

Possum and ferret control brings smiles to farmers' faces

HEALTHY CATTLE and regenerating bush have put smiles on the faces of North Canterbury farmers Robin and Chris Gardiner, who farm near Mt Cass. A few years ago, it was a very different story as their herd became infected with Tb during an outbreak of the disease that spread through a large area south of the Hurunui River. Tb is spread mainly by possums and ferrets, which used to run all over their farm.

"I was poisoning and shooting them but just couldn't keep up," Robin notes.

Environment Canterbury started control work in the early 1990s on a 14,000ha block around Mt Cass, which includes the Gardiners' farm and neighbouring properties.

Environment Canterbury's Tb management officer Phil Spencer recalls how badly infested it was 15 years ago. "You could go and shoot more than 100 possums in a night."

Control work started with 1080 carrot bait plus trapping, then switched to feratoc cyanide, which is safer for dogs and livestock, in 1997.

During the past three years, Tb in livestock has virtually disappeared in the Mt Cass area, with just one deer herd now infected. The native bush and birds are now bouncing back.

Contractors are also working in a big area between the Waimakariri River and Kaikoura, and in the southern part of the region around Omarama, the Mackenzie Country and the Waitaki Valley.

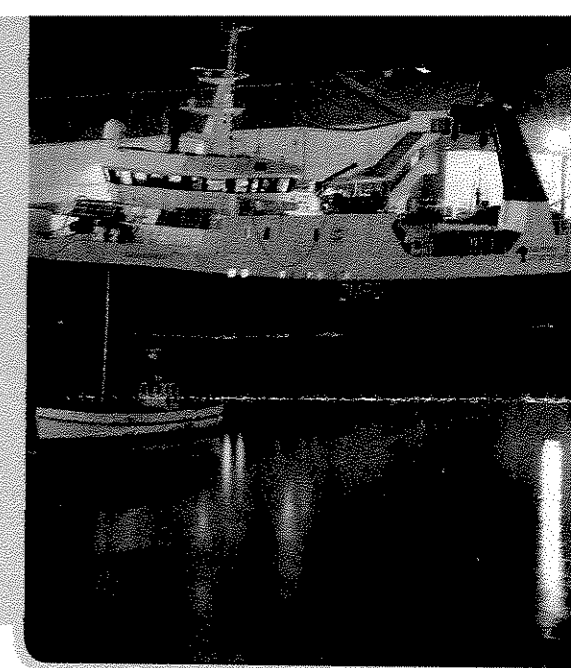
More than \$7.8M is being spent on possum and ferret control in Canterbury in 2005/06. Environment Canterbury is contributing about \$860,000 and the rest is from central Government and Tb levies on cattle and deer at the freezing works.

"You could go and shoot more than 100 possums in a night"

Regional harbourmaster Jack Hutchings says Environment Canterbury will work alongside the Lyttelton and Timaru port companies, with the help of consultants, to study all possible risk factors. The port companies will focus on risks around wharves, inner port areas and main navigational channels, while Environment Canterbury will study the remaining areas of the harbours – the parts used by recreational vessels.

"Essentially, it's about how we can maintain and improve safety," Jack says.

The risk management report is due to be completed by July, and the code of practice by mid-2006, at a cost of \$35,000 from general rates for the first year of this work.



Pests and biosecurity

WE WANT:

- an environment for native plants and animals that is not threatened by pests
- control of animals that spread bovine tuberculosis, such as possums and ferrets, so that cattle and deer export markets are maintained
- control of plant pests so that they don't affect the environment or land productivity, and control of animal pest so that they don't increase soil erosion

Plant and animal pests pose serious economic and environmental threats – reducing land production, eroding soil, wiping out native vegetation and killing native birds.

Environment Canterbury has regional pest management strategies for rabbits, wallabies, rooks, possums, mustelids, old man's beard, nassella tussock, gorse, broom, wilding conifers, boneseed and egeria.

We can require land occupiers to carry out control to a specified level, or we can deliver a service and advice to farmers and others.

Partnerships with land occupiers, community groups and other interested parties are an increasingly important part of the way Environment Canterbury carries out pest control.

Environment Canterbury manages the feral vector control programme for bovine tuberculosis in the region. This involves large-scale control programmes for possums and ferrets, which are carriers of bovine Tb. Environment Canterbury also funds the Canterbury share of the programme.

THE COST OF THIS WORK WILL BE: \$11.8M

STOP PRESS...

Animal pest control capability

Maintaining an adequate long-term capability for animal pest management in Canterbury is a key consideration for Environment Canterbury. Discussions have been held with pest liaison committee chairpersons to explore options on how this could be achieved. Further consultation is planned with the committees and the public and a submission made to the final 2005/06 Annual Plan.

Banks Peninsula possum control programme

Good progress has been made in eradicating bovine Tb from cattle and deer herds on Banks Peninsula. As a result, the possum control programme carried out in partnership with the Animal Health Board is now being phased out. The Banks Peninsula Pest Management Liaison Committee and Environment Canterbury are currently exploring ways to maintain the gains made by continuing the possum control programme. Details of options are being circulated to rural ratepayers on the peninsula and, depending on feedback received, a submission made to the final 2005/06 Annual Plan.