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To: New Zealand Plant Producers Incorporated

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Recommendation to remove Chilean myrtle (*Luma apiculata*) from sale due to its serious weed potential

Purpose

This information sheet describes the serious weed risk of the popular garden plant Chilean myrtle (*Luma apiculata*). It is likely that Chilean myrtle will eventually be added to the National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA), but this may take several years. In the meantime, the continued sale of Chilean myrtle plants will result in further spread from gardens into native ecosystems throughout New Zealand. The Department of Conservation urges the New Zealand Plant Producers Incorporated and the wider ornamental horticultural industry to take a voluntary approach in removing this major weed from sale.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CHILEAN MYRTLE

Chilean Myrtle (*Luma apiculata*, family Myrtaceae) is a hardy, evergreen tree with distinctive orange bark, native to Chile and Argentina.

INVASIVE QUALITIES AND LIKELY IMPACTS OF CHILEAN MYRTLE

Chilean myrtle tolerates a wide range of light environments, from full sun to deep shade. Plants can also establish in a wide range of habitats, from dry grassy sites to wetlands. Chilean myrtle produces copious fruits, and seeds are widely dispersed by birds. Seedlings are very shade tolerant and can form dense colonies under closed canopies, dominating invaded sites and excluding other species. Seedlings can be difficult to detect. Cut stumps can resprout, and branches can take root where they touch the ground. Trials in New Zealand indicate that it can be difficult to control with herbicide. Chilean myrtle can even look 'weedy' in its native range (Figure 1).

There is a 94.7% climatic similarity between overseas records of Chilean myrtle and the New Zealand climate (based on Better Border Biosecurity climate match assessment tool: <https://b3nz.shinyapps.io/cmi-maps/>). This means that Chilean myrtle has the potential to invade forest ecosystems and displace native plant species throughout the whole of New Zealand. It may also be a vector for myrtle rust.

WHERE IS CHILEAN MYRTLE ALREADY INVASIVE?

In New Zealand, the largest infestation of Chilean myrtle is in the Graham Valley near Nelson (Figure 2). A control operation is currently underway there, with thousands of seedlings and saplings already removed. Wild seedlings have also been recorded near New Plymouth, Gisborne, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, and Stewart Island. Chilean myrtle has also naturalised in Great Britain, Ireland and the United States.



Figure 1. Chilean myrtle looking 'weedy' even where it is native (Chile), dominating the canopy and excluding other species (photos by Kate McAlpine)



Figure 2. Invasive Chilean myrtle population in New Zealand native bush (photos by Fiona Thomson and Phil Cochrane)

RECOMMENDATION

Chilean myrtle will likely be added to the National Pest Plant Accord when the next review is completed (2026 at the earliest). In the meantime, the Department of Conservation urges the New Zealand Plant Producers Incorporated and the wider ornamental horticultural industry to take a voluntary approach and remove this emerging major weed from trade.