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Report to the Landcare Committee
from Geoff Cameron, Manager, Natural Forestry

Forest Health Research Collaborative

1. Purpose

To advise the Committee about past and future membership of the Forest Health Research Collaborative, and the results of the most recent meeting.

2. Details of the Collaborative

The Forest Health Collaborative (FHRC) was set-up in 1996 in an effort to speed up access to a range of science research providers with an interest in forest health, and to provide a forum for discussion and debate on forest health issues. At that time research providers were competing for work, and the white spotted tussock moth had been discovered in Auckland City.

The FHRC has a formal Agreement as the basis of membership. This is between the New Zealand Forest Owners Association (NZFOA) and “those other interested parties who agree to participate.”

The Mission of the Collaborative is “*to provide solutions to forest health problems of common relevance to members, through cost effective research and technology transfer, to minimise the effect of pests and diseases on trees, forests and wood*”.

The Agreement states the Collaborative will achieve its mission through:

- sponsoring workshops and site visits;
- providing simple mechanisms to facilitate research and information transfer;
- providing a forum within which to identify, prioritise, and attract funds for research and information transfer;

- providing a common meeting ground for interested parties including the forestry sector, researchers and overseas specialists;
- providing an infrastructure for research providers and information transfer;
- enhancing communication and networking;
- providing umbrella and focus research structures; and
- identifying forest health issues and research needs.

The FHRC is, understandably, dominated by NZFOA members (commercial forestry companies), but the membership of DoC, Wellington Regional Council and the research providers does mean a more holistic approach to funding research projects is taken. The Collaborative is administered through Forest Research Ltd.

The Agreement was reviewed at the most recent meeting of the Collaborative, and it is now appropriate to review Wellington Regional Council's membership.

3. **Membership Benefits to the Regional Council**

The Plantation Forestry department is a member as of right through its membership of the Forest Owners Association.

The Natural Forestry department joined as an "interested party" in 1996 for a number of reasons:

- the terms of reference were holistic and took a broad definition of forestry;
- it fitted nicely with our forest health survey contract with the Ministry of Forestry;
- it gave quick access to the science necessary if we had a forest health problem (e.g. Asian Gypsy Moth in our water collection areas);
- it provided international contacts through forestry companies and/or research providers; and
- it has close links to Government.

Regional Council membership will be reviewed through the new Parks and Forests management team, in association with the Water Group. At present membership costs \$1200 per year.

4. **Attendance at the Most Recent Meeting**

The Collaborative meets twice a year, and I try to attend at least one of those. The most recent meeting was on the West Coast and had an indigenous forestry "flavour". Points of interest were:

- The Agreement was reviewed and some minor changes made.
- New research projects approved were:
 - further work on possum damage especially finding a way to “grade” the damage.
 - assessing the economic impact of aphids on conifers.
 - biological control of blackberry, which is a subset of a project underway at CSIRO.
- On-going projects of interest to us are technology transfer projects, specifically the Handbook on the Pathology of New Zealand Trees, and the Electronic Guide to Forest Pests and Diseases in New Zealand. Both of these projects replace old pamphlets first produced in the 1950s, and cover most common pathogens found on indigenous plants.
- NZFOA have put the plantation estate forest health survey out to tender, which now makes this work very competitive. There are concerns that future surveys will be down to a price, rather than up to a quality. Such a trend would be acceptable if border control was satisfactory, but experience has shown that it isn't. The seamless nature of WRC's plantation and natural forest estate means that one agency should do both surveys.
- DoC staff from Westland conservancy talked about the native pathogens attacking beech forests in the Maruia Valley and how they have to manage public perceptions arising from a natural event.
- They also discussed their work on trying to protect beech mistletoe. This species has shown variable dieback, and it seems to be independent of possum control once the plant has returned to an area after possums have been controlled.
- Landcare Research staff discussed the role of fungi in beech forests. They revealed that about 800 species of fungi have been described in West Coast beech forests, an indication that there are probably over 2,000 species in that ecosystem. Fungi are an important source of food for possums. There could be some fungi that would be good indicators of beech ecosystem health, but that line of research has not progressed very far.
- During the field trip:
 - We noted the occurrence of one fungus further south than previously recorded. This was the blue fungus which appears on the New Zealand \$50 note, and is the same colour as the wattle on the Kokako.
 - We noted the extensive spread of gorse spider mites. This mite had taken many years to establish on the Coast because of the high rainfall, but a new strain from a high rainfall area was proving effective. Gorse spider mite is one of a series of biological control agents being used against gorse. It has a long-term effect by reducing the seeding capability of the plant. The mite is present in small numbers in Wellington.

- We noted the spread of pampas grass and buddleia through disturbed indigenous forest. This reinforced the approach we are taking at Queen Elizabeth Park, Mt Climie and Akatarawa to control these pest plants before they become established.
- We had good philosophical debates about what constituted sustainable forest management.
- The next meeting will be held in Wellington in November.

5. **Communication**

This report covers a largely technical issue, which interfaces with forest monitoring when a problem is detected. In isolation it will have a limited audience, but it can be used when developing information on this Council's stewardship role.

6. **Recommendations**

- (1) *That the report be received and its contents noted.*
- (2) *That the Committee note that future membership of the Collaborative will be decided by the Parks and Forests management team as part of service level decisions in the Environmental Asset Management Plan.*

Report prepared by:

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