
Subterranean termites

David Kershaw

There has been considerable publicity about the detections of Australian subterranean termites recently. Outbreaks of this type have been detected on a number of occasions in the past and have been dealt with by the Forest Service or previously by the State Advances Corporation. Now the Ministry of Forestry has taken over the responsibility. The source of subterranean termites has always been related to imported Australian timber nearby. Termites have often been found associated with hardwood utility poles that were imported 25 or more years ago when we did not insist that all imported poles of this type be fumigated.

Subterranean termites do not like light and the queen has her nest underground. Termite trails radiate out from the nest and when they cross open areas such as concrete house piles they build characteristic clay tracks. Once a year winged termites swarm, but for some unknown reason there has never been any evidence of them spreading by this means in New Zealand.

The first of the recent infestations was discovered at Seatoun, Wellington on October 12 as a result of the failure of a 30-year-old utility pole holding up trolley bus wires. We think there was a nest in the pole and another satellite nest was found in a *Eucalyptus* tree. Two houses were infested in either their sub floor or wall timber and termites were discovered in loose timber, fencing, a garage and in two pohutukawa trees extending over three residential sections. Treatment was completed by December 10 and entailed the tent fumigation of two houses, injecting insecticide into two rows of drilled holes 30 cm apart to a metre depth, around the infested area, around each house, and around house piles. There will be subsequent monitoring for several years.

An infestation was detected on October 25 at a previously known site in Onehunga, Auckland, industrial area subsequent to a MOF routine inspection. Three factory premises were involved and a nest was detected in a nearby power pole. Treatment was completed by November 15 and involved the tent fumigation of a factory, and the replacement of infested timber.

A resident of a house in Otorohanga reported subterranean termites, and a subsequent MOF survey indicated there are six property sections involved. Two utility poles have termites and are prob-

ably the source of the infestation. The infestation will soon be assessed to decide treatment, which will probably be similar to that at Seatoun and involve the tent fumigation of houses, the removal of infested wood and vegetation, and trenching or drilling for a containment

barrier of insecticide.

There have been questions regarding compensation for damage done due to infestations. Under present law only the cost of damage done to property during the course of insect eradication may be paid by the Minister of Forestry.

Reform of scientific agencies

Government's science policy, announced before the election, included disestablishing DSIR and other Government science agencies and setting up separate stand-alone research institutes.

In November Government approved this in principle. Decisions and implications since then are as follows:

- * DSIR, MAFTech, the Forest Research Institute and the Meteorological Service will all be restructured into Crown-owned Research Institutes (to be known as CRIs).
- * The CRIs will be set up under special umbrella legislation which will contain provisions tailored to the character and needs of scientific and technological research.
- * Unlike the old science departments, the CRIs will be independent of political direction. The Crown's ownership interest will, however, be held by a Minister responsible for Crown Research Institutes.
- * Cabinet has specifically agreed that CRIs will have as their principal objective the conduct of public good research for the benefit of New Zealand.
- * A Task Force has been set up to oversee the form and detail of the restructuring. The initial members of the Task Force, to be chaired by the Hon. Simon Upton, are:
Hon. Simon Upton;
John Butcher Forest Research Inst.
Kevin Cosgriff Treasury;
Jonathon Lee State Services Comm.
Derek Milne DSIR Land Resources;
Mark O'Grady Meteorological Ser.
Peter O'Hara MAFTech;
Andrew West MORST
- * The Task Force will first define the principles and criteria for the restructuring, then proceed to drafting legislation.

* The Task Force was to report back to Cabinet by December 17, 1990 defining the principles and criteria for the reform.

By March 31, 1991 the necessary legislation is to be drafted.

By June 30, 1991 the number, size and roles of the individual CRIs will be decided.

By July 1, 1992 all CRIs are to be fully established.

* After the CRIs have been established the DSIR itself will go out of existence.

This restructuring follows naturally from the decision to direct long-term research money through the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (see the August 1990 issue of NZ Forestry).

Serious disease threat to trees

A new outbreak of dutch elm disease has been found in Auckland, placing New Zealand's 250,000 elm trees in jeopardy.

Diseased elms in Ponsonby were felled after a resident told the Ministry of Forestry the trees were dying.

The disease was capable of decimating New Zealand elm trees, the Ministry's Auckland Regional Manager, John Lewis, said.

Cuttings from four other trees were being tested for the disease by the Forest Research Institute.

These included an elm in a Symonds Street cemetery and three in or near St Kentigerns College, Remuera.

"The English countryside has been radically affected by the disease," Mr Lewis said.