

Our reference: A1141717  
Enquiries to: Jolie Hazley  
Email: [jolie.hazley@es.govt.nz](mailto:jolie.hazley@es.govt.nz)

26 September 2024



Dear Stakeholder

***Biocontrol Stakeholder consultation letter***

I am approaching you as a potentially affected party to seek your feedback on proposals to introduce biocontrol agents for two weeds, Darwin's barberry and Chilean flame creeper.

We have started to prepare applications to NZ Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) to gain permission to introduce two new biocontrol agents. The first is the Darwin's barberry rust fungus (*Puccinia darwinii*) for the control Darwin's barberry (*Berberis darwinii*). The second is the Chilean flame creeper leaf beetle (*Blaptea elguetai*) for the control of Chilean flame creeper (*Tropaeolum speciosum*). Environment Canterbury regional council is the applicant for the Darwin's barberry application which we aim to submit in December 2024. Environment Southland regional council is the applicant for the Chilean flame creeper application which we aim to submit in March 2025.

As part of pre-lodgement consultation, we are now consulting a wide range of stakeholders and interested and affected parties to gather views on these proposals. This is an opportunity for you to share with us your views or concerns about the release of these biocontrol agents. In your response you may wish to (but this is not a requirement) consider aspects such as:

- Do either of the weeds currently affect your sector?
- Do either of the weeds affect environmental values in your sector, and if so, how?
- Do either of the weeds affect economic values in your sector, and if so, how? Do you have any monetary estimates of management costs? (Anecdotal information would also be of value.)
- Do either of the weeds confer any benefits?
- Do you have any comments on the effects of the introduction of the biocontrol agent for either of these weeds?
- Any other comments you consider would be of value.

We welcome responses that address any or none of the above. If you wish to make no comments at all, we would appreciate you letting us know that too.

You can send your feedback via our online form, which can be [accessed here](#). Please send us your/your sector's response by 28 October for the Darwin's barberry rust fungus and 1 February 2025 for the Chilean flame creeper leaf beetle.

Your feedback on these draft applications will be integrated into the final applications prior to lodgement, to inform the EPA's decision-making committee. Please let us know if you believe your feedback should not be made public.

Note that you will also be able to submit comments directly to the EPA once either application is formally lodged and opens for public submissions.

For now  
& our future

### **Further information:**

We have included two factsheets with this letter. You can find further key information about these applications in the [dedicated websites](#) for the Darwin's barberry application and the Chilean flame creeper application.

In each of those pages you will find information about:

- The weeds and the potential biocontrol agents.
- The pre-application consultation process with Iwi and other stakeholders.
- Analyses of the Risks, Costs and Benefits for Darwin's Barberry rust (Report), Darwin's barberry flower weevil (Report from 2012 application), and Chilean flame creeper leaf beetle (Report).
- Reports on the host range determination for Darwin's Barberry rust (Report), Darwin's barberry flower weevil (Report), and Chilean flame creeper leaf beetle (Report).
- List of cited references.

### **Brief Application Summaries:**

#### **Darwin's barberry rust**

Darwin's barberry is a tall, spiny shrub that aggressively invades pasture, forest margins and light gaps in disturbed or remnant forest. It is an increasingly important weed that threatens environmental and economic values throughout New Zealand. The Darwin's barberry rust damages Darwin's barberry by infecting the leaves and fruits and is expected to reduce plant growth and potentially seed production. Research on the host specificity of the rust indicated that it is specific to Darwin's barberry and will pose no risk to any native or desirable plant species in New Zealand. The application will also include a re-application for the release of the Darwin's barberry flower weevil (*Anthonomus kuscheli*). The release of this weevil was approved by the EPA in 2012, but the approval has since lapsed.

#### **Chilean flame creeper leaf beetle**

Chilean flame creeper is a vigorous climbing plant that thrives in full sun. It grows high into tree canopies, blocking sunlight for plants below and inhibiting their growth and seedling establishment. Chilean flame creeper is an important environmental weed in New Zealand, particularly in Southland, Otago, and Canterbury. It is also present in lower parts of the North Island, and becoming a problem weed in Manawatū-Whanganui. Adults and larvae of the Chilean flame creeper beetle feed on the leaves and, when available, the flowers of Chilean flame creeper, reducing plant vigour and potentially seed formation.

Testing indicated that the beetle is host specific to the genus *Tropaeolum*. There are no native *Tropaeolum* species in New Zealand, but several exotic *Tropaeolum* (*nasturtium*) species are grown as ornamentals and garden companions in New Zealand.

In laboratory tests, very limited feeding and larval development occurred on the crop species Pak choi (*Brassica chinensis*). However, it is highly unlikely that this species, or any other *Brassica* species, will be field hosts for the beetle. This conclusion is also supported by field surveys in Chile that found no evidence of the beetle on unsprayed *Brassica* crops, as well as literature searches that found no association of the beetle with any *Brassica* crops cultivated in the native range.

Two online Q&A sessions focusing on the Chilean Flame Creeper application will be held on Tuesday 22 October at 11 – 12pm and 7 – 8 pm with Environment Southland and Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research. To register please email [communications@es.govt.nz](mailto:communications@es.govt.nz).

We would be happy to discuss the applications and answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jolie Hazley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping tail.

Jolie Hazley  
**Team Leader Biosecurity – Plants**

Encl.