Forest Health and Biosecurity Report

There has been a lot of action in forest health and biosecurity over the last 12 months, including some high profile incursion responses. This report will, of necessity, be a very brief summary.

Biosecurity Strategy

The biosecurity strategy document was released in August 2003, has been accepted by the Government and is now being actioned. Much of the document reiterates widely accepted expectations and goals, with perhaps the traditional emphasis on animals rather than trees, but one key point is welcomed by the forest industry. MAF is to be the lead agency and lines of decision making and responsibility will come back to the Director-General.

The operational aspects are now being actioned. Forest Owners Assn. expressed a desire for a sector based approach, but MAF is developing more of an operational approach, (staff will be organised according to the job they do rather than sector they serve), but recognising the need for sector input and accountability. I am relaxed about this approach, but share the belief that good sector communication and input is essential.

Over the last year the industry's relationship with Forest Biosecurity has generally been very effective and constructive. The Forest Biosecurity Consultative Committee and other ad hoc groups have worked well. There have been more deficiencies at our end, because I have found that with the other responsibilities that land on my plate, I have not been able to devote as much time to Forest Health and Biosecurity as I should.

Research Funding and Proposed Research Structures

Biosecurity and Forest Health have done very well in recent bidding rounds. It was one of the growth areas in FRST funding, in fact some might even suggest it has grown a little too fast, with extra staff being taken on at Forest Research and also at Lincoln where the Centre of Research Excellence (CoRE) has a sizable FRST funded programme. Promised FRST and FOA funding amounts to about $19 million over the next 5 years.

In addition the Kyoto Protocol based Forest Industry Framework Agreement (FIFA) is promising significant funding in this area, if it can be signed off. Other funds have come from the Sustainable Farming Fund.

However, much of the public good research funding relies on the industry also being prepared to reach into its own pocket. To rationalise both the funding and direction of research efforts, it is proposed that a Forest Health Research Group (FHR**G**) be established as an unincorporated joint venture with representation from FOA, MAF, research providers and the Forest Health Research Collaborative (FHR**C**), which is a long standing group with wider representation, including FFA. Note also that FFA is represented on the FOA Forest Health Committee, but without worthwhile funds to put in the research pot we will not be at the top table.

FOA Forest Health Committee and FHRC

I have continued to represent the NZFFA on these committees, though there was a hiccup with the former group last year. One of the more important roles for the FOA FH Committee is their forest monitoring programme. They have a long standing arrangement with Vigil and Forest Health Dynamics for forest monitoring and more recently both CHH and Fletchers (as was), have developed less intensive forest condition monitoring systems using regular observations from selected vantage points.

This leads on to two questions for this AGM:

1 Would members be interested in joining the FOA forest health surveillance scheme, which currently costs FOA member close to $1/ha? Should I enquire about possibilities?

2 Would members be interested in learning about and applying the forest condition monitoring systems? An appropriate training day(s) might be possible but costs would have to be covered.

Rotorua Forest Health Workshop

This has now become an annual event and this year the focus was on *Nectria fuckeliana,* or flute canker, a very important disease issue for Otago and Southland.

Southern farm foresters have known for some years that 'diplodia' whorl canker is a major problem in pruned radiata pine. Thanks to research funded by City Forests, Rayonier, Wenita and Earnslaw One, it is now known that the primary pathogen here is not diplodia (now *Sphaeropsis sapinea*) but a northern European wound pathogen *Nectria fuckeliana,* though diplodia may also be present. It is a very serious problem in many pruned stands and raises questions about pruning and species.

Because the research has been largely funded privately, there is an IP ownership issue. Farm foresters are going to have to pay something to get access to existing information. However, the research team will be in the south in June and it might be possible to organise a seminar or field day supported by either an entrance fee or possibly Sustainable Farming Fund money. Thoughts please.

Pine pitch canker (or just pitch canker) remains a hot topic at these workshops. Work has continued at FR developing DNA probes for rapid identification and international research is continuing, looking at various aspects of epidemiology, pathology, species susceptibility, etc.. NZFFA has helped fund this work through Sustainable Farming Fund money. Fears about pitch canker have abated slightly, natural stands of *P. radiata* in California are showing some recovery, but it is still at the top of the nasties list.

Biosecurity Lapses

The discovery of pitch canker in symptomless Douglas fir scions at the Kaiapoi quarantine facility may be a useful reminder that all defences in our biosecurity shield need to be operating properly. In this case the second line of

defence worked well, but, very appropriately, the first line has been strengthened.

Similarly the painted apple moth larvae that survived the quarantine incinerator at FR were a sharp reminder that nothing should be taken for granted. I do not believe either event has compromised our biosecurity situation.

Incursion Responses

Painted apple moth eradication appears to be proceeding to plan, with the exception of one male moth found in Mt Eden. More intensive trapping in the vicinity has failed to find any more moths. It is possible this moth may be an infertile offspring of one of the 'sterile' males still being released (till May), but somewhere there had to be a fertile female. Work on the pheromone has been complicated by the instability of one component. The area being sprayed is steadily reducing. One alarming feature is the very high proportion of the budget going on public relations and community issues.

There have been no further finds of gypsy moth at Hamilton or fall web worm at Mt Wellington and it is hoped that eradication is being achieved. A survey at Hamilton showed that 71% of respondents supported the MAF actions, while 15% had never heard of gypsy moth nor the eradication campaign.

Dutch elm disease is still occurring in the greater Auckland area, with the recent removal of a number of trees at Murvale. While numbers of diseased trees are still low compared to the early '90s, they have increased over the last couple of years. The FBCC has urged more resources to achieve final eradication.

Gum leaf skeletoniser (*Uraba lugens)* is now well established across south Auckland and eradication is not considered practicable, but the infested area is expanding only slowly. The Govt. has provided funding to move to a pest management regime and work is under way on a number of research topics including biocontrol, (some promising prospects), population dynamics, feeding trials and host preferences. This is a nasty with a wider host range than most eucalypt insect pests including, it would appear, some deciduous hardwoods.

Surveillance Issues

This is receiving a lot of attention. Over the last 10 or 15 years container numbers have increased from 100,000 to about 450,000 per year, imported used cars have grown from almost zero to around 180,000 per year and tourist numbers have grown steadily with a 250% growth in cruise ship passengers in 5 years and 800 private yachts arriving in 2002. This is a big challenge. The increase in accredited inspectors of containers is one response. This is not an army of MAF emploees going forth, but the training of people who routinely handle containers. It is not fool proof, but in my opinion is an important move.

Other surveillances chemes for new pest arrivals include:

MAF high risk surveillance sites - ports, devanning facillities etc.. 76 sites with most interceptions.

MAF small forest blocks - 276 one ha. sites randomly chosen, have never had a new interception. These are to be changed to a more strategic distribution.

MAF wood boring bark beetles (WBBB) and gypsy moth surveillance traps are distributed round the country. Important programmes, barkbeetles can be serious disease vectors.

MAF passive surveillance is the public's response to a new bug. This is how PAM, fall web worm and white spotted tussock moth were found. There is room for improvement here.

FOA exotic forest surveillance, which has actually found very few new arrivals, far fewer than the Carter Model suggests it should.

DOC surveillance including first night campsites programme. Early days.

Some extraordinary stories come through from various interceptions, such as the bug infested foliage in resin cat figurines, powder bark beetle in wood in sophisticated medical equipment or the "hairy" i.e. fungus infested, teak posts going to an organic vineyard. Natural durability compromised by being all sap.

Local Action

I would like to mention what Dean Satchell is doing in Northland as an example of what individual farm foresters can do. With Sustainable Farming Fund money he has tracked down *Cleobora mellyi*, a yellow ladybird introduced some years ago to control *Paropsis charybdis* but now restricted to parts of Marlborough. It is hoped that reintroducing it to Northland may provide some control of a resurgent *Paropsis.* Other possibilities for controlling *Paropsis* include the parasitoid *Neopolycistus insectifurax* and anyone wishing to release this one please contact me.

Dean Satchell is also looking at the blackbut leafminer, *Acrocercops laciniella* which is attacking a number of eucalypt species in Northland.

I have commented often enough about how little money farm foresters spend on forest health and biosecurity issues. Local action like this can be an equally effective way of tackling issues. We can guarantee there will be plenty more challenges that will require money and/or action in the future.

Denis Hocking
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