

## Waitākere Ranges Local Board Feedback: Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP) Review 30 August 2017

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1. Controlling pest animals, plants and organisms in and around the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area (WRHA) is of the highest priority for the Waitākere Ranges Local Board (the Board). Concern that we are going backwards with weed and pest management has been a key message from our communities since early on in the formation of Auckland Council, and we need to do better.
2. The local board gave feedback setting out a desired approach in November 2015. Many of the questions asked this time around appear to be similar, if not the same question.

### *General Comments and Context*

3. We are concerned that the amount of budget available for pest control is setting the agenda for the review of Auckland Council's RPMP, rather than the more fundamental question of what, as a Council and a community, we want our priorities for Auckland to be.
4. The Council's lack of investment in pest control, both as an owner of public land especially road corridors, and as the key agency in Auckland responsible for enforcement, education and support for community efforts, are key issues to address in the review. Council needs to show leadership and hold itself and its agencies to account through the RPMP.
5. Auckland Transport (AT) spends \$120,000 in our area and targets four weeds which is a fraction of what is needed to fulfil its obligations under the existing RPMP.
6. The Council needs to establish an ongoing mechanism for monitoring the performance of AT with regard to its obligations for pest control.
7. The position in our previous feedback (from November 2015) has not changed. 'Council funding needs to be made relevant to the scale of the problem a local board is facing. At present there is nothing in the funding mechanism to address the enhanced needs faced by local boards with significant ecological areas. The Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area requires better funding in recognition of the scale of the problems in the area, and the obligations and responsibilities imposed on it by Act of Parliament, for example, where dealing with public and private properties and in parks reserves requiring maintenance.'
8. The site-led management approach as set out to us in this review appears to be a band aid. The Council cannot walk away from its overall responsibility as the lead agency responsible for pest control. In some instances site-led will be appropriate but this cannot be at the expense of its overall duties.
9. With the isthmus being so narrow, something more comprehensive than site-led is needed, as many of the worst weeds eg moth plant and climbing asparagus can easily be taken from one site to another by wind or birds.

10. There is also a point to be made about how responsibility for weed management sits across the wider Council family and that Council Controlled Organisations. Road corridors in particular are significant weed vectors, and Auckland Transport, and in our area, Watercare, must be committed to the wider approach. Referring to previous feedback we reiterate that 'Auckland Transport should itself be more active in relation to addressing weed management in the road corridor of the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area. There still appears to be no compulsion via an appropriate service level agreement for Auckland Transport to manage pest animals within those road corridors, and that should be changed.'

*Does the local board support a site-led approach to managing wide-spread pest plants?*

11. We do not support the philosophy of the 'site-led approach' where it simply means cutting resources and / or doing nothing, and advocate that council should be aiming for elimination even where the action falls short. The new RPMP should also provide for site-led programmes for community groups, but not as an excuse for the council to do nothing.
12. As we set out in our 2015 feedback on the RPMP discussion documents, the Regional Pest Management Plan Review should continue to be cognisant of the 2008 Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area (WRHA) Act, which gives the area national priority and confers particular governance responsibilities and obligations on both governing body and the local board. The WRHA requires better funding in recognition of the scale of the pest-management problems in the area, and the obligations and responsibilities imposed on it by Act of Parliament. In that sense, a site-led approach is appropriate.
13. However, we expressed reservations in our previous feedback and those continue to be valid. In general terms, and where pests and pest plants are quite widespread, a smaller-scale site-led approach is not the right solution for such a complex and wide-ranging problem. The site-led approach as presented fails to deal with the differences between Auckland's rural, ecological, and urban areas, and in concentrating only on particular designated areas simply ensures that others will rise to become the problem.
14. This approach also gives the wrong message to private citizens about Council's role and ambitions in managing the weed threat, and we are concerned that the huge efforts to control ecological weeds in Regional Parkland and private property are likely to be undermined. The best way for us as a Council to eliminate weed pests across the region is to take a 'whole of community' approach, as evidenced in our own climbing asparagus community weed removal programme in Piha, Huia, and Karekare.
15. As we have previously stated, 'the policies of Council need to take a long-term view in relation to how best to support pest-management by community groups. The council itself needs to put more emphasis on the education and providing resources at low-levels, such as bait, equipment and bins. Auckland Transport also needs community focused resource in this area in order to support communities that want to do work in the road corridor.' In practice this requires making more staff available to support community programmes. Staff are at present simply spread too thinly, and the Review proffers no positive solution to that.
16. A 500 meter buffer zone is not sufficient for a site of significance such as the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area. A more appropriate buffer is 1 – 2 kilometres.

### *The future of pest control*

17. Possums. The WRLB would not support a targeted rate across rural Auckland. Control of possums is a region-wide responsibility of the Auckland Council under the Biosecurity Act. Control of possums is important for a number of reasons not just the specific issue that they carry bovine TB.
18. In Waitākere control of possums is important for ecological reasons, and control crosses across rural and urban and public and private parts of our area.
19. Feral pigs. The goal in the Waitākere s should be elimination because of the damage pigs do, and their role in spreading kauri dieback.
20. Kauri dieback. There needs to be a specified approach for the Waitākere Ranges. Not just throwing in the towel but a serious attempt to halt spread by more investment on the ground, eg investing in board-walks, enforcing track closure, keeping hygiene stations functional and installing the best quality stations for ease of use.
21. Weeds on council land. Control should not be confined to SEAs but should cover all Council parkland. Council should set an example for control of weeds. In addition, road corridors and other council vacant land where weeds are not controlled or insufficiently controlled, create a threat to private land and Council land on which weeds are controlled.
22. North-west wild link. Funds need to follow this idea. Local boards need to be leaders of this project.
23. Road corridor weeds. This approach is highly unacceptable. Road corridors act as vectors for pest plants and highly visible examples of the Council's attitudes to weeds.

### *Does the local board support the proposed definition of a pest cat?*

24. We support cat-free areas, integrated predator control, and micro-chipping, and would like to see a push for residents to 'make this cat your last one'. This is particularly important in the Waitākere Ranges in that a number of coastal villages are surrounded by parkland and residential properties about the perimeter of the parkland. There are a number of intensive pest-control programmes in the Ranges, most notably Ark in the Park, which involve release of rare species. There are ambitions to release further species, including kiwi. Communities in the Waitākere Ranges need to begin to take steps to minimise the impact of domestic cats on fauna.

### *Does the local board support a more holistic approach to possum control?*

25. We support restoring the possum control budget to realistic levels, and eradication rather than reduction as a fundamental principle.

26. As stated in previous feedback, the board would also like to make a strong plea for possum indices in natural areas of the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area to be maintained at two per cent Residual Trap Catch or below in perpetuity. A research programme needs to be developed to assess the scale of this problem regionally.

*Kauri Dieback*

27. We understand that kauri dieback will now be included within the Regional Pest Management Plan Review, and point to the “Kauri Dieback Report 2017: An investigation into the distribution of kauri dieback, and implications for its future management, within the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park”, noting that there are implications and risks here for the Auckland region as a whole, and the need for Council policies and actions to point to a coordinated and coherent response to the kauri dieback threat. There needs to be a mechanism that requires Council to act promptly where necessary.