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**METHODS OF INOCULATING CYPRESS
WITH *SEIRIDIUM* SPECIES TO SCREEN FOR
RESISTANCE AND PATHOGEN
VARIABILITY**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Applied Science in Plant health at Massey University
Palmerston North, New Zealand.



Massey University

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ABSTRACT

The cypress species are grown for their timber value, ornamental beauty and shelter. Their existence is threatened by the presence of cypress canker disease caused by fungal pathogens of the genus *Seiridium*.

The long term solution for controlling this disease is to breed for cypress clones that are resistant to cypress canker. Screening for resistance is conducted by artificially inoculating cypress plants with the pathogen's inoculum.

This study aimed at developing reliable methods of artificial inoculation that are suitable for New Zealand's climatic conditions.

Infection of cypress plants in nature is caused by conidia but mycelial inocula are more commonly used in artificial inoculation. Several methods of inducing sporulation of *Seiridium* species were investigated. Addition of plant substrates was shown to increase sporulation of cultures of *Seiridium* isolates. Studies comparing the two types of inocula (mycelial plugs and conidial suspensions) showed that mycelium inocula caused a higher percentage of canker lesions than spore inocula. Conidial inocula offer a more consistent pathogenicity. Experiments to determine the effective spore load revealed that the percentage of canker increased with the increase of inoculum load. Pathogenicity varied between species and individual colonies of *Seiridium* isolates.

Infection of cypress in nature is thought to occur through wounds and in this work, wounding was required for infection under both glasshouse and outdoor conditions. Inoculation of the main stem and side branches showed disease symptoms develop more rapidly on side branches than on the main stem. Investigations on in vitro inoculation of tissue cultured plants and excised side shoots showed the possibility of screening cypress ramets under different environmental conditions. Temperature and percentage relative humidity were found to influence the percentage of successful inoculations on cypress plants.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF PLATES	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF APPENDICES	xiv
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW	3
1.2.1 IMPORTANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE 3	
1.2.2 TAXONOMY	4
1.2.3 SYMPTOMS AND DISSEMINATION OF CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE 5	
1.2.4 FACTORS AFFECTING CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE	6
1.2.4.1 Fungal pathogenicity	7
1.2.4.2 Host resistance	7
1.2.4.3 Environmental factors	8
1.2.5 CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE CONTROL	9
1.2.5.1 Cultural management	9
1.2.5.2 Chemical control	10
1.2.5.3 Breeding for resistance to cypress canker	10
1.2.6 ARTIFICIAL INOCULATION METHODS	10
1.2.6.1 Introduction	10
1.2.6.2 Wounding technique	11
1.2.6.3 Fungal inoculum	11
1.2.6.4 Methods of inoculum production for artificial inoculation	11
1.2.6.4.1 Methods of culturing <i>Seiridium</i> species	11
1.2.6.4.2 Methods of inducing sporulation of <i>Seiridium</i> species	12
1.2.6.4.3 Conidial inoculum load	12
1.2.7 ASSESSMENT OF CANKER INFECTION IN ARTIFICIAL INOCULATION	13
1.3 CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH AIMS	13
CHAPTER TWO	15
THE BIOLOGY OF <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> SPECIES	15
2.1 VARIATION IN SPORULATION AND CULTURAL MORPHOLOGY OF <i>S.</i> <i>UNICORNE</i> AND <i>S. CARDINALE</i> ISOLATES	15
2.1.1 INTRODUCTION	15
2.1.1.1 Aims	15
2.1.2 MATERIALS AND METHODS	16
2.1.2.1 Study 1: Investigation on the morphological variation of selected <i>Seiridium</i> isolates	16
2.1.2.2 Study 2: Investigation on the pathogenicity of a mutant sector of <i>S.</i> <i>unicorne</i> isolate SUL101.4	18
2.1.2.3 Study 3: Investigation on the effect of media used for stock cultures on sporulation	19
2.1.3 RESULTS	21
2.1.3.1 Study 1: Investigation on morphological variation of selected <i>Seiridium</i> isolates 21	

2.1.3.2	Study 2: Investigation on the pathogenicity of a mutant sector of <i>S. unicornae</i> isolate SUL101.4	22
2.1.3.3	Study 3: Investigation on the effect of media used for stock cultures on sporulation	23
2.1.4	DISCUSSION	24
2.1.4.1	Study 1: Investigation on the morphological variation of Selected <i>Seiridium</i> isolates	24
2.1.4.2	Study 2: Investigation on the pathogenicity of a mutant sector of <i>S. unicornae</i> isolate SUL101.4	24
2.1.4.3	Study 3: Investigation on the effect of media used for stock cultures on sporulation	25
2.2	CONIDIUM GERMINATION OF <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> SPECIES ON HOST PLANTS	26
2.2.1	INTRODUCTION	26
2.2.1.1	Aim	26
2.2.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	26
2.2.3	RESULTS	27
2.2.4	DISCUSSION	28
CHAPTER THREE		29
EVALUATION OF A RANGE OF MEDIA FOR SUPPORTING SPORULATION OF <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> SPECIES		29
3.1	EVALUATION OF A RANGE OF AGAR TYPES AND ADDITIVES	29
3.1.1	INTRODUCTION	29
3.1.1.1	Aims	31
3.1.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	31
3.1.2.1	Experiment 1	31
3.1.2.2	Experiment 2	34
3.1.2.3	Experiment 3	36
3.1.2.4	Experiment 4	38
3.1.3	RESULTS	39
3.1.3.1	Experiment 1	39
3.1.3.2	Experiment 2	40
3.1.3.3	Experiment 3	42
3.1.3.4	Experiment 4	42
3.1.4	DISCUSSION	42
3.2	EVALUATION OF TREE SHOOTS AND CYPRESS CONES AS SUBSTRATES FOR ACERVULI PRODUCTION OF <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> SPECIES	44
3.2.1	INTRODUCTION	44
3.2.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	44
3.2.2.1	Trial 1	45
3.2.2.2	Trial 2	46
3.2.2.3	Trial 3	47
3.2.3	RESULTS	48
3.2.3.1	Trial 1	48
3.2.3.2	Trial 2	50
3.2.3.3	Trial 3	51
3.2.4	DISCUSSION	52
CHAPTER FOUR		54
METHODS OF ARTIFICIAL INOCULATION		54
4.1	ARTIFICIAL INOCULATION METHODS FOR INOCULATING CYPRESS SPECIES WITH <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> SPECIES	54
4.1.1	INTRODUCTION	54
4.1.1.1	Aims	55
4.1.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS	55
4.1.2.1	Experiment 1: Inoculation of a glasshouse trial	55
4.1.2.1.1	Side branch and main stem inoculations	56

4.1.2.1.2	The effect of wounding	56
4.1.2.2	Experiment 2: Inoculation carried out under shade cloth.....	57
4.1.2.2.1	Side branch and main stem inoculations.....	59
4.1.2.2.2	The effect of wounding	59
4.1.2.2.3	Comparison between mycelium and conidial inocula	59
4.1.2.3	Experiment 3: Glasshouse main stem inoculation trial (MSI).....	60
4.1.3	RESULTS	61
4.1.3.1	Experiment 1	61
4.1.3.2	Experiment 2	64
4.1.3.2.1	Side branch and main stem inoculations.....	64
4.1.3.2.2	The effect of wounding	65
4.1.3.2.3	Comparison between mycelial and conidial inocula	67
4.1.3.3	Experiment 3	68
4.1.4	DISCUSSION.....	68
4.2	CONIDIAL INOCULUM LOAD REQUIRED FOR CAUSING CYPRESS CANKER INFECTIONS	70
4.2.1	INTRODUCTION	70
4.2.1.1	Aims.....	70
4.2.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	71
4.2.2.1	Glasshouse trial (GT).....	71
4.2.2.2	Shade cloth trial (SCT)	72
4.2.3	RESULTS	74
4.2.3.1	Glasshouse trial (GT).....	74
4.2.3.2	Shade cloth trial (SCT)	78
4.2.4	DISCUSSION.....	83
CHAPTER FIVE	84	
EXCISED SIDE SHOOT INOCULATION TECHNIQUE FOR SCREENING <i>CUPRESSUS</i> SPECIES FOR RESISTANCE TO <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> SPECIES	84	
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	84
5.1.1	Aim	84
5.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	85
5.2.1	Experiment (SSI Trial 1).....	85
5.2.2	Experiment (SSI Trial 2).....	86
5.2.3	Experiment (SSI Trial 3).....	87
5.2.4	Experiment (SSI Trial 4).....	89
5.3	RESULT	91
5.3.1	Experiment (SSI Trial 1).....	91
5.3.2	Experiment (SSI Trial 2).....	93
5.3.3	Experiment (SSI Trial 3).....	95
5.3.4	Experiment (SSI Trial 4).....	97
5.4	DISCUSSION.....	99
CHAPTER SIX	101	
METHODS OF IN VITRO INOCULATION OF TISSUE CULTURE CYPRESS PLANTS WITH <i>S. UNICORNE</i> ISOLATES	101	
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	101
6.1.1	Aim	101
6.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	102
6.2.1	Experiment 1 In vitro inoculation of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> shoots with mycelia of <i>S. unicorn</i> on agar plugs.....	103
6.2.2	Experiment 2: In vitro inoculation of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> shoots with conidial suspension of <i>S. unicorn</i>	105
6.2.3	Experiment 3: In vitro inoculation of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> shoots with conidial suspension of <i>S. unicorn</i> on filter paper discs	106
6.3	RESULTS.....	108
6.3.1	Experiment 1	108

6.3.2	Experiment 2	109
6.3.3	Experiment 3	110
6.4	DISCUSSION.....	112
CHAPTER SEVEN.....		114
OVERVIEW OF ALL EXPERIMENTAL WORK.....		114
7.1	INTRODUCTION.....	114
7.2	MATERIALS AND METHODS.....	114
7.3	RESULTS.....	115
7.3.1	Effective inoculum load	115
7.3.2	Susceptibility of cypress families under different environmental conditions 116	
7.3.3	Pathogenicity of <i>Seiridium</i> species under different environmental conditions 118	
7.4	DISCUSSION.....	119
CHAPTER EIGHT.....		120
GENERAL DISCUSSION.....		120
8.1	INTRODUCTION.....	120
8.2	MAIN STEM AND SIDE BRANCH INOCULATION	121
8.3	METHODS OF INDUCING SPORULATION OF <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> SPECIES... ..	122
8.4	AGAR PLUGS AND CONIDIAL SUSPENSION INOCULA.....	122
8.5	CONIDIAL LOAD REQUIRED FOR CAUSING INFECTIONS.....	123
8.6	ASSESSMENT OF BRANCH INOCULATIONS OF RAMETS IN VITRO AND IN VIVO	123
8.7	ASSESSMENT OF WOUNDING AND NON-WOUNDING OF INOCULATION SITES	124
8.8	RANGE OF PATHOGENIC VARIABILITY IN <i>SEIRIDIUM</i> ISOLATES ..	124
8.9	THE EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENT (Temperature and % relative humidity) ON CYPRESS CANKER INFECTION AND DISEASE DEVELOPMENT)	125
8.10	CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS.....	125
REFERENCES		126
APPENDICES.....		134

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1	Positions of inoculation points on the stem and side branches (1) unwounded inoculation; (2) wounded side branch; (3) wounded main stem inoculation	57
Figure 4.2	Percentage (%) relative humidity recorded from 9/11/01 to 15/2/02.....	63
Figure 4.3	Temperature recorded from 9/11/01 to 15/2/02	63
Figure 4.4	Percentage relative humidity recorded during July-August 2002.....	75
Figure 4.5	Temperature recorded during July-August 2002.....	76
Figure 4.6	Percentages of side branches with cankers for each cypress family caused by isolate SUL101.4 at three spore loads 56 days after inoculation.....	77
Figure 4.7	Average percentage relative humidity recorded during October 2002- March 2003	78
Figure 4.8	Average temperature readings recorded during Oct 2002- March 2003	79
Figure 4.9	Number of new disease lesions observed during November 2002- March 2003	79
Figure 4.10	Percentage of shoots with canker from each cypress family inoculated with three <i>Seiridium</i> isolates at three conidial loads 23 weeks after inoculation. ..	80
Figure 5.1	Percentage relative humidity recorded during November 2002- January 2003	92
Figure 5.2.	Temperature recorded during November 2002- January 2003	92
Figure 5.3	Percentage of shoots from each cypress family with canker symptoms caused by four <i>Seiridium</i> isolates 40 days after inoculation	99
Figure 7.1	Percentage of shoots with canker at three conidial loads under shade cloth (SC) condition (where SL1=conidia per wound; SL2= 500 conidia; SL3= 5,000 conidia) and glasshouse (GH) condition (where SL1= 100 conidia per wound; SL2= 1,000 conidia; SL3= 10,000 conidia).....	115
Figure 7.2	Susceptibility of cypress families under different environmental conditions (GH=glasshouse, LB/csgH=Laboratory bench using cut shoots from plants maintained in the glasshouse, SC=shade cloth; IN/cssc= Incubator using cut shoots obtained from plants maintained under the shade cloth).....	116
Figure 7.3	Susceptibility of cypress families inoculated with <i>S. cardinale</i> L152.2.4 and <i>S. unicorn</i> L156.2.2 under shade cloth (SC) and incubator conditions (IN on a 10°C dark/15°C light cycle)	117
Figure 7.4	Percentage canker incidence caused by <i>Seiridium</i> isolates under different temperatures (SC= Shade cloth, In= incubator and GH= Glasshouse).....	118

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1.1	(a): Wilted side branches (indicated by a white arrow) next to a canker on the main stem of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> . (b): Resinous canker on the stem	6
Plate 2.1	Different colour of cultures sub-cultured from the same stock culture of <i>Seiridium unicorne</i> SUL175.4. (a): Dark grey with a light brown- coloured sector (indicated by an arrow). (b): Extreme “degenerative” form, orange colour. (c): Orange and grey coloured sectors resulted from the same inoculum plug.	16
Plate 2.2	(a): <i>Seiridium unicorne</i> isolate SUL83.2 developed a ‘degenerative sector’ (indicated by a white arrow) on corn meal agar (CMA) overlaid with autoclaved carnation leaves (b & c): <i>S. unicorne</i> isolate SUL83.2 & <i>Seiridium cardinale</i> SCL182.2b subculture resulted in the reduction of in growth rate of the colony.	17
Plate 2.3	<i>S. unicorne</i> SUL156 .2.1 sectored out into three different morphologies	18
Plate 2.4	(a): Normal colony (b): Waxy yellow colony subcultured from a white coloured <i>S. unicorne</i> SUL175.4 mutant sector; (c): Orange coloured colony subcultured from orange coloured <i>S. unicorne</i> SUL175.4 mutant sector.	22
Plate 3.1	(a): <i>S. unicorne</i> isolate SUL101.4 spores on <i>Cupressus macrocarpa</i> shoots and around original inoculum placed on corn meal agar (b): <i>S. unicorne</i> L83.2 spores around agar plugs on water agar. (c): <i>S. unicorne</i> isolate SUL101.4 conidia on carnation leaves shoots placed on water agar.	30
Plate 3.2	(a): 15-20 mm pieces of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> shoots placed on the media (b): 40-.50 mm pieces of carnation leaves placed around the original agar plug.....	33
Plate 3.3	Two forms of SUL155.7.1 colonies incubated in the dark at room temperature for two weeks. (a): Mutant form of <i>S. unicorne</i> SUL155.7.1; (b): “Normal” form of <i>S. unicorne</i> SUL155.7.1.....	37
Plate 3.4	Acervuli (indicated by white arrows) formed on the bark of black current, twigs. This substrate was given a score of 5 in spore production.	49
Plate 3.5	(a): <i>Casuarina</i> sp. inoculated with <i>S. unicorne</i> isolate SUL175.4, (b): <i>Alnus</i> sp. inoculated with <i>S. unicorne</i> isolate SUL175.4, (c): <i>C. macrocarpa</i> inoculated with <i>S. cardinale</i> SCL182.3, (d): <i>C. macrocarpa</i> inoculated with <i>S. unicorne</i> SUL175.4, (e): Black current inoculated with <i>S. unicorne</i> SUL175.4. The visual rating for spore production is above each twig numbered 1-5.	50
Plate 4.1	(a): Wounded main stem, 98 days after inoculation with SUL101.4. The infected stem tissue became brown above and below the inoculation site. (b) Wounded side branch resulted in browning of the foliage.....	62
Plate 4.2	(a): <i>C. lusitanica</i> (Family no. L15-11); (b): <i>C. macrocarpa</i> (Family M50) with diseased side branches more 20 weeks after inoculation.	81
Plate 5.1	(a): Control shoot; (b): Shoot with browning symptom of the foliage (indicated by an arrow).....	93
Plate 5.2	Four <i>C. lusitanica</i> shoots (left) with canker symptoms and inoculated healthy shoots (right) after 30 days incubation in McCartney bottles at room temperatures.....	94
Plate 5.3	Six <i>C. macrocarpa</i> shoots with canker symptoms and control shoot (centre) after 30 days incubation in McCartney bottles at room temperatures.....	95
Plate 5.4	Shoots from <i>C. macrocarpa</i> families M23, M25 and M50 with browning symptom after 51 days incubation in McCartney bottles at room temperatures	97

Plate 6.1	Symptoms observed on two plants inoculated with <i>S. unicorn</i> isolates SUL101.4 and SUL83.2 twenty days after inoculation.....	109
Plate 6.2	<i>C. mcarocarpa</i> family M50 inoculated with three <i>S. unicorn</i> isolates (SUL83.2, SUL101.4 and SUL156.22) 20 days after inoculation.....	111
Plate 6.3	Mycelia of the fungal pathogen (SUL101.4), growing on filter paper disc 2 months after inoculation.....	111

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Areas of cypress (ha) planted in North and South Island as at 1986.....	2
Table 2.1	Colour of surface mutant sectors and resulting colonies sub-cultured on MA under white light at 20°C on a 12 h light/12 h dark cycle.....	21
Table 2.2	Number of inoculated side branches with disease symptoms.....	22
Table 2.3	Number of cultures with sporulation after five weeks incubation under near UV light on a 12 h light/12 h dark cycle.....	23
Table 3.1	Ingredients (Media consisting of agar types and plant additives).....	34
Table 3.2	Treatment means for conidia count.....	40
Table 3.3	Treatment means for conidia count.....	41
Table 3.4	Treatment means of score for Acervuli production.....	48
Table 3.5	Treatment score means for acervuli production.....	51
Table 3.6	Acervuli production score means.....	52
Table 4.1	Observation results for plants with symptoms inoculated with SUL101.4 62	
Table 4.3	Chi-square test for the different treatments.....	66
Table 4.4	Treatment means for canker lengths (cm).....	68
Table 4.5	Volume of conidial suspension used to obtain the required conidial loads of <i>S. unicornne</i> isolate SUL101.4 & SUL83.2.....	72
Table 4.6	Chi-square test and percentage of side branches with canker symptoms at the three spore loads 56 days after inoculation for the two <i>S. unicornne</i> isolates....	76
Table 5.1	Percentage of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> shoots with browning symptom 52 days after inoculation with three spore loads for the two <i>Seiridium</i> isolates.....	91
Table 5.2.	Percentage of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> and <i>C. lusitanica</i> shoots with canker symptoms 30 days after inoculation.....	94
Table 5.3	Chi- square test result and overall percentages of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> and <i>C. lusitanica</i> shoots with canker 40 days after inoculation.....	96
Table 5.4	Chi-square test result and overall percentages of <i>C. macrocarpa</i> and <i>C. lusitanica</i> shoots with canker 40 days after inoculation.....	98
Table 6.1	Canker mean score for three <i>S. unicornne</i> isolates.....	110

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix I	Raw data and analysis results for Chapter Three	134
Appendix II	Raw data and analysis results for Chapter Four.....	137
Appendix III	Raw data and analysis results for Chapter Five	140
Appendix IV	Tissue culture media ingredients and analysis results for Chapter Six	141
Appendix V	Result of % canker incidence recorded on each cypress family inoculated with <i>Seiridium</i> isolates under different environmental conditions	143
Appendix VI	Spore shapes of <i>Seiridium</i> isolates used in this study	144
Appendix VII	Microscopic observation of susceptible and resistant host tissues.....	145
Appendix VIII	List of <i>Seiridium unicorne</i> and <i>Seiridium cardinale</i> maintained at Massey University.....	146

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Cypress canker is a serious fungal disease of trees belonging to the *Cupressus* family. The disease causes lesions on the bark and cankers on stems and branches. Infection of the branches and crowns of highly susceptible plants can eventually lead to the death of the whole plant. Cypress canker has caused the death of cypress trees in some parts of the Northern Hemisphere during the past years. There is taxonomic evidence that two of the three *Seiridium* species causing cypress canker are present in New Zealand. The disease was first recorded in this country by Birch in 1933. He identified *Seiridium cardinale* (Wagener) Sutton & Gibson (= *Coryneum cardinale* Wagener.), as the pathogen responsible for the damages. Beresford & Mulholland (1982) found *S. cardinale* to be predominant in trial plantations. In the later years, it was found that most of the damage was in fact caused by *Seiridium unicorne* (Cooke & Ellis) Sutton (= *Monochaetia unicornis* (Cooke & Ellis) Saccardo (Van der Werff 1988; Self 1994).

New Zealand forestry industry supplies 1.1% of the world's total product (Anonymous 2001). At present 95 % of the soft wood timber production is from *Pinus radiata* (Aimers-Halliday et al. 1994). There is an encouraging prospect to develop cypresses as a substitute for the western red cedar and red wood currently being imported for weatherboards and exterior joinery (Miller & Knowles 1996). The *Cupressus* species have advantages over other soft wood tree species such as fast growth, wind resistance, durable heartwood, good machining properties and high quality timber (Franklin 1994).

The cypresses were introduced in to New Zealand in the 1860s from California, Kenya and Guatemala (Miller & Knowles 1996) and were grown mainly as shelterbelts. The four most important cypress species grown in New Zealand include *Cupressus macrocarpa* Hartweg, *Cupressus lusitanica* Miller, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* (A. Murray) and the hybrid *Cupressocyparis leylandii* (Jackson and Dallimore). Growers prefer *C. macrocarpa* because of its high quality timber and availability of market. The area planted with the important cypress species as at 1986 is listed in Table 1.1. A recent

survey carried out reported an increase in the planting of *C. macrocarpa* and *C. lusitanica* by private growers during the past 10-15 years (Hood et al. 2001). The survey revealed an increase of small to medium sized woodlots, shelterbelts and hedge growers on rural land.

The survey also showed an increase of cypress canker, from South to North through out the country. The disease was more commonly found in young stands.

Cypress canker is identified as one of the major constraints in growing *Cupressus* species especially *C. macrocarpa* (Franklin 1994; Self 2000). Control methods such as the use of fungicides are not practical in forest plantations. The best alternative method for controlling cypress canker is to breed and screen for cypress clones resistant to the disease.

Forest Research in New Zealand requires a reliable method of screening isolates of *Seiridium* species for variations in pathogenicity and for screening cypress clones for resistance to cypress canker.

Table 1.1 Areas of cypress (ha) planted in North and South Island as at 1986

Cypress species	North Island	South Island
<i>Cupressus macrocarpa</i>	439	13000
<i>Cupressus lusitanica</i>	674	92
<i>Chamaecyparis lawsoniana</i>	329	617
Total	1442	2009

Source: Miller & Knowles (1996)

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 IMPORTANCE AND DISTRIBUTION OF CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE

The disease is caused by fungal pathogens in the genus *Seiridium*. The genus is classified under the subdivision Deutromycotina and the class Coelomycetes, of the order Blastomatales (Sutton 1980). Susceptible cypress species become infected through wounds. The pathogens have been found to produce toxins and Graniti (1998) suggested that these could be responsible for the appearance of symptoms on damaged host tissues.

Cypress canker has spread far and wide over the last several decades; California, USA, Africa, New Zealand, Italy and other parts of Europe, and the Mediterranean region. Depending on the type of climate where *Seiridium* species are present, these pathogens can cause major losses. *S. cardinale* was reported as the major cause of serious disease in the Mediterranean and other parts of the world (Xenopoulos 1991). In New Zealand, *S. cardinale* is also reported as attacking *Cupressus macrocarpa* (Beresford & Mulholland 1982; Boesewinkel 1983). Graniti (1998) reported that *S. cardinale* affects several species of *Cupressus*, *Chamaecyparis*, *Cryptomeria*, *Cupressocyparis*, *Juniperus*, *Thuja* and other related genera of *Cupressaceae*.

Seiridium cupressi (Guba) (telemorph: *Lepteutypa cupressi*) has caused a major problem in Europe on *Cupressus* (Graniti 1998). It was also reported in New Zealand (Boesewinkel 1983), but the existence of this species is still being debated. The host range is restricted to the *Cupressaceae* family.

S. unicorne on the other hand, attacks *Cupressaceae* and other botanical families (Barnes et al 2001). Boesewinkel (1983), claimed to have isolated *S. unicorne* from *Cryptomeria*. It is of minor importance in the Mediterranean region (Xenopoulos 1991). Graniti (1998) stated that the recent reports restricted the host range of population of *S. unicorne* living on cypress to *Cupressaceae* in countries such as Japan (Tobata et al. 1991) and New Zealand (Beresford & Mulholland 1982; Boesewinkel 1983; Van der Werff 1988). In North America, *S. unicorne* has been found to attack

several *Cupressaceae* and a study carried out revealed no evidence of host specificity (Tisserat et al 1991).

During 1981-1982 periods, *S. unicorne* has spread throughout New Zealand except the coast of the South Island (Van der Werff 1988). Cypress canker disease was reported as widely distributed in younger shelterbelts and woodlots. The disease is also present in older rural stands and forest plantations (Gea & Low 1997; Self 2000; Hood et al. 2001; Hood & Gardner 2002).

1.2.2 TAXONOMY

The disagreement among taxonomists regarding the number of *Seiridium* species causing cypress canker has been a long controversy. There is a history of discussions on the taxonomic species of *Seiridium* (Swart 1973; Boesewinkel 1983; Chou 1989; Viljoen et al. 1993; Graniti 1998; Morrica et al. 1999 & 2000; Barnes et al. 2000, 2001). Conidial morphology; host ranges; cultural characteristics and geographical distributions description were used in distinguishing between the three species.

Swart (1973) suggested one species with variable morphology, while Chou (1989) supported the existence of two species, *S. unicorne* and *S. cardinale*. Boesewinkel (1983) identified 3 distinct species, *S. unicorne*, *S. cupressi* Boes.combi nov. *Cryptostictis cupressi* Guba (teleomorph = *L.cupressi*) and *S. cardinale*. He used the absence of an appendage to distinguish between *S. cardinale* and the other two species and the appendage at an angle of 45° to distinguish *S. cupressi* from *S. unicorne*. Although many workers consider that there are only two species (*S. unicorne* and *S. cardinale*), modern molecular work is providing support for the three species concept. Barnes et al. (2001) found three distinct species on analysis of both β -tubulin and histone sequences.

The results of current studies have reaffirmed the morphological investigations of the three fungi causing cypress canker in New Zealand (Boesewinkel 1983) and biochemical investigations by Graniti (1998) based on appendage angle and toxin production. There is a strong support for the presence of three distinct *Seiridium* species present in different parts of the world. However, as Graniti (1998) pointed out, the existence of races or ecotypes especially with regards to *S. unicorne* cannot be ruled out.

In New Zealand, the general view of cypress canker workers is that only two species exist in the country, *S. cardinale* and *S. unicorne*. The third species identified is thought to be a variation of *S. unicorne*.

1.2.3 SYMPTOMS AND DISSEMINATION OF CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE

The *Seiridium* species that cause canker disease on barks of cypress trees are wound parasites. However, under favourable conditions, the pathogens can enter through the epidermis (Raddi & Panconesi 1981). The canker name itself describes the symptom of the disease. Upon entering through the wounds on the barks of cypress plants, lesions form around the wound as the pathogen progresses through the bark. Resinous canker develops on the bark and in young plants the stems are girdled (Plate 1.1).

Canker formation is found on the tree trunk as well as on the branches. Symptoms of disease include yellowing, browning and wilting of foliage of cankered branches. Infection can result in the loss of foliage and eventually death of susceptible trees. Cankered trunks of mature trees become deformed and reduce the timber quality.

Factors such as cold, wind, insects that cause wounds on bark of cypress plants spread the disease (Raddi & Panconesi 1981). The conidiomata of the *Seiridium* species open wide on canker surfaces under moist conditions (Graniti, 1998). Slimy conidial masses exposed under moist conditions when dry are dispersed by wind. Rain water also disperses conidia from acervuli over short distances. Insects or air borne ascospores could be responsible for spreading the disease on branches high up the trunk of tall mature cypress trees.



Plate 1.1 (a): Wilted side branches (indicated by a white arrow) next to a canker on the main stem of *C. macrocarpa*. (b): Resinous canker on the stem

1.2.4 FACTORS AFFECTING CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE

Cypress canker is believed to spread from one continent to another through the distribution of diseased planting material. However, the establishment of the disease within a locality depends on fungal pathogenicity; environmental conditions such as relative humidity and temperature; and the defence mechanism of the host plant.

1.2.4.1 Fungal pathogenicity

Research carried out in Europe revealed that the pathogenicity and host ranges differ between the *Seiridium* species (Barnes et al. 2001). For instance, *S. cupressi* has been found to be an aggressive pathogen in Europe on *Cupressus* species. Xenopoulos (1991) reported pathogenicity variation in his study. *S. cardinale* and *S. cupressi* caused bigger and severe cankers than all strains of *S. unicornne*. Initially cankers caused by *S. cardinale* were bigger than those of *S. cupressi* but two years after inoculation, the cankers of *S. cupressi* become larger and more severe than cankers of *S. cardinale* (Xenopoulos 1991). Work done in New Zealand also showed overall higher pathogenicity and less variability among *S. cardinale* isolates than those of *S. unicornne* isolates (Chou 1990). The study also revealed that isolates of *S. unicornne* displayed vast differences in pathogenicity and therefore caused difficulty in determining pathogenicity. Despite the variation in pathogenicity, Chou (1989) reported that apart from the difference in the presence or absence of conidial appendages, *S. unicornne* and *S. cardinale* are similar in many biological characteristics.

1.2.4.2 Host resistance

The susceptibility of the host plant to cypress canker is one of the important factors that influence the rate of spread within a locality. The literature showed that there are considerable differences in susceptibility among cypress species and among individuals within the same species (Raddi & Panconesi 1981; Beresford & Mulholland 1982; Raddi & Panconesi 1984; Xenopoulos 1990). *Cupressus macrocarpa* has been found to be susceptible to cypress canker compared to *C. sempervirens*, *C. arizonica*, *C. lusitanica* and *C. torulsa*. Resistant cypress species are useful for incorporating resistance into breeding programmes.

The resistance mechanism of cypress to attack by *S. cardinale* has been reported to be based on the ability of cypress trees to compartmentalize wounds (Xenopoulos 1990). It also suggested that the resistant mechanism was under apparent polygenic control. This view was also supported by Spanos and co-workers (Spanos et al. 1999). Spanos and co-workers expressed the view that anatomical responses to wounding and infection considered to be stable polygenic process might cause difficulty in manipulation in breeding programmes.

Apart from genetic resistance of certain cypress species, plant maturity appeared to play a role in host resistance. Van der Werff (1988) reported that canker infection on *C. macrocarpa* decreases as the tree age increases. Tree age however, was not correlated with disease incidence on *C. lusitanica* and *Ch. lawsoniana*. A study on the effects of infection and tree age on the progress of *S. unicornne* by Yamada et al (1994) supported the observation by Van der Werff. Yamada & Ito (1995) also found a similar result when inoculations of *S. unicornne* were carried out at heights of 1, 2, 3 metres. The study showed non-wounding inoculations induced infection at height of 3 m and not at height 1 and 2 m. It was concluded that the preformed outer bark was the most responsible factor for fewer infections. However, observation on younger *Cupressus* plants showed a contradicting result. Chou (1990) reported that young seedlings (3-6 months old) of *C. macrocarpa* and *C. lusitanica* were found to be highly resistant but infection occurred when one and half year old plants were used. The study also revealed that the basal part of the stems were infected but not on the inoculations made on the upper green stems of the same plant. A study on *Chamaecyparis obtuse* (“hinoki”) showed that infection caused by *S. unicornne* in 3 year old trees spread more rapidly than in younger trees (Kato 1996). It was also noted in Israel that natural infection by *S. cardinale* was observed more frequently on adult trees than on young plants (Solel et.al. 1983).

An artificial study also showed that under greenhouse conditions, the bark maturity prompted infection. These observations were similar to what Chou (1990) observed with cypress plants used in his study. However, the study in Israel also revealed that with artificial inoculation in field conditions, canker development did not differ either between young thin branches and older ones or between inoculations at the base and at the tip of the branches.

1.2.4.3 Environmental factors

Different observations on bark resistance mentioned in the previous section could be related to environmental factors and due to the fact that bark canker resistant trait is not stable as reported by some workers (Casini & Santini 1995; Santini et al 1997).

Geographic-climatic barriers may also responsible for low disease rate among cypresses with no genetic resistance to cypress canker (Santini & Lonardo 2000). The most important environmental conditions critical include relative humidity, water and

temperature. Graniti (1998) reported that for *S. cardinale*, the conidia failed to germinate when the relative humidity approaches 80 %. On the other hand, Solel et al. (1983) stated that high relative humidity enhanced artificial infection of nursery seedlings.

Water plays the most important role in spreading conidia of cypress canker pathogen (Raddi & Panconesi 1981). Xenopoulos (2000) suggested that drought stress seems to be the main factor for the infection of susceptible host plants.

The optimum temperatures for pathogenicity of each *Seiridium* species differ. The optimum temperature for growth and sporulation of *S. cardinale* and *S. cupressi* is 25°C (Graniti, 1998; Sasaki & Kobayashi 1976). Graniti (1998) reported that *S. cardinale*, is the most thermophilic of the three *Seiridium* species and its conidia can germinate, and colonies can grow up to 35°C. It was also observed that the growth of *S. cardinale* in host tissues is slowed or stopped during the hottest months of the year, resuming again in autumn. The pathogen spreads in the host tissues during winter. For *S. unicorne* the optimum temperature is 20°C (Graniti 1998). Low temperatures during winter or frost can cause damage on the bark of trees and provides an easy entry of the pathogens (Moricca et al. 2000). In New Zealand Van der Werff (1988) reported that infection increased with the increase in temperature across the country.

1.2.5 CYPRESS CANKER DISEASE CONTROL

1.2.5.1 Cultural management

Good management practises can prevent the spread of cypress canker in young plants and small scale plantings such as those used for shelter belts and ornamental cypresses. Selection of clean planting material is always the best option to prevent plant disease spreading within a locality. In the nursery the disease can be controlled by removal of diseased seedlings and obtaining planting material from healthy stock plants. Removal of diseased branches could be easily done with plants grown for ornamental and wind breaks purposes. This practice becomes difficult as the plants grow tall and cannot be applied to forest plantation situations.

1.2.5.2 Chemical control

Studies in Italy have shown that application of benomyl or benomyl and captafol were partly effective in controlling cypress canker in the first stage of infection (Panconesi & Raddi 1986). Work done in New Zealand also showed that *S. cardinale* can be controlled by chemicals such as benomyl and chlorothalonil (McCain 1984). Parrini & Panconesi (1991) stated that chemical trials carried out on *C. sempervirens* in the nursery showed systemic products such as benomyl and thiophanate-methyl proved to be more effective than conventional contact fungicides. However, chemical control is considered as expensive and impractical in the plantation situations.

1.2.5.3 Breeding for resistance to cypress canker

Some cypress species have some level of resistance to cypress canker disease. Some of species include *C. lusitanica*, *C. arizonica* and *C. torulosa*. Breeding for resistant to cypress canker appears to be best alternative of controlling the spread of cypress canker disease. A number of countries in Europe have breeding programmes to screen for resistant clones. It is difficult to develop universally resistance clone due to the fact that the canker resistances has be found to be unstable (Casini & Santini 1995).

1.2.6 ARTIFICIAL INOCULATION METHODS

1.2.6.1 Introduction

Screening for cypress clones resistant to canker disease caused by *Seiridium* species involves artificial inoculation. Inoculations are normally done on young plants in the field and in glasshouse conditions. In vitro inoculation of cypress with *S. cardinale* had been done in Europe and the result has a potential for use in cypress canker screening programmes (Spanos et al. 1997 a). Mycelium is the common type of inoculum used in screening programmes in several countries (Strouts 1973; Raddi & Panconesi 1984; Chou 1990; Xenopoulos 1990; Tisserat et al. 1991; Santini et al. 1997). However, spore suspension was also used in New Zealand by Beresford and Mulholland (1982) and by Ponchete and Andeoli (1989) and Strouts (1973) in England.

1.2.6.2 Wounding technique

The most widely used inoculation technique is to create wounds or insertion on stems or branches of cypress plants. The inoculum, which can be either conidial suspension or agar plugs containing mycelium are placed on the wounds. Wounds are made using cork borers or scalpels. This technique is now commonly used in Europe (Raddi & Panconesi 1984). In New Zealand, the convenient inoculation technique used is reported in Chou (1989, 1990) and Self (1994). Wounds are created by making a V-shape cut on the stem and placing mycelial plugs in the wound. The same technique is used in other, overseas countries (Strouts 1973; Spanos et al. 1999).

1.2.6.3 Fungal inoculum

Infection of cypress plants in nature is by conidia (Raddi & Panconesi 1981). The use of mycelium could mask the type of reaction of the same plant in the natural habitat when it is exposed to conidial inocula. Use of high inoculum could result in early elimination of clones of desirable characters that could be used in the breeding programmes. Raddi & Panconesi (1984) suggested that the variation in screening results could be due to the fact that inoculations might have been carried out with mycelium taken from a surface mutant sector of fungal colony with either higher or lower pathogenicity. Hood & Gardner (2002) expressed a similar concern, that with *S. unicorne* cultures, the ability of cultures to degenerate and loose virulence poses an additional complication as reported by Chou (1989) and Self (1994).

1.2.6.4 Methods of inoculum production for artificial inoculation

1.2.6.4.1 Methods of culturing *Seiridium* species

Isolation is normally done by obtaining small sections of bark or other diseased tissues and culturing on artificial media after surface sterilization using ethanol or sodium hypochlorite. Cultures of *Seiridium* species can be maintained on 1.5- 2.0% potato dextrose agar (Tisserat et al.1991; Graniti et al.1992; Barnes et al. 2001). Other media

being used included malt agar (Viljoen et al 1993; Spanos et al.1997a). Single spores have also been isolated from conidiomata embedded in the bark (Tisserat et al. 1991).

1.2.6.4.2 Methods of inducing sporulation of *Seiridium* species

The use of conidial suspension for artificial inoculation requires adequate supply of conidia. *Seiridium* species in some cases sporulates easily on artificial media and natural substrates such as bark of cypress. However, it has been reported that after series of subcultures or long storage, *Seiridium* isolates often loose their sporulating capability (Tisserat, et al. 1991).

Different methods of spore production have been reported in (Strouts, 1973; Initini & Panconesi, 1974; Sasaki & Kobayashi, 1976; Solel et al. 1983; Chou 1989; Tobata et al. 1991; Sanchez & Gibbs 1995). The length of incubation reported in these references for the appearance of conidia ranged from one week to several weeks. Inoculation of sterilized cypress twigs and exposure of *Seiridium* isolates to near UV light seemed the most common method of inducing spore production. Plant material added to agar has been found to increase sporulation of some fungi (Fisher et al. 1982; Wang et al. 1985; ; Hu & Wu, 1997; Wyss et al. 2001). Variability of *Seiridium* isolates was also observed in conidia production.

1.2.6.4.3 Conidial inoculum load

Artificial inoculation with conidia is considered more natural than the use of mycelia. Conidial inocula were used in the past for artificial inoculation. Methods of conidial inoculum applications have been described in (Strouts, 1973; Beresford & Mulholland, 1982; Solel et al., 1983; Ponchet & Andreoli, 1984; Ponchet & Andreoli, 1989; Panconesi & Raddi, 1991). The concentration of conidial suspension varied and in most cases the number of conidia used per wound was not reported. A study by Ponchet & Andreoli (1984) revealed that for *S. cardinale* the minimal effective dose was 50 conidia per wound and the optimum was 500, but it is not known whether there is a difference between *Seiridium* species or isolates of the same species relating to the minimal effective dose.

1.2.7 ASSESSMENT OF CANKER INFECTION IN ARTIFICIAL INOCULATION

From the literature method of assessment carried out in most studies involved measurement of the canker sizes, visual observation of plant growth, disease symptoms and presence of fungal fruiting bodies. The measurements are done from few weeks to few years after the artificial inoculation of cypress plants. For cypress canker disease resistant screening purposes, the method of assessment used is normally based on a descriptive scale. The different methods of assessment are described in various research areas, some of which include (Beresford & Mulholland, 1982; Solel et al. 1983; Xenopoulos 1990; Santini & Lonardo 2000).

1.3 CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH AIMS

Having reviewed work done overseas and New Zealand, it is obvious that screening for cypress canker resistant plants in this country is still at its early stage. A complication is that two of the three pathogenic *Seiridium* species have been confirmed in New Zealand but there is a possibility of existence of a third species. It is important that the number of species is confirmed in order to develop a reliable screening programme. Contradictory results are likely to be related to misidentification of the *Seiridium* isolate used in studies because they may behave differently under the same environmental conditions. Variability in resistance has also been observed between ramets of the same clone growing at the same site (Raddi & Panconesi, 1984). Most of research work on cypress canker in the past decade has been done on *S. cardinale* and *S. unicorne* under overseas climatic condition and the results may not be directly applicable to New Zealand.

Forest Research requires reliable method of artificial inoculation of cypress with *Seiridium* species to screen for canker resistance under New Zealand climatic condition.

The overall goal of the study was to develop reliable methods of artificial inoculation of cypress with *Seiridium* spp. in order to detect any clonal differences in resistance to these pathogens.

The aims were to:

1. Consistently obtain abundant spore production in culture since large numbers of conidia would be required as inoculum.
2. Compare main stem and side branch inoculations.
3. Compare agar plug and conidial suspension inocula.
4. Determine the effective dose for conidial inoculum.
5. Assess inoculation of ramets in vitro and in vivo.
6. Determine whether wounds are required for infection.
7. Assess the pathogenic variability of isolates.
8. Assess the effect of environment on infection.