

The role of community involvement in future incursion responses

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Forest Research and the University of Canterbury will be undertaking a project that models new methods for public involvement in pest eradication programmes.

While everyone remains hopeful that no new painted apple moths will be found in Auckland following the recent eradication programme, biosecurity risks will always be with us. It is widely acknowledged that new attacks from foreign insect pests are inevitable, with major consequences for native flora, plantations, horticulture, and amenity species if they become established. At the same time, eradication efforts have the potential to disrupt and alienate affected communities. It is appropriate, therefore, to explore new approaches to integrating community perspectives into the design of future incursion responses.

Some suggestions for improvement may be straightforward to implement. For example, in MAF's (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) consultations following the painted apple moth programme, suggestions were made about how to prevent the public from being caught in an unexpected aerial spray operation. This was more likely to occur when spray days were shifted because of adverse weather or when decisions were left to the last moment. While MAF made considerable efforts to accommodate public concerns regarding spray scheduling, community consultation suggested that relatively simple measures such as more frequent advertising on a wider range of radio stations, more information in newspapers, and letterbox drops could have been very helpful.

Successful campaigns depend to a significant extent upon community cooperation. Social acceptance for the way the eradication is performed is becoming increasingly important for the success of eradication campaigns, particularly from a long-term sustainability perspective.

While determined opponents can obstruct eradication efforts, at least as important is the fact that campaigns may depend for their success on the knowledge and the "eyes" of the community, whose detection of pest incursions and spread has often been crucial in the past.

Community cooperation and community knowledge are valuable resources for biosecurity decision-making. Integrating community

perspectives in the decision-making process will be enhanced by being proactive and raising questions in *anticipation* of incursions. We have knowledge about the types of pests we are likely to encounter in the future and about the types of responses we currently have available to us to deal with these pests. Using this knowledge, it is possible to discuss options and approaches with community groups *before* an incursion is detected.

This "anticipatory dialogue" would thus address an inevitable tension inherent in incursion responses: urgent decisions cannot allow sufficient time for the detailed identification of community knowledge and concerns. An *ongoing anticipatory* dialogue could compensate for this lack of time; response options could be explored and evaluated and community perspectives considered well in advance of a *particular* incursion event.

Another important benefit of such an approach is that it would raise the profile of biosecurity issues among the public. A growing understanding about the importance of biosecurity and the possible consequences of invasive pests on native flora and fauna, amenity species, horticulture and plantation forestry is an important basis for long-term cooperation with the public and for a successful biosecurity policy more generally.

The discussion of future response options with the public will also provide the opportunity to raise more general questions about biosecurity policy in New Zealand. The costs and benefits of eradication campaigns, the priorities they reflect, possible alternatives, the credibility of the institutions responsible, and future expectations need to be considered. According to a more recent study done by MAF (Feb. 2004), there is a desire within the community for biosecurity discussions to focus on these and other more fundamental issues.

In conclusion, it is clear that this anticipatory approach can be mutually advantageous. Most importantly, it would bring the community perspective into the decision-making process and engage the community in sharing the challenge of protecting New Zealand's flora and fauna. Integrating the community into the process on an ongoing basis will lead to a long-term sustainable way of dealing with incursions in the future.

We welcome input from interested people on our proposed anticipatory approach and on the integration of community perspectives in biosecurity policy more generally.

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