

REGIONAL BIOSECURITY UPDATE – December 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.

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.

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AREA BIOSECURITY UPDATE – December 2021

Boneseed (Sustained Control Programme) The CRPMP objective is to:

- Prevent clear land from becoming infested by boneseed within the Port Hills/Lyttelton Zone.
- Eliminate Boneseed plants prior to setting seed on 20% of infested land outside the Port Hills/Lyttelton Zone.

There are 2 known sites in Central BAG area at the Rakia Huts and Ashburton River Mouth. Both these sites were Inspected and controlled.

Search has also been undertaken in areas around these known sites.

Nassella Tussock (Sustained Control Programme)

Co-designing a new approach for Nassella Tussock

Three community workshops were held in Amberley on a fortnightly basis to co-design a new approach to Nassella Tussock management. Information from these workshops has been collated and shared with the wider community via our 'Have your say' website. Community members not involved in the workshops then asked questions, answered surveys, and started discussions on the information, feeding back into the approach for the next workshop.

At the end of this process, the approach decided upon was to put a much stronger emphasis on encouraging land occupiers to undertake their grubbing as early as possible in the year. This will help to free up time for ECan biosecurity staff in the busy end of year period to focus on other important programmes like Chilean Needle Grass. It will provide more flexibility for all parties as to when inspections take place, which in some cases are unable to take place around the compliance dates due to lambing etc.

Strong focus on early inspections this season. Land occupiers that have completed annual control work were encouraged to contact ECan and arrange for early inspection. To date there has been a good response, with several properties completing Nassella control work early. This work was completed despite major disruption due to the flood event.

Chilean needle grass (Sustained Control Programme)

The objective of this programme is to contain Chilean needle grass to known sites.

Biosecurity officers have visited the one site known to occur in the Central area and controlled the plants found. They will follow up at this site again throughout the summer, with a high likelihood that plants will continue to be found. Biosecurity Officers have also been involved in supporting search and control efforts in North Canterbury.

Below is some additional information regarding Chilean needle grass for your interest.

Why is Chilean needle grass a pest?

Chilean needle grass (CNG) is an invasive weed that negatively affects both farming and our environment. Infestations reduce the livestock carrying capacity of pasture and sharp seeds can cause animal welfare issues. A change in farm practice is often required as stock must be removed from infested areas from late October until March to avoid contact with seeds.

CNG is hard to identify and seeds can last for more than 10 years in the soil, making it difficult and costly to control in the long term. Its seeds can be spread by people, animals, vehicles, and machinery as well as in mud, plant matter and water.

There is currently 3500ha of land infested with CNG across New Zealand (Canterbury-300ha, Marlborough-2700ha and Hawkes Bay-500ha). It has the potential to affect 15 million hectares nationwide.

Control options:

CNG is very hard to control due to the difficulty in identifying infestations and the long life of the seed in soil. Any landowner who has, or suspects they have found, CNG on their property should work with Environment Canterbury to develop an individual control plan suitable to their property. Control methods may include a combination of:

- Hand removal
- Knock down herbicides (eg glyphosate)
- Residual herbicides (eg Taskforce).

To prevent the spread of CNG, landowners should practice good on farm biosecurity. Biosecurity measures for your property could include:

- Erecting biosecurity gate signage
- Minimising vehicle and stock movements on the property
- Providing a wash down area for vehicles entering or leaving your property
- Searching your property for infestations in November/December every year.

More information:

For more information, see pages 50-52 of the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Plan.

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