Executive Summary

Report from Dr W Rumball
DSIR, New Zealand

The 1991 year has been spent making final selections in the Agrostis Capillaris breeding project, following notice that the funding would cease after 1992. The selected plants were interpollinated during the summer of 1991-2 (Southern Hemisphere) and the seed harvested will be sent to Dr Bridget Ruummele for evaluation in the USA. Some of the seed will be held in New Zealand for a final progeny test, and for further seed increase. This second seed harvest will be used for sward evaluation in both USA and New Zealand, starting 1993.

The small-plot progeny trial kindly accommodated by Prof. Reed Funk, at Rutgers University, duly provided agronomic data used in the selection of parent plants for interpollination. I took the initiative of sending seed there in 1989, to give some local reality to the selection criteria. I am very pleased that Reed is interested in holding these plots for several years, to 'sort-out'. Dr Ruummele is of course most welcome to make full use of any useful data or plant material, and I would hope we could develop an increasing exchange of data and material.

With the sending of the 'selection' to Dr Ruummele for evaluation, I think New Zealand has carried out its side of the contract. As I have stressed to Jim Snow and others, we have kept fairly rigidly to the selection criteria laid down by the USGA - tolerance to low inputs such as fertiliser, irrigation and sprays. We have made little concession to superficial characters such as the current American concept of a desirable colour; nor to the widespread practice of increasing inputs as necessary to maintain perfect sward surfaces.

The Selection (Br 1518) of A. castellana being currently evaluated in the USA is basically a bonus to the main project. There should be no expectation that Br 1518 - or indeed any other selection of A castellana - would ever approach the best cultivars of either A. capillaris or A. stolonifera in performance. The species is simply not good enough nor ever will be. Br 1518 (now called 'Grasslands Milford') has been made available for two very precise niches:

1) to compete with 'Highland Bent' (also A. castellana) in the 'cheap seed' market.
2) to blend with dark cultivars of A. capillaris.

In this blend, Milford simply extends the versatility of the Colonial bent, adding improved performance in dry sites and dry seasons; and better cool-season colour.

My final comment is that this contract project with the USGA has been a great challenge and joy to us. I would welcome any further opportunities to do similar work.

10th April 1992