

Memorandum

9 June 2017

To:	All Elected Members All Independent Māori Statutory Board Members
Subject:	Pest Free Auckland programme – implementation update
From:	Councillor Penny Hulse – Chair, Environment and Community Committee Councillor Alf Filipaina – Deputy Chair, Environment and Community Committee
Key contacts:	Brett Butland - Programme Director, Pest Free Auckland Gael Ogilvie - General Manager Environmental Services Barry Potter - Director, Infrastructure and Environmental Services

Summary

- Pest Free Auckland is a community-led conservation programme, facilitated by council, to eradicate invasive ecosystem transforming plants, animals and pathogens and concurrently restore the region's native ecosystems. Partnerships with community groups, mana whenua, landowners, schools, council, Department of Conservation, and private and philanthropic sectors are key to the success of this programme.
- There are already many volunteers, iwi, landowners and groups who are taking up the challenge to control pests and restore our natural environment, with community groups active in approximately 25% of the Auckland region.
- The Pest Free Auckland programme will focus conservation action on islands, peninsulas, open sanctuaries and corridors. The programme includes three concurrent components, described below:
 - Building capacity and capability of community groups, iwi and landowners to implement conservation action at home, in schools and in parks;
 - Showcasing community action (Telling stories) and celebrating local and region-wide successes;
 - Delivering great conservation outcomes through our own programmes on parks and open spaces.
- Over the next six months, staff will:
 - Build capacity in community groups through the existing Pest Liaison Group;
 - Deliver an inaugural Auckland Festival on 24 June 2017 and showcase community conservation action;
 - Support local boards to implement or develop local conservation strategies;
 - Prioritise and align council's conservation activities with community activity and energy to achieve greater conservation outcomes.

1. The purpose of this memo is to provide an update for elected members on Pest Free Auckland including the proposed approach, scope, initial progress and future plans.

Background and overview

2. In a region of 500,000 hectares, less than 30 per cent of Auckland's original native vegetation cover remains. Over half of the remaining native vegetation is on private land, along with some of Auckland's most threatened ecosystems and species.
3. Introduced pest animals compete with our native birdlife for food and habitat, eat the eggs and young, and attack adult birds. Pest plants smother and displace native plants and ecosystems. Effective pest control has the biggest impact in protecting native species. There are already many volunteers, landowners and groups who are actively controlling pests, and restoring Auckland's natural environment.
4. Pest Free Auckland is a community-led conservation programme, facilitated by council, to eradicate invasive ecosystem transforming plants, animals and pathogens and concurrently restore the region's native ecosystems. Partnerships with community groups, mana whenua, landowners, schools, council, Department of Conservation, and private and philanthropic sectors are the key to the success of this programme.
5. The Pest Free Auckland programme will focus conservation action on islands, peninsulas, open sanctuaries, and corridors. The programme includes three concurrent components, described below and represented in attachment 1. Council will:
 - a. Build capacity and capability of community groups, iwi and landowners to implement conservation action at home, in schools and in parks by providing technical advice, best practice tools, resources and funding support. This will include backyard and schoolyard trapping networks, adopting new technologies (such as self-setting traps and remote monitoring) and introduction of threatened species at suitable sites. Council will facilitate innovation and new methodologies to improve effectiveness.
 - b. Showcase community action (tell stories) and celebrate success using mobile and social media applications to capture, monitor and communicate conservation activities to show achievements and region-wide trends.

Council will work with partners to co-ordinate community action through a customer relationship management framework, real-life networking and collaboration forums and digital portals.
 - c. Deliver great conservation outcomes as part of our own programmes in community and regional parks and along the road corridor. Council will:
 - integrate conservation outcomes into our own design, build and maintenance programme for park and road corridor assets;
 - work the Department of Conservation to identify priority sites and align current programmes with community activity and energy to deliver greater and more integrated outcomes;
 - implement its statutory obligations described in the Regional Pest Management Plan.

Community action

6. Council currently supports over 400 community groups and many landowners to implement conservation projects by providing technical advisory, materials and funding support.
7. In response to the Predator Free NZ Trust's national initiative to eradicate rats, possums and stoats by 2050, there is increasing community action and social expectation for conservation programmes. Some local boards have developed (for example Pest Free Kaipātiki), or are beginning to develop, strategies to guide local action.
8. Staff will continue to support local boards to implement their conservation strategies, and will assist other local boards to develop strategies. The grants programme will be aligned with prioritised biodiversity focus areas, wildlife corridors and priority peninsulas to support community action in local board areas.

9. Hui with mana whenua have been held to identify opportunities to implement, or expand conservation action. A further hui is scheduled for mid-July.
10. The inaugural Auckland Festival will be held on 24 June. The objective of the Festival is to bring community groups together to showcase current community-led conservation in Auckland, learn about innovative techniques and tools, and provide feedback on how council can help.
11. Community groups have provided feedback that they need to improve their species identification skills, monitoring and control methods, and volunteer management capacity. Upskilling will be provided through the quarterly Pest Liaison Group forums, commencing in August.
12. A Sustainable Schools programme to empower schools to lead local conservation action is being trialled in primary and intermediate schools in the Howick Local Board area. Students will carry out monitoring of rodents using tracking tunnels to inform the design of a trapping programme that they will manage. Schools will also control pest plants in their school grounds.

Telling stories and celebrating success

13. Community groups, council and others use a variety of systems to record their data and activity but many of these don't "talk" to each other and record data in an inconsistent way. As a result, it is difficult to establish a regional picture of activity and therefore track outcomes from community and council activities.
14. Staff are establishing a regional monitoring framework, and target measures, that will be used to clearly track, and communicate, aggregate progress towards key tangible targets, for example bellbirds in backyards.
15. Council has begun a monthly rolling Conservation Hero's feature. The feature profiles community groups/individuals by using existing council media channels such as Facebook pages, Bio News and Our Auckland.
16. The 2017 Biosecurity and Biodiversity award winners were announced at an event to celebrate International Biodiversity Day on 24 May 2017. Gwenda Pulham was the recipient in the Influencer category for her work to establish and maintain a volunteer network to monitor and protect Auckland's shorebirds. Richard Hursthouse won the Innovator category for his work as the co-founder and driving force of the Pest Free Kaipatiki programme.

Council action

17. Biodiversity Focus Areas, spanning public and private land, have been identified to ensure that each of the native ecosystem types currently present in the region remain in a viable and functioning state. There are over 140 focus areas spread over approximately 52,000 hectares, representing approximately 10% of the region. These areas will be used to prioritise, stage and scale councils' conservation work delivered across our parks and open spaces through council's new Community Facilities ecological restoration contracts commencing in July.
18. Pest control programmes in regional parks will continue. Pest plant control has been extended onto private land and the coast adjacent to high priority regional parks. In many cases, this work has been supported by local boards with contract specifications designed to control target species to zero density.
19. Council's regional pest animal programme will continue to focus on high priority ecosystems (such as the Waitakere and Hunua Ranges regional parks), and to connect areas where the community is carrying out pest animal control.
20. Council's conservation-focused activity will be captured in the regional monitoring framework and contribute to the aggregate regional progress.

Next steps

21. An update on the programme will be provided at the end of August.
22. If you have any queries relating to the Pest Free Auckland programme, please contact Brett Butland on brett.butland@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz.

