a joint venture to fund and control phragmites by excavating and removing the plants and rhizomes. This is a major undertaking currently in the preoperational stage. Mitigating factors include resource consent to excavate and the requirement to test for potential contaminated soil.

Planned operations put on hold due to COVID Pandemic. The removal operation will be postponed until 2022.

Boneseed (Sustained Control Programme) > Boneseed is widespread around coastal Banks Peninsula and Christchurch coastal regions. Control operations are targeted outside the Boneseed Containment Area on a 2 – 3-year rotation.

Control works completed outside of the designated Boneseed containment zone in the Akaroa Harbour bays and Banks Peninsula outer bays.

Combination of Biosecurity Officer field work and contractor surveillance and control undertaken.

Boneseed field day held at the Urumau reserve in Lyttelton to educate and assist volunteer reserve weed programme.

Gorse and Broom (Sustained Control Programme) > Focus on the hill and high country as described in the CRPMP.

Emphasis on boundary rules and keeping productive land clear of gorse and broom.

Focus on follow up inspections. Weather restrictions, first prolonged drought then heavy winter rain has limited on farm inspections.

Purple Loosestrife (Sustained Control Programme) > A pest that grows on the margins of waterways, easily spread, and can block streams and drains.

The Purple Loosestrife Programme is a multi-agency resourced effort lead by ECan combined with the department of Conservation and Christchurch City Council.

Currently in the planning stage, multi-agency and stakeholder meeting was held in October to plan proposed works. Work will be undertaken in the late spring – early summer.

Banks Peninsula Feral Rabbit programme

The contractor has continued with inspections and control work. Dry conditions prevailed well into winter on the peninsula.

Rabbit calicivirus's proved effective in Autumn. Some hare control work also undertaken.

The contractor undertaking control, fumigating burrows, poisoning and night shooting.

Nassella Tussock (Sustained Control Programme) > Port Hills and Banks Peninsula.

Outside the Hurunui District land occupiers must complete their Nassella control work by 30th October annually.

Strong focus on early inspections this season. Land occupiers that have completed annual control work encouraged to contact ECan and arrange for early inspection. Biosecurity Officers have conducted compliance Inspections on Banks Peninsula properties 35 properties inspected.

Feral Goats (Site Led Programme) Environment Canterbury Biosecurity support the Feral Goat removal project led by the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust.

Major work programme undertaken in the Mt Evans and Kinloch catchment. This operation has received very positive feedback from the landowners involved and can be considered a resounding success.

The next area of operations and planning is currently underway for Autumn 2022.

Environment Canterbury supporting this programme with site visits to educate domestic goat herd owners of the requirements to identify goats and Boundary Fence standards.

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