



NEW INFORMATION



Forest Health – helping keep New Zealand Green

One of the unfortunate realities of free international trade and strong westerly air flows from Australia is that inevitably some exotic pests and diseases will infiltrate New Zealand's rigid timber quarantine inspections to find their way into our forests, woodlots and parks. In fact an estimated four to five new fungi and insects affecting commercial forestry species arrive each year.

The need for a second line of defence to detect and monitor these new introductions, as well as manage established forest health problems, was identified by the old New Zealand Forest Service when it launched the Forest Biology Survey in 1955. This developed to become the Forest Health Survey, as we know it today, under the Ministry of Forestry.

Working closely with scientists and technicians attached to the Forest Health Group of the New Zealand Forest Research Institute, a team of nine Forest Health Officers annually survey, from Kaitia to Bluff, the country's forests, port environs, nurseries and parks. This provides a comprehensive understanding of current pathogen biota and how they act on and interact with our trees and forests, which is one of the most important aspects of any contingency planning.

Although long established, the Forest Health Survey has always been something of an anomaly within New Zealand's regulatory border protection environment. It operates with the need for a 'willing buyer'. Many might argue this to be a handicap to good forest health, but, quite to the contrary, it has become one of its greatest strengths.

The Ministry of Forestry and groups with a vested interest in this country's trees and forests have had no option but to form a workable and compliant relationship. Since 1987 the vehicle for this has been the Forest Health Advisory Committee (FHAC) through which forest owners, timber importers, nurserymen, local government, New Zealand Forest Research Institute and the Department of Conservation have, with the Ministry of Forestry, formulated and developed a nationally coordinated forest health strategy and survey which complements the existing Timber Quarantine role.

Based on historical data, the country is

divided into areas of differing hazard or risk to a new introduction. Surveys, ranging from simple drive-through inspections to aerial inspections and intensive sample plots, are then tailored to suit the perceived level of risk.

Nationally, the current survey specification provides slightly more than 74 per cent probability of detecting any new insect or disease, should there be one. The FHAC does, however, hope to increase survey intensities in the future to achieve 85 per cent detection probability.

One of the many beneficial outcomes derived from the close working relationships within the FHAC was the implementation of a formalised and comprehensive forest health training programme for industry staff. This maintains a high standard and not only provides the opportunity for forest owners to apply hands on forest health in their own forests, but also enables them to contribute to the targeted 85 per cent probability of detection.

The numerous groups who identify with New Zealand's trees and forests concur that it is vitally important to maintain



A routine forest health inspection for new pests and diseases near the Port of Timaru. Photo courtesy of the Timaru Herald.

our status as being relatively free from exotic pests and diseases. Unfortunately, however, our trees and forests do not enjoy some form of divine protection and it would be foolhardy to assume so. Therefore, it is essential that not only Forest Health strategies continue to evolve, but continue to evolve within the climate of cooperation enjoyed now.

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Swift progress with Framework

Nearly 600 unit standards, written and developed by industry, have now been registered on the new National Qualifications Framework. Another 2000 should be registered by the end of the year.

Units are the building blocks of the new qualifications system which offers a variety of entry points and pathways for people to gain the skills they need at any age and at any stage in their careers from senior secondary school onwards. The Framework is a key part of the Skill New Zealand strategy which aims to raise the skill levels of New Zealanders and encourage lifelong learning.

Units will be available at a wide range of education and training providers, including schools and workplaces. Units may be cross-credited between any accredited provider.

There is also provision under the Framework for assessment and formal recognition of skills and knowledge in the workplace. Policies and procedures for

this are being trialled by industry over the next few months.

Over the next few years, all learning, including conventional school subjects, will be translated into units. In the industry sector, more than 6000 unit standards are being developed and packaged into national qualifications.

This massive task has fallen to 135 national advisory groups representing different industries and professions. The groups cover over 70% of New Zealand's occupational groups. In many cases, the unit standards, and the education and training programmes that follow, will be an industry first.

Each unit standard states the key skills and knowledge that learners must achieve in order to gain credit towards nationally-recognised achievement – National Certificate, National Diploma or Degree. Learners gain a National Certificate or National Diploma when they complete the required units.