

The first thousand days: communicating the introduction of change in the New Zealand Department of Conservation

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Summary Weed control monitoring, a new method of assessing performance, was formalised in New Zealand's Department of Conservation with the introduction of the Weed Control Monitoring Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in 2000. Weed staff in the 13 Conservancies were trained in the new procedures. A support scientist was appointed to help staff implement monitoring of their weed control programmes. A list of frequently-asked-questions was prepared, an email contact list set up, and a central spreadsheet on which staff could record their monitoring efforts prepared. The SOP ascribed responsibilities for making sure that the work was done. We thought everything had been done to make the new system work well.

In early 2003, inspection of the weed control monitoring spreadsheet, and feedback from staff involved in monitoring revealed that all was not well in the land of weed control monitoring. A panel convened in mid-2003, reviewed both the SOP and the monitoring process. This panel highlighted the problems faced and made recommendations to overcome some of

these problems. Subsequently, appropriate staff were interviewed for their views on monitoring and its introduction. These interviews were used as the basis for examining the communication procedures through which the change in monitoring had been introduced and subsequently maintained.

This paper summarises the communication processes through which the Weed Control Monitoring SOP was developed, introduced to staff and implemented. It highlights where these processes appear to have been successful and where they seem to have failed. The results of this study can be applied more widely; better ways of communicating technical know-how are outlined. Suggestions include improved encouragement from operational management staff, more clearly defined technical support, ongoing staff training, and provision of good examples of effective monitoring.

Keywords Weed control, monitoring, standard operating procedure, communication.