

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 led 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 led to agreement to a Long-Term Velvetleaf 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 Te Paiherenga group, 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.

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.

SPACE INVADERS: A review of how New Zealand manages weeds that threaten native ecosystems

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment has recently published a review of weed management. The Commissioner has made a series of recommendations to improve the way weeds threatening native ecosystems are managed here in New Zealand. He is calling for improved national leadership to help coordinate action on which plants to manage, where and how they are to be managed, and by whom.

The Commissioner also recommends better monitoring and surveillance of exotic plants to help nip new threats in the bud. This includes establishing an emerging risks team to scan for new escapees that could harm native ecosystems. Go to <https://www.pce.parliament.nz/publications/space-invaders-managing-weeds-that-threaten-native-ecosystems> for the report.

Report prepared by:

Laurence Smith, Principal Advisor - Biosecurity

AREA BIOSECURITY UPDATE – November 2021

Wet weather and lambing in the region have impacted on the normal work programme for the Southern Biosecurity team. It has however, given the team the opportunity to plan for the coming months which will be busy with project work and rabbit inspections.

Sustained Control

Gorse and Broom

Gorse and broom inspections have continued with focus on hill and high-country areas however recent rain events and lambing across the southern area have meant this has been limited.

Officers have continued to provide advice to landowners on control and implementing quality control programmes to ensure gorse and broom does not spread onto neighbouring properties and to ensure that clear land is maintained to ensure productivity.

Nassella Tussock

All planned inspections for Nassella Tussock have been completed. Most landowners have made significant progress, with the officers having the opportunity to educate and provide awareness of Nassella Tussock.

A new site was found in Kurow behind the holiday park/campground.

The Southern team have spent a week working in the northern area assisting with Nassella inspections there.

Feral Rabbits

Rabbit compliance inspections will commence in the coming months. These have been delayed due to the lockdown and lambing in the rabbit prone areas.

Darwin's Barberry

The team have been mapping out areas of Darwin's Barberry at Orari Gorge Station for contractors to carry out control work. The good news was that it had not spread as far as we initially thought it may have.

Site Led

Wild Thyme

Last month, the team spent a day controlling Wild Thyme at Forest Creek, a site led, known infested area. Around 80 plants were found, which indicates a downward trend. Four years ago, there were approximately 900 plants.

Bio Control

Alongside Landcare Research, the southern team recently released an Old Man's Beard Mite into a site by the Orari River which is heavily infested with Old Man's Beard. This bio control release will be monitored over the coming months and years to see its effectiveness at controlling the plant.

Report prepared by: **Gina Slee** Team Leader - Biosecurity