

Response to Consultation on future management of risks from *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Phytophthora kernoviae*

The National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG) is a charity whose aim is to conserve, document, promote and make available Britain and Ireland's rich biodiversity of garden plants for the benefit of everyone through horticulture, education and science. One of the vehicles for our conservation efforts is the National Plant Collections of which there are currently 665 (www.nccpg.com). As the body that deals with the administration and awarding of National Plant Collection status we represent the interests of our collection holders, and cultivated plant conservation. Some of our collection holders have been affected by *Phytophthora ramorum* and *Phytophthora kernoviae* but most of those will have contributed to this consultation in their own right.

It is difficult to make an informed choice between Options 1 and 2 due to the levels of uncertainty involved. However of the two, Option 2 would seem to offer the best chance of controlling the spread of both pathogens, and therefore would be the preferable choice.

The NCCPG and the National Plant Collections (NPCs) could potentially be affected by *Phytophthora ramorum* and *P. kernoviae* at several levels:

- There is the initial and most obvious risk of infection of plants held in the National Plant Collections, with either pathogen. As the collections act as reservoirs of the genetic material this would clearly put their function at risk.
- The scheme requires for movement of plant material into and out of the collections. This is to maintain the collection's status as a representation of the chosen scope in cultivation; and also to accomplish the need to propagate and distribute the plants so that they are safeguarded for the future. Any potential restriction on the movement of plants or plant material will impact on this.
- The NCCPG operates a nationwide Plant Exchange scheme which again aims to propagate and distribute rare plants around the country. This too would be at risk if plant movement is restricted.
- Should the option of clearing all infected material, plants in proximity to infected material and *Rhododendron ponticum* be taken up; there is then the possibility that plants in the NPCs or otherwise in need of conservation may be destroyed or harmed. There are currently few records of what is kept in large gardens (although the National Trust are working on one for their gardens), and it is possible that valuable plants will be lost without trace.
- Many of our collections are Heritage collections (*Rhododendron* & *Camellia* introduced to Heligan pre 1920, John Bartram Heritage Collection at Painshill Park) and as such often depend on the context in which they are grown. As many historic landscapes will be altered considerably by either the pathogens themselves or the

work done to contain them; it is essential that as much as possible of the existing landscape and the plants within that landscape are recorded and preserved.

- Any threat to the economic viability of a Historic or Public garden will create a danger to the plants that are grown there. Highly-skilled horticulture is often the first casualty in financial cutbacks.
- This comes at a time when many large gardens are being forced to rethink their planting and maintenance strategy in the light of climate change; this places an additional burden on stretched resources.
- The area and the plants (South West England and Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias) affected form a historical resource which needs to be preserved as soon as possible before it is destroyed. Efforts are being made to micropropagate specimens so that their future is more secure, but this needs time and more resources.
- The source of much variety of cultivated plant material is the small specialist nursery. They are operations that are often run on a financial shoestring as a hobby or a part-time job. Any threat to their financial viability will also threaten the supply of rare plants and the source of new ones.

However the long term threat of both plant diseases is potentially greater. The NCCPG would therefore tentatively support Option 2 provided that the above reservations were taken into account