

Newsletter to participants January 2007

Background

STIMBR was born out of a meeting of over 40 individuals representing 26 organisations held in May 2006. These organisations shared the important concern about how market access for log and timber exports could be sustained and enhanced, given the increasing pressure on the widely used fumigant methyl bromide.

The group, while focused on the market access issue for forest produce, also recognised the wider implications of reducing methyl bromide use in New Zealand. Forestry is the main consumer but methyl bromide is also vital for the import quarantine and the horticultural sectors.

The meeting established a working group to develop a draft research strategy made up of Don Brash (Crop & Food Research), Paul Burrige (Biosecurity New Zealand), Sarah Adams-Linton (Ministry for the Environment), Gordon Hosking (Frontline Biosecurity), Brian Husband (Dow AgroSciences), Brian Richardson (Ensis), Mark Self (Applied Biosecurity Consultants), and Wei-Young Wang (Forest Owner's Association). This working group met in late June and accepted Gordon Hosking's offer to chair the group. Priorities for the working group were to develop a terms of reference for STIMBR and develop a draft research strategy for consideration by all stakeholders as the basis for funding applications.

The risk

The forestry sector is seriously exposed to any constraints on methyl bromide use, both locally through the New Zealand Government's efforts to reduce ozone depleting emissions, and internationally through any move by trading partners to reduce their own methyl bromide use.

An aggressive research programme focused on alternative strategies will demonstrate a commitment by the sector to reduce its reliance on methyl bromide, and recognition of the economic and environmental risks of "business as usual". Such a strategy would also be consistent with the sustainability focus of New Zealand plantation forestry.

Role of STIMBR

STIMBR was formed to bring together a wide range of organisations and individuals with a common interest in progressing alternative strategies to methyl bromide fumigation for enhancing market access of forest produce while reducing reliance on methyl bromide use. Specifically STIMBR aims to:

- provide a united voice in support of initiatives and research aimed at enhancing market access for forest produce while reducing methyl bromide use,
- act as a forum for the discussion of stakeholder interests and activities,
- inform government and the wider public as to the unique needs of New Zealand's situation (i.e. unique quarantine pests and need for local data to build markets) and the need for urgent action in the development of alternatives to methyl bromide (especially if greater restrictions on its use are imposed either locally or by our trading partners),
- co-ordinate and promote research being undertaken on alternatives to methyl bromide,
- provide independent but informed advice on research priorities and collaboration potential in this area,
- offer a governance role in research proposal and research output evaluation within an overarching research strategy.



Activities to date

Over the past six months the STIMBR working group has:

- developed and obtained stakeholder approval of a terms of reference,
- developed and obtained stakeholder agreement in principle to a draft research strategy,
- submitted a funding application to FRST's Cross Departmental Research Pool,
- submitted a research programme proposal to FRST's Public Good Science Fund ,
- made substantial progress towards developing an economic case for funding research into alternatives for methyl bromide.
- produced this newsletter to inform stakeholders of progress.

The failure to secure Cross Departmental Funding and the failure to progress a proposal to the second round of FRST evaluation, despite a strong and well developed case, was a major disappointment to the group.

These failures did however identify the widespread misunderstanding of the implications of reduced methyl bromide use to New Zealand, the lack of appreciation of the urgency with which alternatives need to be pursued, and the false assumption that answers will emerge from research outside New Zealand and outside the forestry export sector.

The working group believes that tackling this poor appreciation of the impact of methyl bromide reduction within a New Zealand context to be fundamental to obtaining support for an effective research programme.

Representations to appropriate Ministers and senior government and sector players are seen as the working group's highest priority. The weakness of recommendations by the Local Government and Environment

Select Committee is symptomatic of the poor understanding and lack of urgency in tackling methyl bromide reduction, at the highest levels in Government.

Current research

Current research into alternatives to methyl bromide is largely being driven by operational imperatives, reflecting specific pressures on government departments or sector groups.

Vehicle fumigation. Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ) is currently providing operational funding to evaluate alternative fumigants for the disinfection of used vehicles being imported into New Zealand. The project, being led by Crop and Food Research, expects to focus on one or two of the most promising alternatives and progress their specific application for the quarantine treatment of used vehicles.

Phosphine fumigation of logs. The forest produce export sector has strongly supported operational research into the use of phosphine for the fumigation of logs and timber over the past four years. The Forest Produce Export Committee (FPEC) has been instrumental in advancing this research, with support from MfE and MAF, which has led to the acceptance by China of in-transit phosphine fumigation for logs. A current initiative is focused on obtaining similar acceptance by India, as well as identifying what further research is needed to support wider acceptance of phosphine by both product type and trading partners.

FIDA funding for market development.

FIDA funding of a New Zealand Forest Owners Association (FOA) project on environmentally friendly quarantine treatments has been approved. The four year programme led by Ensis has a wide focus to include alternative fumigants, light traps, heat treatment, and new technologies, and is strongly directed at delivering tools for end users.

Where to from here?

Priorities for the STIMBR working group for 2007 include:

- expanding and strengthening STIMBR by ensuring all interested parties in New Zealand are involved, and exploring interest in Australia at both a government and sector level.
- assembling a summary of all current research in this area in both New Zealand and Australia.
- exploring other potential funding opportunities.
- meeting with appropriate Ministers and officials to raise the awareness of STIMBR and its objectives, outline the urgent need for action, and seek support for our research strategy.
- developing a summary paper around the implications of methyl bromide reduction to New Zealand, the uniqueness of New Zealand's situation and the need for urgency in advancing an integrated effort on alternative strategies.
- presenting a budget and securing funding for STIMBR to advance its interests over the next 12 months.

A meeting of stakeholders is proposed for Friday 30th March at 9am (aiming to finish at noon) in the Ministry for the Environment's Level 1 meeting room at 23 Kate Shepherd Place, Wellington.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- seek wider stakeholder evaluation of the working group's activities to date,
- discuss the structure, roles and operation of STIMBR.
- review the progress of STIMBR towards its goals,
- agree and prioritise STIMBR activities over the next 12 months,
- propose a budget to undertake these activities, and
- discuss, and if possible agree, a funding mechanism.

*Gordon Hosking
Chair, STIMBR Working Group.*

