

27 March 2018

Memorandum

To:	Environment and Community Committee
Subject:	Update on Implementation of the Weed Management Policy
From:	Rod Sheridan, Director Community Facilities Barry Potter, Director Infrastructure and Environmental Services Key contact: Jenny Gargiulo, Senior Environmental Quality Assurance Specialist

Purpose

- To update the Environment and Community Committee on the ongoing implementation of the Weed Management Policy.

Summary

- This update on the ongoing implementation of the Weed Management Policy outlines the work programme for Auckland Council over the last six months.*
- Highlights include:*
 - Council units are reporting on agrichemical use across the council family. This will be used to measure contractors' performance on the key performance indicator included in the Community Facilities maintenance contracts, to track down on agrichemical use from a baseline established in the first year. An annual report on agrichemical use by board area will be provided after July 2018.*
 - A vegetation management trial has been developed to assess different weed management methodologies at the Auckland Botanic Gardens. This will provide valuable information about the effectiveness, cost and health and safety implications of different weed management methodologies.*
 - Work is underway to ensure continued best practice in vegetation management and pest plant control. This includes holding workshops with council contractors involved in weed management to promote shared innovation, development of a best practice pest plant control manual for community groups and a regular newsletter.*
 - Education and support for community conservation groups through programmes in regional and local parks, Pest Free Auckland and targeted support to groups working on private land.*
- Overall, implementation of the policy is continuing across the council family with a focus on achieving best practise and ongoing improvements in weed management.*

Context/Background

- Weed management is a priority for Auckland Council as Auckland is one of the weediest cities in the world. Auckland's warm and wet climate makes it particularly vulnerable to weeds. Exotic plants with no natural enemies can spread unchecked, displacing native plants and threatening biodiversity.
- Auckland Council's Weed Management Policy was adopted by the Regional Development and Operations Committee in 2013 (resolution RDO/2013/137) and provides operational guidance for weed management across the council group. It was developed following a review of the weed management policies of Auckland's legacy councils, national and international best practice, and the current trends in weed management, and iwi, stakeholder and public consultation.

3. The policy drives best practice weed management with eight objectives to be applied when determining weed management methodologies:
 - Take an integrated approach to weed management and vegetation control (prevention, control, education, restoration, and cooperation).
 - Ensure best practice in weed management and vegetation control.
 - Minimise agrichemical use.
 - Minimise non-target effects of agrichemical use.
 - Ensure public health and safety.
 - Protect and enhance the environment.
 - Empower the community to manage weeds in accordance with the policy.
 - Deliver weed management and vegetation control which is value for money.
4. These objectives apply to multiple departments across the Auckland Council group that are involved in weed management, with activities ranging from vegetation management (including grass edging), to pest plant control and ecological restoration. The Weed Management Policy also includes an action plan, which is being addressed through ongoing council work programmes.
5. This memo provides an update on activities since the last report back on 17 October 2017 to the Environment and Community Committee.
6. Over the last six months the weed management work programme has included:
 - reporting on agrichemical use across the council family
 - vegetation management trial
 - community empowerment - herbicide reduction in the road corridor
 - ensuring continued best practice in vegetation management and pest plant control
 - education and support for community conservation groups.
7. A more detailed update on each of these areas is provided below.

Discussion

Reporting on agrichemical use across the council family

8. Council units are reporting on the amount of agrichemical used for weed control. Types of weed control activities captured through this reporting system include:
 - pest plant control as required by the Biosecurity Act and Regional Pest Management Strategy
 - vegetation management in areas such as pathways – for health and safety and amenity values
 - sportsfield maintenance and renovation to ensure community have usable playing surfaces
 - asset protection - preventing the denigration of built assets such as pavements or buildings.
9. A reporting template for local boards is being developed that will breakdown agrichemical usage by active ingredient. As weed control fluctuates seasonally agrichemical usage will be reported annually to local boards after July 2018.
10. The report will be used to measure the key performance indicator included in Community Facilities maintenance contracts, to track down on agrichemical use from a baseline established in the first year.
11. For the use of agrichemicals Auckland Council takes direction from the Environmental Protection Authority. Should the Environmental Protection Authority update its position on the use of any agrichemical, Auckland Council will ensure it is fully considered when making any decisions and changes to operational procedures.

Vegetation management trial

12. The weed management policy states that *'Best practice weed control requires constant research to keep up to date with evolving weed management techniques, both locally and internationally, and continual innovation to achieve effective, efficient and sustainable outcomes.'*
13. In line with the policy, a trial on existing and new weed control methodologies has been developed by the council. The trial will run for a minimum of one year and will be conducted at the Auckland Botanic Gardens event site lawn.
14. The aim is to determine the efficacy and cost of seven different weed control methods with a focus on non-chemical alternatives. Some of these methods are well established and regularly used in Auckland (for example, mechanical control) while others are more innovative (for example, electrothermal control).
15. Each treatment will be judged on the following criteria:
 - health and safety
 - accessibility to the site with equipment
 - costs (of product, equipment and staff time)
 - practicalities relating to use of product
 - effectiveness in terms of weed control.
16. The trial will provide information on efficacy, impacts and costs of different weed management methodologies. This information will support local board decision-making on vegetation control.

Ensure continued best practice in vegetation management and pest plant control

17. Best practice in the weed management policy is defined as *'a method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is used as a benchmark. In addition, a 'best' practice can evolve to become better as improvements are discovered.'*
18. Since October 2017 Auckland Council has carried out multiple activities to support best practice including:
 - two community facilities innovation workshops held in November 2017 and February 2018. These provided an opportunity for council contractors to share innovations and discuss best practice techniques.
 - contractors and staff attended a presentation on thermal weed management techniques held by For the Love of Bees.
 - a regular Weed Management Newsletter has been developed and is being sent to council's weed management contractors (see Attachment A)
 - a weed manual to provide guidance on best practise weed management techniques is being prepared for community groups.
19. On 28 March 2018 the next Best Practice Reference group meeting will be held. The agenda includes landscape weed control, vegetation management strategies and requirements for electro weed control on council and biocontrol.
20. Māori representation on the Best Practice Reference Group is also being sought to support ongoing best practice for the operational implementation of the Weed Management Policy. A working group with mana whenua has been established to recruit these Matauranga Māori representatives.
21. Meetings have also been scheduled with other regional councils to discuss methods for weed management to drive best practice and coordination across regions.

Community empowerment – agrichemical reduction in the road corridor

22. Weed control and berm maintenance is currently completed by Auckland Transport in the road corridor to:
 - prevent degradation of hard surfaces
 - ensure that drains are clear
 - ensure walkways are free of trip hazards
 - reduce the visual impact of weeds.
23. Auckland Council is taking over berm maintenance from Auckland Transport as part of the streetscape project. The contracts will be outcome-based, meaning weed control is not required on berms that are weed free and have no grass overhanging onto the footpath. Communicating this to residents can support the reduction in the amount of agrichemicals required to manage weeds in the road corridor.
24. The no spray register identifying sensitive residents will be moving from the Auckland Transport website to the Auckland Council website as part of the handover of the streetscape contracts.

Education and support for community conservation groups

25. Council offers support to community groups that are involved in weed management through many different channels, including programmes in regional and local parks, Pest Free Auckland and targeted support to groups working on private land.
26. In late 2017 the Community of Practice for Community-led Conservation was established. This working group from council and Department of Conservation business units was formed to support the coordination of conservation activities including community-led pest plant control.
27. A number of local boards are also supporting community groups in their area to carry out weed management activities in specific areas. For example, the Waitākere Ranges Local Board is supporting a long-term project with the communities at Piha, Karekare and Huia to reduce the density of climbing asparagus on private property and Kaipātaki Local Board is supporting various weed management initiatives delivered by the Pest Free Kaipātaki Network.

Attachment A

Weed management newsletter.



December 2017

Collective innovation

A quarterly update - Weed Management Policy



We had our first Project 17 weed management supplier workshop in November. This workshop is one of the activities towards the implementation of the policy and the eight objectives that guide Auckland Council's weed management requirements.

1. Take an integrated approach to weed management and vegetation control
2. Ensure best practice in weed management and vegetation control
3. Minimise agrichemical use
4. Minimise non-target effects of agrichemical use
5. Ensure public health and safety
6. Protect and enhance the environment
7. Empower the community to manage weeds in accordance with the policy
8. Deliver weed management and vegetation control which is value for money

Best practice in weed management

The weed management policy drives best practice in weed management including the formation of a best practice reference group made up of council staff and external weed management experts.

We discussed at the Project 17 workshop the development of a matrix of recommended methodologies to achieve vegetation maintenance contract outcomes. This will be a living document to communicate what we do and why we do it. The development of this tool will include the best practice reference group recommendations.

The next meeting of the best practice reference group is planned for February 2018. I will be following up with staff and contractors involved in weed management to identify challenges to be discussed in that forum.

If you have anything you would like included or you would like to present please contact me at Jenny.gargiulo@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz.

Weed management innovations



On the 13th December a demonstration of thermal technology was held by “The Love of Bees” at Highwic.

This included a presentation from Charles Merfield and demonstrations on steam technology by Jeremy from Weedtech www.weedtechnics.co.nz and electric weeding by Kazel from hotgrass www.hotgrass.co.nz.

A few of the highlights were the demonstration of the multiple uses of steam for weed management, water blasting and managing moss and lichen.

Hotgrass is an exciting new technology, and this was a great opportunity to see it

in the prototype stage.

Staff are developing a process to review technology and gather robust data on different methodologies.



No spray register – data update

The No-Spray data from both Auckland Transport and Council registers is being mapped on GIS.

In January this will be available as a layer to be supplied to Contractors.



Community groups – pest plant control

At the Project 17 vendor workshop Paul Duffy, Volunteering & Programmes Team Leader, led the discussion on community groups. We identified the need for a clear process for green waste pick up and litter collection.

Auckland Council's coordination and assistance of community groups for weed control is supportive of the Pest Free Auckland initiative which includes the development of a centralised customer relationship management system to optimise shared outcomes.

Glyphosate formulations

Auckland council has completed a review of the formulations of glyphosate based commercially available agrichemicals in NZ. Surfactants, penetrants and marker dyes have been assessed as part of this research including POEA.

2018 and beyond.

We have an exciting year next year with council taking over berm management from Auckland Transport as well as the ongoing forward work programme for the weed management policy.

Merry Xmas everyone – and I look forward to seeing you all in the New Year.