

Helping to represent you on pest matters



*By Peter Reid, Chair
Kurow Pest Management Liaison
Committee*

This note is to briefly introduce the new Pest Management Liaison Committee and to mention its responsibilities within the Kurow Pest District.

I would like to thank Alistair Wills, who has retired from the committee, for his many years of service, and I would like to welcome Richard Simes to the committee.

The committee is here to liaise between landowners and ECan on animal pest and weed issues. We are here to pass on our experience, and also pass on to ECan any concerns that landowners have. The committee can only be as effective as the feedback it gets from ratepayers.

If you receive Notices of Direction or Action on Default notices, to carry out rabbit control work, feel free to contact me. Please don't ignore them, as the longer control work is left, the bigger the problem becomes and costs escalate. ECan has strict powers to enforce control and recover the costs.

If you are contemplating control work, act early and seek professional advice. Use only qualified contractors, especially if aerial work is required. Currently the only two contractors in Canterbury able to do aerial work to the required standard are Mt Hutt Helicopters and Excell Contracting.

Also, once the initial control work is completed, remember to carry out secondary work and don't rely on RCV.

ECan's contracted rabbit co-ordinator, is available to organise and coordinate work between neighbouring properties, but it must be remembered that whilst the initial coordination work is funded by ECan, the actual control work is on a user pays basis. Funding for the coordinator is available for a further twelve months, but after this if the position is to remain it may have to be rated for.

There is considerable discussion now occurring on the user pays system of pest control. I personally am not in favour of it because of the enormous costs it inflicts on a small percentage of the farming community who, with the poor returns over the last three years from sheep and beef farming, are finding that they simply can't afford the costs involved. However after repeated requests, the Government has stated it will not put any further money into rabbit or wallaby control. It must be remembered that, for whatever reason at the time, landowners voted for

user pays and if we can't come up with another method of funding control work, it is here to stay. One fairer way may be to charge a rate within an area to cover inspection, monitoring and organising, then the actual work could be under a user pays system. A lot will depend on whether landowners view pests, as a community problem or simply as an on-farm issue.

Wallabies

Wallabies are becoming a huge issue that has been put in the too hard basket in recent years. There have been sightings of odd animals on the south side of the Waitaki in the last twelve months. If you can confirm these, let the committee members know. Hopefully field trials of a new bait similar to the Feratox possum pellets to target wallabies will be carried out in the next twelve months.

On the Tb side of things, control work managed by ECan has had a major impact in reducing the incidence of Tb in our cattle and deer herds. However, the Animal Health Board (AHB) has now taken over management of this work and split the South Island into three management areas: north and south of the Rangitata River, and the West Coast.

ECan previously collected rates within Canterbury to offset the costs of this work, but this may not be the case in the future and a new method of rate collection may have to be adopted. It has been strongly pointed out that the AHB setting up its own rating method will only add further costs to landowners. ECan will continue to collect rates for the 08-09 programmes.

Plant Pests

On the weed front, keep up with your spraying programmes and watch out for those isolated gorse and broom bushes, a few prills now may stop a problem later when those plants start getting neighbours.

The historic sites of nassella tussock in the district are monitored and grubbed each year, but there is a concern there may be sites outside of those areas that we don't know about.

Cotton thistle is another one that is occurring more often; a bit of grubbing now or spraying could stop its spread further.

I have mentioned just some of the issues the district is faced with, relating to pests, and the committee welcomes your comments on dealing with them.

Committee's work invaluable

By Councillor Eugenie Sage, Pest Portfolio chair



Welcome to this edition of Pest News. Congratulations to the recently elected members and chair of the Pest Management Liaison Committee (PMLC). The committee and its counterparts around the region have an invaluable role in advising Environment Canterbury on how the

Regional Pest Management Strategy, which provides the framework for the control or eradication of specified animal and plant pests in the region, is best implemented.

The committees also comment on ECan's annual budget for pest work and the level of targeted rate for their pest district, and liaise between rural landholders and the Council. The committees are elected every three years after the local body elections.

Highlights for the last 12 months include the continued decline in the number of cattle and deer herds in Canterbury infected with bovine TB, to 14 in April. This is well ahead of the region's June 2008 target of 27 infected herds and is on track to achieve the 2013 goal of 0.2% infected herds or two herds in every thousand.

ECan's rabbit trend count monitoring has shown high or rising rabbit numbers in rabbit-prone districts such as

Waikari, Amuri, Ashburton and the Mackenzie Basin, and increased levels of immunity to Rabbit Calicivirus (RCV) in young rabbits. It is increasingly urgent for landholders to plan to fund and organise rabbit control using traditional methods such as aerial spreading of 1080 impregnated carrot bait.

Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) is being a good neighbour and has usefully organised rabbit control over some sizeable areas, such as part of the Waiau riverbed.

An estimated 26,000 ha. in Canterbury now have rabbit numbers above the modified McLean scale level three, the level where the Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) requires that control be undertaken. Environment Canterbury is preparing 36 Action on Default notices under the Biosecurity Act (many more than usual). These notices allow ECan to undertake the work and then charge the occupier.

To help make the current "user pays" regime more effective, Environment Canterbury plans to apply for a region wide resource consent for the use of 1080 impregnated baits to control rabbits, possums, and wallabies in targeted areas. Stakeholder consultation is underway. If granted, the consent could be used by contractors certified by ECan.

I am happy to be contacted about pest issues. I look forward to working with landholders and community interests on the most effective ways to control animal and weed pests to benefit farming and biodiversity.

eugenie.sage@ecan.govt.nz

Kurow rabbits

From the Canterbury Regional Rabbit Trends Report 2007

Rabbit numbers in the Kurow district dropped by 1.1 rabbits per km in the 2007 census which is significant. More than six transects show large reductions in rabbit numbers and the majority of these are the result of RCV and secondary control efforts from landowners. There was also approximately 110 tonnes of carrot used in primary rabbit poison operations of which over half was used in the Otekaieke River operation.

The overall increasing trend since the arrival of RCV in 1997 is still obvious, with a sharp increase from 2004 to 2005 of almost two rabbits per kilometre.

Kurow pest district retains the highest number of properties that have been issued with Notices to reduce rabbit numbers.

Tests for RCV immunity in two parts of the Kurow district showed the Hakataramea Valley had 52% immunity and Maerewhenua Valley had 48.5%.



How are rabbits counted?

Rabbit populations are monitored by spotlight night counts, which provide an indication of rabbit abundance. Counts are undertaken in early spring along 120 routes located in rabbit prone areas across the Canterbury region. These cover nearly 2400 km on 158 properties. The counts provide a snapshot in time of the lowest rabbit population level over a twelve month cycle. The measure is expressed in rabbits sighted per km, and results are compared over time. These figures for the Kurow District are derived from 314.4 kilometres of transect over twenty properties.

Pay us an e-visit

Copies of all pest newsletters are available at www.ecan.govt.nz.

www.ecan.govt.nz

It's gorse and broom time again

Early summer is a good time to control broom and gorse on properties and boundaries before the busy summer season begins.

The aim of this work is to prevent gorse and broom from infesting land that is presently free of these two plant pests.

It is the responsibility of land owners or occupiers under the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) to contain gorse and broom if they are present on their properties.



Gorse



Broom

Here is a helpful check list

Hedges

- Have gorse and broom hedges been clipped or trimmed to prevent plants from setting seed and spreading into clear unaffected areas?

Roadsides

- Is the roadside clear of gorse and broom?
or
- Are gorse and broom infestations along the roadside, which are not part of a hedge, at least 10m from the centreline of the road?

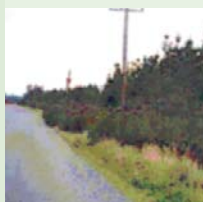
Boundaries

- Is there a 10m clearance along the full boundary to prevent seeds or plants spreading into neighbouring clear, or being cleared, properties?

Scattered plants

- Have all scattered or isolated plants been killed? (This includes clusters of plants less than 50m² and more than 5m from block gorse and broom).

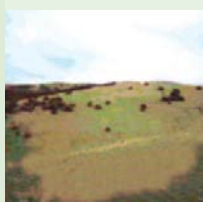
Landholders are not required under the RPMS to eradicate block gorse and broom infestations. (These are infestations greater than 50m²). However any extra work is recognised and appreciated by Environment Canterbury and the community.



Hedges and roadsides: This is **Not OK** - Gorse and broom need to be at least 10m from boundaries which is the centre of the road.



Boundaries: **Good** - This landowner has sprayed and killed all plants that are within 10m of their neighbour's property, that is gorse and broom-free.



Scattered Plants: **Not OK** - All scattered plants including patches less than 50m² which are more than 5m from block gorse and broom need to be eradicated to prevent spread. A block is a patch greater than 50m².

The responsibility for controlling pests on roadsides varies among district councils within the Canterbury region. In the Waimate and Mackenzie District it is the adjacent landholder's responsibility unless the road is a State Highway. In the Timaru and Waitaki Districts it is the responsibility of the road controlling authority.

The Regional Pest Management Strategy's objective for gorse and broom is to prevent land currently free from gorse and broom being infested.

Biological control – natural born killers

Environment Canterbury and other regional councils work with Landcare Research in the field of biological control of pest plants. Landcare Research studies the natural predators of some of New Zealand's pest plants. It tests their suitability for release under New Zealand conditions, then passes them to Environment Canterbury and other regional councils

for distribution. Biological control agents currently at work in Canterbury include insects for controlling gorse, broom, old mans beard, hieracium, ragwort and nodding thistle. The gorse soft shoot moth is a recent release in the Kurow district, and hopefully more releases are on the way this coming Spring-Summer.



Please make yourself aware of nassella tussock

It may not be as common as it is further north in the region but Environment Canterbury is asking all landholders in the Kurow Pest District to keep an eye out for Nassella Tussock. Nassella can be found throughout the Canterbury region. The Hurunui District remains the most seriously infested area followed by Banks Peninsula and the Rakaia River catchment.

Nassella tussock is a tufted perennial with fine leaves, erect when young but slightly drooping when older. The leaves feel rough when rubbed downwards. The plant looks very similar to native tussocks, which makes identification difficult. Mature plants are up to half a metre high and one metre across. Each mature plant can produce up to 100,000 seeds per year. The seed straw is readily carried by wind and can travel many kilometres. It is also distributed by water, stock, and machinery or on the bark of milled trees.

Nassella is classified as a serious pest as it grows fast and can rapidly dominate and eventually smother grasslands. Nassella is unpalatable to stock and will grow almost anywhere, however this invasive tussock is most commonly found on sunny slopes,

Infected herds continue to diminish

*Bovine Tb control in the South of the region
From the Tb contracts management team*

All possum and ferret operations in the southern part of the Canterbury region were completed by the first week in June.

The 25 operations have generally gone well. Most operations passed the Residual Trap Catch monitoring requirements first time.

A large number of ferrets (5700) were captured in this year's operations as part of the search for infected vectors and none have been found to be infected with Tb so far, but there are still animals to be autopsied. Infected herds continue to diminish, with three herds on movement control in the south of the region (down from four at this time last year.)

The 2008/09 operation programme has been finalised and approved by the Animal Health Board and there will be another year of strategic control work throughout the southern region. As well a new operation called Clear Stream is to be added to the programme. This is the area covering the large Otematata River catchment and fills the gap on the southern region's boundary.

Surveillance continues in the Fairlie Basin to guard against the movement of Tb infected vectors into the area, and buffer control operations continue from the Hunter Hills to Mt Dobson.

Kurow Pest Management Liaison Committee members

Peter Reid (Chair)
03 436 0216

Mark Giles
436 0181

Dave Feary
436 0980

Peter Bell
689 2227

Richard Simes
436 0035

Graeme Blanchard
431 2574

Ken Patterson
436 0967

Lindsay Paton
436 0555

Biosecurity Staff at Environment Canterbury

ECan's Biosecurity section is divided into three teams: Northern, Central and Southern. The South Canterbury Pest Management District falls into the Southern areas jurisdiction.

Graham Sullivan is Biosecurity Manager, (Phone 03 684 0535), responsible for implementing the Regional Pest Management Strategy.

The Southern Area Team Leader, is Brent Glentworth. Timaru Biosecurity Officers are Terry Broughton, Glen Currall and Bridget Keenan, all are located at the Timaru Office and can be reached by telephone number (03) 684 0500.

Contracts Management: Kevin Gallagher is the Bovine Tb and Contracts Manager. He is responsible for managing the Tb vector control programme as part of the national pest management strategy within Canterbury. He is based at the Christchurch office, 03 363 9320. Kevin is helped by Bovine Tb management officers Pleasant Point-based Grant May 027 2844 813 and Amberley-based Phil Spencer 027 437 4745. Rabbit control coordinator, Steve Palmer is a contractor to Environment Canterbury. His phone number is 027 348 5394.

Pests and Biosecurity Portfolio Committee Chairperson is Cr Eugenie Sage, ph: (03) 942 1251