

April 2018

# Collective innovation

## A quarterly update - Weed Management Policy



One of the initiatives supporting Auckland Council's operational best practice is the establishment of the Best Practice Reference Group (BPRG). This is detailed in the action of plan of the Weed Management Policy:

"... which will report to the governing body and the governance group to ensure that the weed management policy and all operational programmes maintain international best practice. The best practice reference group will comprise senior technical staff from the council and its CCOs, relevant external parties and independent national and/or international experts".

The first meeting of 2018 was held in March. The attendees included Jack Crow and Jo Ritchie - community representatives, Dr Margaret Stanley - invasive species ecology, Dr Meriel Watts - urban community representative, Dr Trevor James - agricultural and horticultural weed management and council staff from different departments involved in weed control. Apologies were received from Paul Champion - integrated weed management, Dr Quentin Paynter- biological control of weeds.

### BPRG meeting April 2018

The group was briefed on weed management requirements and council practices. Group members were invited to give recommendations and introduce innovation in weed management for operational staff to consider. The agenda for this meeting included biocontrol, thermal technology and the Weed Management Policy forward work programme.

### Biocontrol

Invasive pest plant species introduced into New Zealand with no natural enemies can out-compete desired plant species. Biocontrol, using one living organism (usually insects or fungi) to control another, is a meaningful way for council to minimise agrichemicals for controlling pest plants.

Council's Senior Regional Biosecurity adviser for Plants, presented to the group on biocontrol in council. They gave the group an overview of operational improvements to procedure and the importance of iwi consultation for any proposed releases.

The conflict between regional and national priorities for council collaboration and the possibility of council needing additional investment in controlling weed species that impact the region was discussed.

The presentation identified the challenges of the high cost for establishing a new agent, with benefits not potentially seen for decades.



Tradescantia leaf beetle in the Whau and Titirangi.

The budget for biocontrol is small and currently Biosecurity is the only department with a dedicated biocontrol budget. More funding has been requested for biocontrol in the Long-Term Plan.

### Group recommendations on biocontrol for weed management

Council should prioritise investment in biocontrol. This investment would support the Weed Management Policy's objective to minimise agricultural use.

The group believes council should look at the environmental and financial impact of asparagus weed. There is also an opportunity to involve the community and local schools in rearing and releasing agents.

The group felt strongly that CCOs should contribute to biocontrol investment given the benefits to their organisations and their required weed control outcomes.

### Weed Manual - Community Group

Community groups that undertake weed control in council's reserves and open spaces are key groups that need best practice guidance from council.

The BPRG group has been involved in the development of a weed manual for council – this would include council's recommendations on managing pest plants. The weed manual identifies best practice methodology for the weeds that community groups would commonly manage. This document will be a companion to the pest animal guide.

The Senior Biosecurity Advisor for Plants at council, updated the group on the project and presented the key species that council is considering including for comment. The draft manual will be circulated to the group before being distributed.

### Group recommendations on Weed Manual for community groups

The group will be reviewing and providing feedback on the list of weed species and grouping in the manual.

### Thermal technology – Hot Grass

Council supports innovation in weed management and this includes looking at new emerging weed management products.

Group member Meriel Watts requested that Hot Grass ([hotgrass.co.nz](http://hotgrass.co.nz)) and Metrocare be included in this meeting's agenda. Dar Charles Merfield, from the BHU Future Farming Centre skyped in to introduce electrothermal weed management technology.

The group discussed criteria for use including Health and Safety and non-targeted impacts on people, plants and organisms.

### Group recommendations on Thermal Technology – Hot Grass



The group felt this technology can have value in certain sites. This has been used overseas and a request was made to obtain more data. Any new technology needs to be evaluated. e.g. a business case that captures man hours, cost, movement, risk and action plan. Testing can then be used to verify information which can support council decision-making.

**Update from the meeting: In May 2018 the RootWave Pro2 received an EU CE mark certification, meaning it can legally be used and distributed throughout Europe. It is now in the process of gaining the same approvals for New Zealand.**



### Thermal technology – Metrocare Hot Foam

Roger Shakes and Aaron Tindall from Metrocare presented to the group on Hot Foam.

Hot Foam is the combination of a hot water and a Bio-Gro certified organic foam to create a thermal blanket for vegetation management.

The Metrocare Hot Foam method for weed control was developed and patented in 2003 by the founder of Biothermal Technology Ltd.

The presentation included trials from overseas and New Zealand. The supporting information will be made available to the Best Practice Reference Group to review and comment.

### Group recommendations on thermal technology - Metrocare Hot Foam

The group identified the potential for the technology. However, a polyglycoside is used to create the foam and, like anything else used on public land, the product's impact on the environment needs to be identified. Further clarification is needed about whether this method is already in use on roadsides in New Zealand, and if not why not.

### Weed Management trial - Botanic Gardens



The curator from the Auckland Botanic Gardens discussed the proposed vegetation management trial.

The objective of the trial would be to determine the efficacy and cost of different vegetation control methods with a focus on non-chemical alternatives.

### Group recommendations on Vegetation Management Trial

The group recommended to include a cross-section of the species managed within experimental area. Auckland Transport can identify the weeds commonly found in the road corridor. The need for replication within the trial design was reinforced. The group will be reviewing the full trial methodology document.

### Landscape weed control – asparagus weed

Pamela Gill from community group EcoMatters presented to the group on the Waitākere Ranges Local Board project “Our Backyard”.

The goal of the project is to work with landowners to control climbing asparagus on their properties.

Pamela took the group through the background for the project and the success of the local board working with EcoMatters to engage the residents in the landscape control of asparagus weed.

The project includes weed control, mapping and ongoing community engagement.

#### Group comment on the “Our Backyard” project

The group considers the project as a positive example for community engagement and an opportunity for local boards to replicate.

The group re-emphasised the need for this species to be a priority for biocontrol.



### Weed Management Policy – what’s coming up

The group members also requested an update on glyphosate formulations containing POEA and review of Organosilicon to be included in the agenda of the next meeting.