

27 July 2018

Memorandum

To:	All elected members and Independent Māori Statutory Board members
CC:	Gael Ogilvie – General Manager Environmental Services, Rod Sheridan – General Manager Community Facilities, Barry Potter – Director Infrastructure and Environmental Services, Mace Ward – General Manager Parks, Sports and Recreation, Ian Maxwell – Director Community Services
Subject:	Long-term management of myrtle rust
From:	Phil Brown – Biosecurity Manager, Environmental Services Simon Randall - Acting Head, Operational Management and Maintenance, Community Facilities

Purpose

1. This memorandum provides an update on the current state and long-term management of myrtle rust.

Summary

- *The Ministry for Primary Industries-led attempt at the national eradication of myrtle rust has not been successful. There are now more than 100 sites impacted by myrtle rust in Auckland, and six instances on land managed by Auckland Council, as detailed in this memo.*
- *The management of myrtle rust is moving from eradication to long-term management to minimise the impacts of the disease.*
- *The Ministry for Primary Industries is currently developing advice for iwi, councils, private landowners and other interested parties around the management of myrtle rust.*
- *Staff from Environmental Services, Community Services and Community Facilities are scoping long-term management options, and are working to define the council's roles as both a landowner and a regulator.*
- *A further update will be provided to elected members and Independent Māori Statutory Board members once the assessment of council's role has been undertaken.*

Context

2. Myrtle rust is a pathogenic fungi that affects a range of plants from the myrtle family (such as Pōhutukawa). It is airborne, but can also be spread through the movement of people and seedlings. It has spread to a number of continents, and arrived in New Zealand in 2017.
3. There has been one potentially successful eradication attempt on Lord Howe Island, but other attempts internationally have been unsuccessful. There are several strains of myrtle rust, and New Zealand has the more severe 'pandemic' variety which spreads more easily than other strains. Initially the Ministry for Primary Industries attempted eradication, but these efforts were declared unsuccessful earlier this year.
4. There are currently no effective treatments in New Zealand, with only preventative treatments available. Preventative treatments require ongoing applications at regular intervals and can have unintentional environmental impacts with repeated use. Treatments are therefore not ideal for widespread use, but can be used to protect significant trees.
5. Over 740 properties are known to be infected nationally with 108 properties reported as infected in Auckland. The council-managed sites where myrtle rust has been identified and removed are:
 - Wairua Reserve, Ōrākei Local Board

- Taylor Park, Albert-Eden Local Board
- Rewarewa Esplanade, Whau Local Board (on two occasions)
- Ōtara Creek Reserve, Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board
- street gardens near 279 Great South Road, Manurewa Local Board.

Discussion

6. The potential impacts of myrtle rust in New Zealand will not be fully understood until the disease has been present for another one to two years. Impacts are likely to increase as it becomes more widely spread and more common. At this stage, myrtle rust is known to impact both native and exotic myrtle species. Impacts vary from cosmetic to plant death depending on vulnerability of the species, local climate (especially rainfall and temperature), and plant health.
7. Impacts on common myrtle species may include:
 - possible extinction in the wild for ramarama, which is highly susceptible to myrtle rust and is also currently being impacted by a second (insect) pathogen
 - potential changes in abundance and distribution of pōhutukawa and rātā species and associated impacts on natural ecosystems and coastal areas
 - probable reduction of *Agonis flexuosa* (myrtle willow), *Syzygium* (monkey apple) and *Callistemon* (bottle brush) street trees and associated impacts on urban forest functionality (such as nectar sources)
 - mānuka, kānuka and feijoa appear to be relatively resistant.
8. A national long-term myrtle rust management plan is being developed. This will see councils and landowners becoming more responsible for managing the disease on their land. Auckland Council could have a role as a regulator to reduce the rate of spread through human activity.
9. Over time there are likely to be increased costs in managing street and amenity trees as many of these are myrtles. There may also be increased costs to council for managing other parts of its operations that involve myrtles, such as nursery and planting programmes.

Next steps

10. The Ministry for Primary Industries is convening a working group to develop advice for councils regarding the long-term management of the disease, which will guide Auckland Council's long-term response. Auckland Council is part of this working group.
11. Council departments, including Environmental Services, Community Services and Community Facilities, are determining options for the council's long-term management plan. This will address key issues such as the implications for the street tree programme, planting guidelines, reducing inoculum levels to protect semi-resistant species, and managing other impacts.
12. The council is also supporting national initiatives such as seed banking being undertaken by the Department of Conservation as an emergency response to ensure retention of genetic material, as well as monitoring of spread and impact on different species.
13. A further update will be provided to elected members and Independent Māori Statutory Board members once further assessment of the council's role under a long-term management scenario as a regulator and land owner has been undertaken.