**Biological Control Agents**

**Natural Helpers for New Zealand**

Biological control uses one living thing to control another. It helps stop weeds and pests by introducing their natural enemies or predators into the environment.

In New Zealand, many plants and insects have been introduced over the years. Some plants become weeds, invading native forests or farmland. Insects that arrived with trade can harm farming and nature too.

Scientists use living organisms like beetles, wasps, mites, and fungi as biocontrol agents to fight these pests. These natural helpers protect New Zealand’s native plants, farms, and special species in a safe, eco-friendly way.

Biocontrol is a preferred method because it is safe for other species; biocontrol agents usually attack only specific weeds or pests, so they don’t harm other plants or animals, unlike chemicals that can kill many different creatures. These agents are also effective in hard-to-reach places, such as hills and forests, where machines or chemicals cannot easily be used. Additionally, biocontrol provides long-term help since the agents keep coming back as the weeds grow, helping to control pests over time. Although it takes significant time and money to find and test biocontrol agents initially, they are cost-effective because they are cheaper to use in the long run.

Before any biocontrol agent is used, scientists study it for 5 to 10 years. They make sure it only attacks the pest or weed it is meant to control and doesn’t harm other plants, animals, or people.

Biocontrol is a natural, safe, and smart way to protect New Zealand’s environment and farms from harmful weeds and pests. While it doesn’t completely get rid of pests, it helps keep them under control along with other methods.

**Comprehension Exercise**

Read the article Biological Control Agents- Natural Helpers for New Zealand.

Answer these questions based on the article:

1. What is biological control (biocontrol)?
2. Why do some plants and insects become a problem in New Zealand?
3. Name two types of organisms used as biocontrol agents.
4. Why is biocontrol safer than using chemicals?
5. How long can testing a biocontrol agent take?
6. Why is biocontrol helpful in hard-to-reach areas?
7. Does biocontrol completely eliminate pests? Explain.
8. Why is biocontrol cost-effective in the long run?

**Answers**

1. Using one living organism to control another, like introducing a natural enemy to stop weeds or pests.
2. Because they don’t have their natural enemies here, so they can grow uncontrollably and harm native plants and farms.
3. Beetles and wasps (also mites and fungi).
4. Because biocontrol agents target only specific pests or weeds, while chemicals can harm many different plants and animals.
5. 5 to 10 years.
6. Because living agents like insects can easily move into places machines or chemicals cannot reach.
7. No, it usually helps control pests but does not fully get rid of them. Other control methods are often needed too.
8. Because after the initial testing and introduction, the biocontrol agents keep coming back and working without much extra cost.