

A Natural Environment Targeted Rate update – February 2019

Since the start of the Natural Environment Targeted Rate (NETR) in July 2018, we've been busy delivering readily expandable pest control programmes and scoping, in some cases with local community groups, how best to invest the targeted rate in projects that deliver maximum ecological benefits over the next 10 years.

Here's a summary (across the nine workstreams) of what we're working on:

PLANT PATHOGENS

- Over 30 Kauri Dieback Ambassadors have joined forces with our Compliance Officers for a summer of awareness-raising, engaging with track visitors, and helping members of the public to use the cleaning stations in our kauri forest. Be sure to say “Hi” if you see them.
- We've hosted a summer events series at Arataki, where a range of scientists and park rangers made themselves available to the public to talk all things kauri dieback.
- Our teams have been working hard carrying out improvement work on tracks so that they meet the standard for reopening, including the Kitekite track that opened on Boxing Day.
- We have worked with Te Kawerau ā Maki on a track reopening plan and now want to hear from our concessionaires, regular park users and the local community about what tracks they think we should prioritise our efforts towards in the next two to five years. Public consultation is open through to 14 March. Find out more [here](#).
- Phosphite treatment is being carried out on 7000 kauri trees in 2019. We know phosphite treatment is not a cure, but it will reduce the lesions and boost the immune system of the infected tree
- We currently have a tender out for fixed wing and helicopter aerial surveillance, as well as ground truthing surveys to gather detailed information on kauri dieback infestation levels at specific sites across the region
- Where members of the public report suspected kauri dieback disease infection, we follow these up with a full analysis. Where the trees are on private land, we are providing landowners the opportunity to treat their own infected trees.
- We are continuing to undertake research to identify solutions for reducing the impacts of Kauri Dieback, Myrtle Rust and Dutch Elm Disease on the environment, and our health, social, cultural and economic well-being.

PROTECTING OUR PARKS

- The 1080 programme at Hunua Regional Park was successfully delivered with expansion to privately-owned land adjoining to the park and Department of Conservation land in December 2018. This will significantly reduce the reinvasion pressure within the park, extending the time until pests re-establish. A recent census shows kōkako numbers in Hunua have nearly doubled since 2014.
- We have expanded the control of pigs in Waitākere and Hunua Regional Parks through hunting. Reducing pig numbers will also help prevent the spread of kauri dieback disease.
- We have ramped up our weed control across our regional parks and buffer areas, particularly at Tāwharanui, Piha, Karekare, and Huia.
- Our contractors are currently confirming the management plans for increasing pest plant and animal control across our local parks.

EXPANDING COMMUNITY ACTION

- 29 conservation projects have received additional funding through a NETR boost to this year's Regional Environment and Natural Heritage fund.
- We've gone out to market to a range of suppliers so that we can leverage our buying power to provide more cost-effective pest control solutions for community groups.
- six community groups have received traps, bait and other hardware to help scale up their conservation activities.
- We are in the process of co-designing a bold new Regional Funding Strategy with our communities so that we can streamline access to funds and ensure we can amplify community conservation action.
- In December we launched a brand new \$300,000 Community Coordination and Facilitation Grant Programme to support community-led conservation outcomes. This grant seeks to provide funding support for community coordinators or facilitators to strategically increase collaboration, capacity and on the ground delivery of natural environment outcomes. Applications close 15 February. Find out more [here](#).
- We're also supporting a community-delivered nursery pilot programme to assess biosecurity preparedness and willingness for private sector nurseries to engage.

ISLAND BIOSECURITY

- We partnered with Department of Conservation, Predator Free NZ and others to launch Te korowai o Waiheke. This is a ground-breaking initiative towards a predator free Waiheke, where we are supporting the community to undertake pest control in their neighbourhoods.
- Planning is also underway to create Pest Free Kawau which will add another pest free island to the gulf.
- We have nine Ambassadors stationed at all main wharves to remind ferry passengers on their way out to enjoy our beautiful islands to check first for pests. We've also got a biosecurity detector dog that's started checking for pest stowaways on vehicles and in freight.
- We responded to two possible incursions over summer, with a suspected stoat on Aotea Great Barrier, and rat on Rakino. Our team and their trusty dogs were out making sure we protect these precious islands.
- We have increased our efforts eradicating Argentine and Darwin's ants from Kawau and Aotea Great Barrier. Our latest results show they are almost eradicated from Vivian Bay on Kawau.
- Plague skinks have unfortunately established themselves on Aotea Great Barrier. Our team is exploring a range of tools to contain and eradicate where possible. Currently we have some chickens being trialled as a biocontrol tool, and they're also supplying the City Mission with eggs in the process!

REGION WIDE BIOSECURITY

- We've scaled up our regional possum control, with an additional 10,937 hectares being controlled in the Hunua Ranges north west buffer zone area this year. Initial monitoring of the Hunua 1080 operation has shown a high success rate which is great news.
- We're increasing hunting and surveillance of feral rabbits, goats and deer, to ensure we protect our precious native flora and fauna.
- We've also increased our control of what's called "low incidence pest plants" – these are the less common, but impactful species which could wreak havoc on our natural environment if they were to establish here.

MARINE BIOSECURITY

- Surveillance has been boosted for marine pests like Mediterranean fan worm at Aotea Great Barrier.
- We're about to survey for current distribution and abundance of targeted marine pests in the Kaipara and Manukau harbours.

- The compliance and enforcement of the new Auckland Unitary Plan hull biofouling rules is now operational, and council is working in collaboration with the Ministry for Primary industries and other Regional Councils toward safeguarding our marine environment. We will be engaging with boaties to help raise awareness of the rules and make it easier for them to comply.

MARINE BIODIVERSITY

- We are working with other agencies to develop monitoring and research plans, as well as conduct preliminary sampling in order to improve representation of marine habitats in SEA (Significant Ecological Area) protection.
- We have established a monitoring and research programme to better understand our precious indigenous seabird populations. This will inform our future management for protecting and restoring threatened seabird habitats.

FRESH WATER BIOSECURITY

- We have held initial hui with iwi and research institutes to develop the site-led pest control programmes on lakes Tomarata and Rototoa, and a freshwater protection advocacy programme.

ENABLING TOOLS

- We are well underway with developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for Auckland's indigenous ecosystems. We know it's hard to manage unless you measure, and this ambitious programme will define the measures we need to report on to identify the progress we are making and inform how we protect our precious taonga.
- We have several projects underway to improve our data collection, our ability to share this across agencies and community groups, as well as within council.
- We have also partnered with Department of Conservation to develop a platform to enable easier access to conservation volunteer opportunities.