

## 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](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.

## **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  
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## **NORTHERN AREA BIOSECURITY UPDATE – December 2021**

### **Puna Grass**

1 of only 2 known sites (in New Zealand) of Puna Grass occurs in North Canterbury near Amberley. Checking of the site, control work and search has occurred once this season to date.

### **Boneseed**

Boneseed is a coastal pest plant that is prevalent along most of our North Canterbury coastal settlements. Search and control work was undertaken in Kaikoura (outside residential areas and drone spraying on steep limestone faces at the southern end of Torquay Street), some limited control to tidy up a few plants at Gore Bay, and Motunau. Work generally occurs in early spring to prevent seeding.

### **Bur Daisy**

There are 6 sites near Amberley of bur daisy covering approximately 20 hectares. 3 sites are active. 4 sites will be checked this season over summer.

### **Chilean Needle Grass**

There are now 25 properties in Canterbury where Chilean needle grass is known to occur. 2 new sites have been found in the past week. 24 of these are in the Hurunui District occurring at 5 locations including Parnassus, Cheviot, Spotswood, Omihi and Waipara. The properties consist of 6 roads (including State highway One), 18 farms and within 1 vineyard. Chilean needle grass at 4 of the properties affected is managed primarily by the land occupiers. At the remaining 21 properties Chilean needle grass (CNG) is managed primarily by Environment Canterbury.

All properties will be inspected, some several times throughout the 2021 – 2022 season.

Surveillance to detect Chilean needle grass on properties adjoining known sites is underway. Surveillance activities are also being carried out north of Kaikoura.

### **Saffron thistle**

There are 14 active sites in Canterbury. Work to control and contain Saffron thistle is currently underway.

### **Wild Thyme**

Several sites are in the Loburn – Whiterock area. A number of these are historical. Work on the most significant site at Whiterock has been completed on this with a collaborative approach between Biosecurity

section, Biodiversity section, Department of Conservation, and land occupiers to control the wild thyme and protect the biodiversity values in the area.

### **Nassella tussock**

An update on Nassella tussock will be presented to the Biosecurity Advisory Group on inspection statistics and this year's programme will be given at the December meeting.

Report compiled by **Matt Smith**  
Biosecurity Team Leader