November 2010
BANKS PENINSULA EDITION

Pest News

A newsletter about pest management in Canterbury

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Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy, mid-point review update

On 30 June 2010, Environment Canterbury published the results of the mid-point review of the Strategy. It recommends that the Strategy should remain largely unchanged, confirming that it continues to provide the appropriate framework for the efficient and effective management of plant and animal pests in Canterbury.

Stephen Hall, Environment Canterbury programme manager for pests and biodiversity, says that there has been a great deal of direct and implicit support for the strategy from the principal users of the strategy, namely the Pest Management Liaison Committees.

"The committees represent the rural ratepayers who work alongside Environment Canterbury biosecurity staff at the forefront of pest control under the strategy."

"One significant change is proposed, with the recommendation that Chilean Needle Grass be included as a pest. This recognises the potential threat posed by this invasive grass in a region where agriculture makes the single largest contribution to the economy," said Mr Hall.

The next scheduled review is in 2014 unless there is a need to do so earlier.

A review report on the statutory mid-point review of the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy 2005-2015 is now available at www.ecan.govt.nz.

Garden dumping threatens valuable natural areas

Green waste, dumped over a bank close to waterway. Note: Old Man's Beard growing and seeding in the right foreground. It probably became established from illegal garden dumping. *Photo: (Judith Earl-Goulet)*

Unbelievable as it might seem, there are people who choose some of Canterbury's more secluded areas to dispose of excess green waste from their gardens. Presumably they think it'll rot down harmlessly and that's an end to it. Unfortunately they are wrong.

Illegally dumped green waste often contains a variety of plants that have become all too successful in home gardens. This can mean that they establish quickly and spread easily to take over sensitive environments like riverbeds, beaches, native bush areas or wetlands.

Three-quarters of New Zealand's problem weeds are garden escapees, often from plant material dumped in our green spaces.

The Department of Conservation conducted research in dune areas where garden dumping was permitted. The research revealed that many plants did not compost down and an astonishing 249 species were found to have made themselves at home in the sand. Similar results might be expected if the research was to focus on other natural areas. Effects of garden dumping can be seen in too many gullies or on riverbanks.

You can help prevent this happening to your favourite places by making sure you dispose of green waste at one of your local transfer stations. For small amounts, use your kerbside green waste bin.

For gardeners who have room on their section, a well managed compost heap can ensure weed material breaks down properly and makes a useful soil improver from the waste, **but please don't burn it in any residential area**.

If you see anyone who looks like they are dumping illegally, don't put yourself at risk by confronting them, write down the vehicle license plate and report the incident to the Christchurch City Council.

Finally, consider carefully what plants you buy for your garden, pond or aquarium. Never dump aquarium water or contents down drains or into waterways. Your small oxygen weed may become the next threat to our waterways.

A few words from Paul de Latour, Pest Committee Chair

In this edition of Pest News, there is a reminder of land occupier responsibilities in managing pest plants on boundaries. I'd like to point out that this is the minimum standard required, but we need to do much more than the minimum to keep on top of weeds like gorse, broom, nodding thistle, ragwort and Old Man's Beard. The Banks Peninsula Pest Committee is unanimous about the need for land occupiers to take the initiative and carry out more thorough and effective control work at the right time.

In August 2009, a Committee general meeting discussed reports from the Animal Health Board (AHB), received an update on the Community Initiated Programme for possum control and discussed the Department of Conservation's concern over rising deer numbers and everyone's concern about Canada geese.

In November last year, there were more reports from the AHB, a Christchurch City Council pest plan update and reports from DOC and Eugenie Sage, Environment Canterbury Councillor for Selwyn/Banks Peninsula at that time. The Committee decided to extend the possum control programme for a further year and Steve Palmer introduced himself as the programme's co-ordinator going forward.

In January this year, the problems with gorse and broom on the south eastern side of the Peninsula and strategies to address this issue were discussed. In March, we looked at the draft targeted rates budget for the coming year. In August of this year, we held a special meeting about the review of the Regional Pest Management Strategy and considered a proposal to introduce a Community Initiated Programme (CIP) for gorse, broom and nodding thistle over the whole Peninsula. The committee decided not to progress this idea but to investigate smaller CIPs in the south east of the Peninsula and in Pigeon Bay instead.

Acting in the best interests of all who live and work on Banks Peninsula, the committee also made submissions on Environment Canterbury's Annual Plan, the Regional Pest Management Strategy midpoint review, Biosecurity NZ's National Pest Management Plan and to Environment Canterbury about regional funding for Tb control.

Chilean needle grass *(Nassella neesiana)*

Chilean needle grass (CNG) is from the same genus as nassella tussock *(Nassella trichotoma)*. However, visually it is quite a different plant, growing up to 1 metre tall and looking more like a grass than a tussock. Its rough-edged leaves are lime green in colour, up to 5mm wide and ribbed on the upper surface. It also produces and disperses seed differently to nassella tussock.

Seed heads are distinctly purple and much bigger and heavier than on nassella panicles, giving plants a characteristic drooping purple flower head. Each seed is up to 10mm long with hard, sharply-pointed heads and a long, hair-like awn about 70mm long. Seed can also be found hidden on the stem at the leaf nodes and at the base of the plant.

Because the seed is heavy, it falls mainly near the parent plant and dispersal is mostly through catching onto animals, clothing and machinery.

CNG seeds prolifically and can displace pasture and native vegetation. When in seed, it is unpalatable to stock, reducing the available grazing during this period. The sharp seeds cause serious damage to livestock and can penetrate hides, contaminate fleeces and devalue carcasses.

Once biosecurity officers based in Hurunui become aware of its presence, a restricted-place management programme was put in place in the infected area. This means that all people, animals, product and vehicles leaving the affected area are to be checked and cleaned of seed. The local Hurunui community was informed of the threat from CNG and how to identify it and minimise the risk of spread. Since CNG was discovered, Environment Canterbury Biosecurity staff have maintained an annual control programme at the known site and are undertaking a systematic search programme of high-risk properties in the region.

Everything is connected
Environment Canterbury Regional Council
Kaunihera Taiao ki Waitaha

Boneseed

Boneseed control work has been carried out in Le Bons Bay, Okains Bay, and inner Lyttelton Harbour during the last year. The odd boneseed plant has been found outside of these known areas, but these have been controlled.

Helicopter work is planned for hard-to-access sites this coming season when weather conditions permit. Land occupiers will be notified.

If you have boneseed in your garden please consider removing it. If you need help in identifying or controlling it, please contact your local Biosecurity officer.

Rabbits: Down, but not out

Live rabbits trying to get over a rabbit-proof fence.

Rabbit infestations can threaten the viability of farming, particularly in semi-arid areas, because rabbits compete with stock for feed and cause soil erosion by overgrazing and digging.

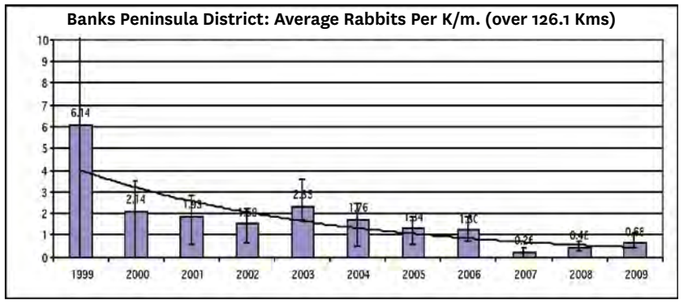
Monitoring from spring 2009 showed that rabbit numbers had fallen in eight of the eleven pest districts, thanks largely to effective control work by landowners. The best way to build on recent successes is to ensure control operations are effective through meeting industry standards.

On average, over 60% of monitored rabbit populations now show immunity to rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD), meaning resistance is on the increase. It is now more important than ever to employ integrated control methods including shooting and targeted poisoning.

Monitoring of rabbit numbers on the Banks Peninsula indicate a slight increase in the mean number of rabbits per kilometre over the previous year. They have increased by 0.20 to 0.68 which is still very low. The average number of rabbits per kilometre on the Peninsula has dropped from 14.43 in 1997 to the present 0.68 rabbits per kilometre, a spectacular reduction.

Banks Peninsula's low rabbit density can be attributed to the Peninsula's co-ordinated rabbit control programme, funded by a separate rate. Banks Peninsula is currently the only pest district that funds such a programme through a targeted rate.

Banks Peninsula District: Average Rabbits Per K/m. (over 126.1 Kms)



Annual gorse and broom control

A gentle reminder to all land owner/occupiers, including small section owners, of their obligations to control gorse and broom. The aim of these requirements is to prevent further spread of gorse and broom onto clear land. Remember to book contractors early. Flowering plants mean that seeding will soon follow!

Please be aware that

- **All gorse and broom bushes within 10m of a neighbour's boundary (where the neighbour's boundary has no gorse or broom within 10m of your boundary) require control prior to seed set.**
- **All scattered plants and patches less than 50m² in area (e.g. a block 5m x 10m) also require control prior to seed set.**

The control method you choose as a landowner/occupier to control gorse and broom may vary depending on the situation. Some scattered plants may be located in sensitive rocky outcrops so you may consider a 'cut and paste' control method (manually cutting plants and treating the stump) over a broad spray to prevent loss of special local flora and fauna on your property. Mowing/slashing along boundaries (such as roadsides) is also an acceptable method but does require control a minimum of once a year as the plants do not die. Spraying is also a good method and can give great results in killing the plants if adequate coverage of bushes from all sides is achieved.

Please ensure that any herbicides are used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and ensure no herbicide comes into contact with other desirable plants, the soil or waterways.

If you own a very large property with extensive boundaries and are concerned that you cannot meet your gorse or broom control obligations as a landowner, please contract your local Biosecurity officer to discuss whether a containment control or staged programme is an option for you.

Possum control on the Peninsula

The bulk of the 2010 Banks Peninsula community initiated programme(CIP) to control possums was carried out between February and May 2010 by North Canterbury Pest Control. There were two contract areas that together encompassed 11,177 hectares of the Akaroa Harbour area. Excellent results were achieved in both blocks with over 1500 confirmed possum kills and an estimated 500 more where the carcasses were not found.

As part of an agreement with the Animal Health Board (AHB), 500 possum carcasses were recovered and supplied to them for autopsy so that the AHB could test for the presence of Bovine Tuberculosis. The results are not known at present.

In addition to the main control blocks, contractors also placed a number of semi-permanent bait stations throughout much of eastern Banks Peninsula. These bait station lines were pre-fed to encourage possums to associate bait stations with food, then poisoned and finally the toxic bait removed. This operation resulted in another 550 or so possum kills.

The Banks Peninsula CIP co-ordinator, Steven Palmer says that the plan is to work these lines at least once annually.

"Funding permitting, we need to keep up control activity if we are to keep a lid on possum numbers until the area requires more intensive control rolls as occurred in the Akaroa Harbour area," he says.

Work within the 2011 budget has already started with the recovery of possums for AHB autopsy. The areas the AHB require possums carcasses from is quite specific and are well-used by the public in summer. For this reason, this part of the programme was scheduled for completion in August/September 2010 while the area was expected to be relatively quiet.

The Contracts for the next CIP blocks will be tendered in October 2010 with a view to work being carried out between February and May 2011.

The blocks where intensive control work is planned are called "Hinewai" and "Lavericks", because of identifying features within the contract areas.

"The feedback I have received from the contractors has praised the commitment of participating landowners and I am told that they have been exceptionally easy to work with," says Mr Palmer.

Nodding thistle

If left to establish, nodding thistle can be very difficult to eradicate. As a landowner/occupier you are legally required to clear all nodding thistle 40m back from neighbouring boundaries and 40m back from stock water and irrigation races to prevent further spread of this pest plant.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

Infested areas need to be checked at least twice yearly to ensure that plants do not seed.

Contact your local agrichemical supplier for information on the best chemical for controlling nodding thistle in your area. When using any herbicide **PLEASE READ THE LABEL THOROUGHLY** to ensure that all instructions and safety requirements are followed.

Recommended control methods

Isolated plants:
Grub out, removing at least 5cm of taproot, or spot-treat with herbicide.

Larger infestations:

- Graze area prior to spraying to help expose seedlings.
- Spot spray or grub the mature plants because broadcast spraying doesn't kill them.
- Broadcast spray during late autumn while plants are in the rosette phase of growth to kill seedlings and small plants.
- Follow up broadcast spraying several weeks later with spot spraying or grubbing to catch late germinating or missed plants.

Ongoing site management options:

- Keep a tight sward of grass by preventing overgrazing in summer to reduce germination and to suppress seedling development.
- Renew pasture, to germinate a large proportion of the dormant seed, allowing easy control.
- Purchase certified seed and hay from areas free of nodding thistle if possible, especially if your property is currently free of this pest.

Boundary weed control check list for containing pest plants

Pest	To Do list	
Gorse and broom	No gorse or broom plants present within 10m of neighbouring boundaries (where the neighbouring boundary is clear/being cleared of gorse and broom) Gorse and broom boundary hedges trimmed tops and sides	✔
Nodding thistle	No nodding thistle present within 40m of neighbouring boundaries No nodding thistle present within 40m of stock water and irrigation races	✔
Ragwort	No ragwort present within 40m of neighbouring boundaries No ragwort present within 40m of stock water and irrigation races	✔
Old Man's Beard	No Old Man's Beard plants within 20m of neighbouring boundaries	✔

If you can tick all of the above, you are meeting your landowner's obligation for boundary weed.

REMEMBER: Scattered gorse, broom and Old Man's Beard plants need doing too! Boundaries include roadsides 10m from centre of road.