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Committee Environmental Wellbeing Committee
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General Manager report to the Environmental Wellbeing Committee meeting on 12 July 2011

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of Greater Wellington activities relating to the Committee's areas of responsibility.

2. Catchment Management Group

2.1 Rabbit Training Needs Workshop - outcomes and next steps

The rabbit prone areas of New Zealand are experiencing a rapid rise in rabbits now that the calicivirus immunity levels have increased after 14 years of random epidemic events. There are now not enough experienced people with the skills to control rabbits, especially when large-scale aerial or ground poisoning operations are required.

Workshop participants, experienced in rabbit control and drawn from NZ Landcare Research and the Otago, Canterbury, Wellington (Ray Clarey & Glen Falconer) and Horizons regional councils, worked with a facilitator over the 19 & 20 May at Lincoln University to produce an outline of the training needs for those engaged in rabbit control.

It identified these training needs to manage rabbit impacts under four main areas:

1. Assessing the need for control
2. Carrying out the planning and design
3. Implementing the field operations, and
4. Post-operational follow-up.

The main elements under each area were developed in more detail and cross referenced to available resources. It represents a framework on which the content of training course modules can be built and is a significant first step to getting pilot training courses started. Otago Regional Council offered to host a training day in October. The training course will be reviewed after a number of pilot training sessions. Unit standards will be written following finalisation of the content, with a view to using them as part of a national qualification in the NZQA framework.

In parallel, a rabbit accreditation section will be developed as part of the National Pest Control Agencies approved operator accreditation system in a similar way to the current system for possum monitoring.

Another issue requiring agreement is to agree on a common name and standard scale (the NZ standard) for rabbit abundance and negate the reference to differing scales.

2.2 Rook Control Workshop

A rook control workshop was held in June at Massey University to identify the four or five most important research projects to improve control of rooks. The session was facilitated by Dr Phil Cowan (Landcare Research) and attended by representatives from Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay, Horizons, Waikato and Greater Wellington regional councils.

The workshop identified several work streams with recommendations from Greater Wellington to focus on the following themes:

- Changes in rook population characteristics as indicators of success
- Alternative control techniques at low density
- Better Surveillance tools
- Rook movements

The registration of alternative baits was raised at the same forum. DRC1339 is currently registered (V002624) for use on rooks and starlings using bread/dripping baits and petrolatum for nest baiting. Historically (>12 years ago) maize, walnuts and macaroni elbows were trialled as bait with very good success but were never registered.

Costs are now being identified to achieving a variation so that money can be set aside for meeting the cost of regulatory applications, field trials, lab testing and data assessment associated with bait registration.

Diederik Meenken (Biodiverse Ltd), an ex GW employee, has been commissioned to investigate the process and will report to the regional councils Biosecurity Managers Group.

2.3 Rabbit monitoring

Annual monitoring of rabbit prone areas in the Western Zone disclosed that rabbits are at relatively low levels. There are a few hot spots that are confined to individual properties which are of no real concern at this stage. There are no adverse impacts on neighbours. No correspondence will be required requesting landowners to control their rabbits to below level 5 on the Modified McLean Scale as outlined in the Regional Pest Management Strategy.

Night count routes at Queen Elizabeth Park had a zero rabbit count for the first time since it was established in 1995. An RCD outbreak in late February throughout the Porirua to Paraparaumu area decimated rabbit populations.

2.4 Taputeranga Island Mouse Eradication

Wellington City Council asked for assistance to eradicate mice from Taputeranga Island in Island Bay, Wellington. A 25m grid of bait stations has been set up on the island and fed with brodifacoum bait. The bait stations have been checked once already and bait will probably be removed by mid July. The island will then be monitored before being declared mouse free and the bait stations removed. Rat bait stations will remain on the island as rats can swim the short distance from Island Bay. This is the first island mouse eradication Greater Wellington has attempted.

2.5 Mustelid traps

Kapiti Coast District Council has secured funding to purchase DOC200 mustelid traps for five Key Native Ecosystems (KNE) in their region. There has also been funding to purchase mustelid traps for Nga Manu KNE out of the GW wetland budget. These traps will be installed by Biosecurity staff the next time existing bait stations are serviced and will then be serviced in conjunction with bait stations at three-monthly intervals or more frequently if a volunteer can be found.

2.6 Biosecurity database progress

Greater Wellington (GW) and Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC) are working together to develop a biosecurity focused database. The aim is to work together under a Public Private Partnership (PPP). This would mean the actual database build would be tendered out to several external software development companies (one of which would be Origen the current GW database provider). An important feature of a PPP arrangement would be that GW, BOPRC and the successful external vendor would share ownership of the database source code. If the vendor on sold the software, then any profits from the sale would be put back into the future development and maintenance of the database.

Internally, the Pest Animal section's requirements for bait station and trap data management are currently being incorporated into the User Requirements document. Engagement with the Land Management department will begin

shortly to ensure that the Biosecurity database will also meet their user requirements.

This project also has links to Auckland Council biodiversity database needs. ECAN has also expressed interest in the project and is assessing options to join the initiative.

2.7 RPMS Management Tools

Since the review of our RPMS in 2007/08 staff have initiated projects to streamline management decisions and improve planning. Opportunities were identified to align our preparation for the next RPMS review with the current national research scene.

Two significant research projects have emerged during the last two years: “Beating Weeds 2” and “Undermining Weeds”. These projects are looking into effective and efficient mitigation of invasive pest plant effects, including pest plant selection processes and cost benefit analysis.

Researchers have assessed current regional council programmes and selected GW as one of two councils nationally to work with scientists on practical field implementation of their pest management research. Two meetings were held with the teams from AgResearch and Landcare Research. Biosecurity staff presented the GW plant selection model developed to help streamline the plant selection process for the RPMS review. The model was well accepted and will be further developed as a part of the research project. Three staff have been invited to contribute as regional council representatives in the Undermining Weeds technical group. Some of the other GW projects that have attracted researchers attention included:

- Delimiting survey of Total Control species (first for New Zealand)
- Development of an RPMS process flowchart
- Surveillance strategy
- Surveillance species control trials and response planning
- Communication planning
- Biocontrol strategy planning

2.8 Hayward’s Scenic Reserve buffer weed survey – a pilot study

Since February, staff have completed a buffer-zone survey of 204 residential properties within 200 metres of the reserve. This involved an initial letter drop advising occupiers of the reasons for the survey (enclosed with all of our pamphlets). All pest plant species that could potentially re-invade the reserve have been recorded and control sheets for each sent to the occupier. The final report from the survey will be provided to the Committee and to Hutt City Council who co-fund pest plant control in the reserve. The maps below provide an overview of the type and number of highly invasive pest plants found.



2.9 National Environmental Standard for Plantation Forestry

A second draft of the proposed National Environmental Standard for plantation forestry has been released for comment. A number of working groups have refined the document, focussing on issues raised in submissions. The groups focussed on biosecurity (wilding pine control), erosion susceptibility, water management and the interface between the NES and the Climate Change response Act 2002.

Erosion susceptibility is a key focus for Greater Wellington as the proposed standard is endeavouring to introduce regulations covering afforestation on erosion prone land. This is more stringent than the existing rules in the Regional Soil Plan and may become an impediment to land use change because of the need for resource consent. Additionally a number of activities such as earthworks and river crossings will affect all land uses, not just forestry.

While it is not certain that the proposed standard will proceed to draft regulations, the Minister is expected to announce his decision by the end of August

2.10 Ballance Farm Environment Awards – National Showcase

The 2011 National Showcase was held in Hastings on 25 June 2011. The Showcase has been held for the past six years. Until this year it showcased the considerable efforts of each regional supreme winner but did not select an overall winner. The decision to select a national winner was a natural step for the organisers and it has been widely applauded.

The Gordon Stephenson Trophy was presented to Southland farmers Grant and Bernadette Weller. Their role will require them to act as “agriculture ambassadors” and includes a trip overseas with a trade delegation and a requirement to host members of agriculture delegations visiting New Zealand. This is a very prestigious trophy named after the founder of the awards and will add further value and interest to the awards in the coming years.

3. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***

Report prepared by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne O'Donnell', written over a faint, light-colored rectangular stamp or watermark.

Wayne O'Donnell
General Manager, Catchment Management