

Pests and Weeds – a blueprint for action

For the first time, the impact of pests on the economy has been estimated. *Pests and Weeds – a blueprint for action* puts the cost of animal pests, weeds and pathogens at \$840 million a year, or one per cent of the Gross Domestic Product. The report,



commissioned by the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA) says the private and public sectors spend about \$400 million a year on pest control, while the economy loses about \$440 million a year due to existing levels of animal pests, weeds and pathogens. The cost of pest damage to public conservation lands is additional to this.

The report challenges organisations and industries to help save New Zealand's natural heritage and combat the dangers posed to farming, forestry and public health. The NZCA has made a number of recommendations building on the report's findings. Below is a summary of the recommendations.

TARGETED FUNDING

Public funding of biosecurity - border control, surveillance, pest eradication and control - should be increased from about \$200 million a year to \$250 million a year. This should be the first step towards increasing investment in pest control to \$400 million annually by the year 2004/5. New Zealand also needs to increase its investment in research into new methods of pest control and eradication.

Provision should be made within the Government's Vote: Biosecurity for pest surveillance and monitoring, and a significant contingency fund should be created for central and regional authorities to use when dealing with outbreaks of new pests.

BETTER CO-ORDINATION OF PEST CONTROL AND RESEARCH

Better co-ordination of New Zealand's pest control and research is needed. It could be met in a number of ways:

- establishing a new dedicated government department,
- contracting this function out to a non-government agency, or
- allocating these responsibilities to an existing government agency.

Any mechanism would have to recognise and protect tangata whenua values.

NEW ZEALAND

CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

TE POU ATAWHAI TAIAO O AOTEAROA

ADOPTING SAFE TRADE PRACTICES

New Zealand needs to exercise its right to safe trade under international agreements. The Government should include a precautionary principle in the biosecurity provisions of all international trade agreements, and increase the investment in scientific support to biosecurity services.

INCREASE BORDER CONTROL RESOURCES

As it is easier to prevent potential pest species arriving in New Zealand rather than dealing with them once they arrive, greater emphasis and resources should be placed on policing biosecurity requirements overseas. New Zealand biosecurity staff should be stationed overseas to ensure clean shipments. Border control information available on planes and ships should be available in a variety of languages. MAF Quarantine should get increased resources to deal with potential pests of the natural environment, not just pests of primary production, which presently receive the most attention. Extra resources should also be allocated for protecting marine ecosystems from pests. People or organisations wanting to import new organisms should post a bond or take out insurance to cover the costs of eradication should the organism establish in the wild. Corporates who bring contaminated goods into New Zealand should be prosecuted, in the same way individuals bringing undeclared fruit and other goods are presently.

PEST CONTROL FOR CONSERVATION

The Department of Conservation (DOC) and regional councils need to expand the number of partnerships they have with iwi to protect taonga species from the impacts of pests, and strongly advocate for the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity on private land, in partnership with private landowners. They should encourage primary industries that benefit from introduced species that are also environmental pests to take responsibility for limiting and eradicating wild populations that might establish. DOC and regional councils should also protect indigenous freshwater biodiversity and prevent the further spread of exotic species, as well as protecting the marine and coastal environments.

DOC should expand its pest control of deer, goats, possums, mustelids, rats and feral cats and establish priorities for the control of weed species around the country. There should be comprehensive quarantine programmes for all the offshore islands that are pest-free. DOC should ensure that the conservation principles of the Conservation Act take priority over other demands on public conservation lands, such as recreational hunting. Eradications of thar, wallaby, chamois and some populations of deer are possible and should be done.

NZ'S INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The Government should legislate against the export of known pest species, except to their country of origin. New Zealand should also advocate for strict international quarantine to protect Antarctic wildlife as some diseases have already been introduced to Antarctica as a result of poor quarantine control.

The NZCA is an independent body that represents the public's long-term interest in conservation at a national level. It provides the Minister of Conservation and the Department of Conservation with independent, expert advice on national conservation planning, policy and management issues.

For more information, see the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz/commu/board/board.htm, or contact Catherine Tudhope for a copy of the report – phone 04 471 3211.