

Improving pastures at Bannaby

FOR Bannaby Angus farm manager Glynn Langford the release of a new granular fluproponate has been a real cost saver.

Bannaby Angus has farms at Taralga and Bannaby, but it's at the farm at Bannaby where the business has struggled to deal with the encroaching serrated tussock.

Mr Langford estimates in the heavily infested areas the carrying capacity is reduced from nine dry sheep equivalents a hectare to just four.

"It's the home of the tussock down here at Bannaby," he said.

However, he said where tussock had been removed the country became quite profitable.

The 890-hectare farm has varying levels of infestation across its breadth and includes areas which have previously only been treatable by helicopter.

This method didn't work so well, as the liquid sprays killed

all the grass and left bare earth.

"The other product (the liquid sprayed from the helicopter) would leave the ground bare and the first thing to grow back was the tussock," Mr Langford said.

In stark contrast, the granular GP Fluproponate G100 has wiped out nearly all the tussock, but has left the native pasture.

"It hasn't killed any (native) grass at all - 99.9pc of the tussock is dead," said Mr Langford, pictured in a patch of dead tussock after treatment with GP Fluproponate G100.

"And the clover is just thriving and that's just after two months."

He said this meant he could treat a pasture infested by tussock without impinging on stocking rate because the beneficial pasture species remained intact.

"There's also a residual effect that should last two to three years, so you don't have to spend weeks

on end dragging (spray) hoses around."

This initial round of treatment with granular fluproponate was partly subsidised by Taralga Rural to trial its effects, so cost just \$80/ha (chemical plus application), which was a lot cheaper than employing two labour units to make their way through the difficult terrain with spray gear.

In a green season such as this summer, the granular application also had the benefit of targeting small, hard-to-see serrated tussock that would most likely be missed by a person spraying.

This prevented these young plants reaching seed bearing age and hence began using up the weed's seedbank.

Taralga Rural co-owner and agronomist Bryn Rees said eventual application costs (including chemical) were expected to be \$90 to \$100/ha.



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New ammo in tussock war

By ANDREW NORRIS

A NEW product targeting tussocky weeds such as serrated tussock is attracting a lot of interest from graziers in the Taralga area.

Granular Products owner and GP Fluproponate G100 creator Graham Barrett, said GP Fluproponate G100 was released in late 2011.

Mr Barrett's expertise was in aerial application and he had been approached by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries to create an efficient treatment for giant rat's tail grass.

Testing of the resulting granular fluproponate was also done on serrated tussock and completed in 2005 before entering the registration process.

Taralga Rural co-owner and

agronomist Bryn Rees said serrated tussock had long been a problem in the Southern Tablelands and any tools farmers had available to beat it were welcome.

"It's invaded some very productive country through the years," he said.

"Once it's established it's a very difficult plant to out-compete."

Serrated tussock was unpalatable and invasive but GP Fluproponate G100 was giving farmers a new advantage.

Mr Rees said farmers had used chipping, spot and boom spraying with glyphosate and liquid fluproponate but these methods had their limits.

In a spot spraying-type application the granules avoided shadowing, whereas over-spraying an area (with liquid) around a tussock plant resulted in a dead patch where other weeds could establish.

Fluproponate is a residual herbicide which is taken up by the plant's roots, so when in liquid form must be washed off the leaves and into the soil surrounding the roots.

When applied by boom or aerial spraying, liquid fluproponate could also do damage to more than just target plants - it could also take out non-target species, which were otherwise beneficial.

The aerial application with liquid fluproponate also had a high co-efficient of variation with its kill rate proving uneven across a wide area, he said.

"However, with a granular product the application is more even because it can be applied more accurately," Mr Rees said.

The granular option could also be used to treat tussock in timbered areas where the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority had not registered the use of liquid fluproponate, he said.

"The granules fall through the canopy and land on the ground near the target."

The addition of the granular fluproponate had added another tool farmers could use, and early adopters were following up with spot spraying, Mr Rees said.

Work which Taralga Rural had conducted during the past six months had also shown retention of natives such as kangaroo and wallaby grasses and improved species such as legumes, cocksfoot and phalaris in areas treated with the granular form.

"We're advocating using it in conjunction with soil tests (and fertiliser) to maintain a productive pasture," he said.

"We've had a heap of interest since it became available with the first aerial jobs in October last year."

"(However), we've also been taking it steady to see that everything was right."

Cost-wise, this new form of

fluproponate also stacked up well, with more hectares being done per payload - in a 300-kilogram payload, 20ha can be covered with granular, but only 3.75ha with a liquid, which quickly impacted cost, Mr Barrett said.

But it wasn't just about cost.

"We believe it's better environmentally because it can be used to take out tussock in timbered areas which reduces recontamination," Mr Rees said.

It was having less impact on non-target species, as the granules fell straight to the ground without any spray drift.

Once on the ground, the fluproponate was washed out of the granule, which was made of clay and could be left to decompose.

"Because it's a granule that hits the ground we know it's hitting the target, but with a liquid there are losses to evaporation and drift."

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