



The piercing problem of Chilean needle grass



Council is continuing to tackle Chilean needle grass, a high-threat and invasive weed with serious implications for the local environment and economy.

Councillors received an update at March's Environment and Planning Committee meeting.

The persistent pest, first spotted in the Blind River area in the 1940s, has expanded its presence, with a total of 2,626 hectares affected as of the 2024/2025 season - an increase of 14 hectares from the previous year.

"Council staff, land occupiers and contractors have rallied together during the crucial seeding period from late October to mid-January, putting in significant efforts to manage and contain this pest," Council Biosecurity Manager Liam Falconer said.

"Despite these efforts, nine new affected properties were identified this season,

highlighting ongoing challenges in controlling its spread."

Chilean needle grass has long stood as a national threat, with a recent study suggesting it could cost New Zealand up to \$1.1 billion over the next 200 years if not adequately addressed.

"Since 2014, Council has increased its resources and implemented intensive search and destroy operations. These efforts aim to tackle new infestations early and support managing lightly and moderately affected properties. However, with 232 active infestations currently recorded, the battle is far from over," Mr Falconer said.

In July last year, the Environmental Protection Authority approved Council's

use of a rust fungus that affects Chilean needle grass, which was released in Blind River in October, and further releases are planned for the coming months.

Engaging the community is crucial in this fight. Council is exploring new ways to raise awareness about the risks associated with this pest, particularly within larger companies where turnover can lead to a lack of understanding regarding its spread.

A full review of the programme is set for 2027, aligning with the Regional Pest Management Plan.

To find out more about efforts to control CNG, go to: www.marlborough.govt.nz/environment/biosecurity/a-z-of-pests/

Tails are wagging in Picton



It's a great time to be a dog in Picton.

Council has recently installed a new bin and bag dispenser (pictured) along the Picton to Waikawa track, below Victoria Domain, much to the delight of dog owners - and their dogs.

There is also a great doggy day out coming up courtesy of the Picton Veterinary Clinic. The 2025 Traffic Light Bandana Dog Walk and Games Day is back for its fourth year on 29 March at Memorial Park in Picton.

Picton Veterinary Clinic Co-Owner Dr Christine Mackenzie said the unique event promotes safe and respectful dog interactions with colourful traffic light bandanas for dogs and t-shirts (for owners) helping communicate how our furry friends are feeling.

"The bandanas are a clever way for dog owners to be an advocate for their dog and protect their well-being. They express the dogs' feelings toward other dogs or people - they wear green for friendly, yellow for disability like deaf or blind, orange when caution is required and red when they may be nervous or not like certain other dogs or people," she said.

"The bandana day includes lots of fun family games like egg and spoon and includes awards for the smallest and tallest dog, best dressed dog and handler and the waggiest tail."

Registration is essential. Go to: www.eventfinda.co.nz/2025/traffic-light-bandana-dog-walk/picton



Fares on Marlborough's public bus routes will increase from 1 July

Bus fares to increase from 1 July

Fares on Marlborough's publicly funded buses will rise this July for the first time since the service started 20 years ago.

Council's Assets and Services Committee has approved a 20 per cent increase which will see the price for an adult one-way bus fare in Blenheim rise from \$2 to \$2.40 and a child fare increase from \$1 to \$1.20. The Picton bus one way fare will increase from \$4 to \$4.80 for an adult and from \$2 to \$2.40 for a child. This is subject to the approval of full Council on 3 April.

The new fares take effect 1 July. Marlborough Roads System

Manager Wayne Oldfield said the increase was in response to increased operating expenses, the need to maintain the service and to meet the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) directive to the sector to increase the private share funding component which comes from ticket sales and advertising on the buses.

"The public transport system in Marlborough has seen an increase in operational costs like many other sectors due to

inflation, wage increases, fuel price rises and maintenance expenses," he said.

"To date these have been absorbed by NZTA and Council however that is not sustainable in the long term. To maintain our current service and to meet the NZTA obligations, we need to adjust fares."

"Our private share component is currently sitting at around five per cent and we need to increase that to 6.5 per cent by 2027. Super Gold card holders,

who travel for free, make up 70 per cent of passengers."

Mr Oldfield said the new fares still represent great value for money and the public transport service continued to offer an excellent alternative to private vehicles as well as providing a social service for users. It also supports Council's regional climate change mitigation efforts.

The Marlborough bus service began in 2005.