



## Making your golf course more shock proof

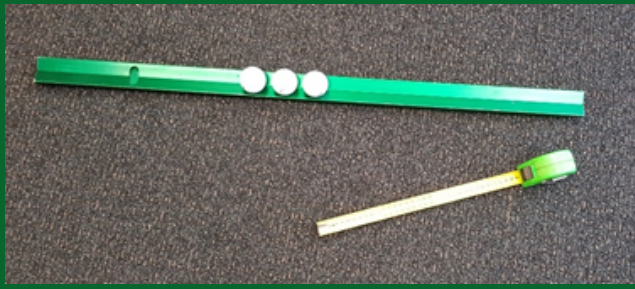
For any turf and training related queries, talk to the team at NZ Sports Turf Institute.

In early February it was evident that we were in the midst of a significant drought that was making it a challenging summer for Turf Managers on golf courses and other turf facilities. The drought was severe – described by many as “once in a life time”.

But that was nothing compared to what was to come. Back then we had some awareness of a new virus that was a problem in Wuhan, China. Think about how quickly things changed after that – by late March, numerous things had happened that no one would have thought remotely possible just 6 weeks earlier - borders closed, the entire population confined to their homes, only essential businesses operating and golf courses closed and to be left unmaintained.

Specifically, in relation to golf course maintenance, every aspect should be looked at forensically and questioned.

- Are we using the right grasses?
- How can we reduce resource use while still providing suitable quality surfaces?
- Are we over maintaining / over delivering?
- What aspects of “turf management” can be improved?
- Do we understand the playing quality that the majority of our players want?
- Have we objectively defined the playing quality that will be provided and educated golfers about this?
- How can we re-calibrate player expectations so that our golf course and club can become more robust?



Tools for measuring green speed and firmness - defined measurable standards.

## **“Hope for the best but plan for the worst”**

- this old idiom would be a good basis for long term planning for golf course maintenance.

What could be the worst?

- Severe even total restrictions on water use for irrigation
- Complete bans on the use of pesticides such as fungicides and insecticides
- Complete bans on the use of artificial fertilizers
- Massive increases in the cost of fuel
- Massive increases in the cost of imports / import restrictions

In light of recent events, you simply can't say "that will never happen". And all of these things already apply somewhere in the world.

### **Preparing for the worst**

Some examples of what preparing for the worst would involve are given below:

#### **Coping with severe water restrictions.**

- Do not plan to increase your irrigated footprint at all, instead look to reduce and minimize it
- Identify the most suitable, most drought tolerant grass species and use them – no ifs or buts.
- Get better at turf management that maintains turf health and durability with reduced or even no water – getting deeper roots, acclimatising plants in advance of dry periods, getting better at re-wetting rootzones after dry periods.
- Educating golfers – during dry times, it is the quality of playing surface that matters, its appearance is secondary.



Ready for the Open Championship – the focus is on playing surface quality, appearance is a secondary concern



### **Complete bans on the use of pesticides such as fungicides and insecticides**

- Avoid like the plague disease prone species and cultivars
- Use grass species and cultivars with natural immunity to disease and insect attack
- Have a complete understanding of practices that reduce susceptibility to insect and disease attack and do them
- Re-calibration of player expectations - educate golfers to understand and accept some imperfections that have negligible effect on playing quality – 2% damage means 98% is free of damage.

### **Complete bans on the use of artificial fertilizers**

- Do not plan to increase your fertilised footprint at all, instead look to reduce and minimize it.
- Use low nutrient requiring grasses.
- Where required, build up soil organic matter levels so that natural cycling of nutrients makes fertilisers unnecessary.
- Get better at managing traffic so that very low growth rates work for you.
- Re-calibration of player expectations - educate golfers to focus on the quality of the playing surface not its appearance.
- Find ways to recycle nutrient from your golf course – for example, collect and compost clippings, and so on.

### **A marathon not a sprint**

Accepting that severe shocks can occur provides a very clear basis for long term decision making. Golf clubs that adopt this approach will make themselves much more robust and shock proof. We are talking about long term planning – changes that may take many years to implement because of the magnitude, cost or complexity involved. On-site research may be required to find the best solution for your club.

One thing is certain, if you don't take a long term and pessimistic view ("plan for the worst"), you will not make difficult decisions to implement long term and potentially difficult changes that will ultimately make your golf course much more shock proof. Recent events should provide the motivation required to start such long term planning.