

WAITĀKERE RĀHUI

Rationale and Background

Kauri dieback disease within the Waitākere forest (Te Wao Nui a Tiriwa) has spread at an alarming rate over the past decade. Current estimates show that the rate of infection has more than doubled over the past few years with at least 19% of all kauri within the forest showing signs of infection. In addition, approximately 58% of kauri forest larger than 5 ha is now symptomatic. The evidence has established that the main vector of the disease is human movement through tracking contaminated soil. The current management methods have not worked. The forest is dying and could face ecological collapse and localised extinctions within a generation unless drastic action is undertaken.

For Te Kawerau ā Maki who are the mana whenua of Waitākere, the death of our forest is an existential threat. It would also see the loss of a nationally significant taonga (treasure) for the people of New Zealand. The Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area Act (2008) directs the Government and Auckland Council to ensure the protection and enhancement of the Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area. Te Tiriti o Waitangi requires the Government to protect tangata whenua and our taonga.

Although the Government and Auckland Council will not assist us with the closure now, it is hoped they will assist in the future. The health of the forest is reaching an ecological tipping point, and Te Kawerau ā Maki will act to protect the forest for future generations. Te Kawerau ā Maki subsequently have decided to place a rāhui (customary prohibition) over the Waitākere forest to prevent and control human access until effective and appropriate research, planning and remedial work is completed to ensure the risks are neutralised or controlled.

Rāhui area

The rāhui has been laid over the Waitākere forest itself (the 'ecological catchment') to quarantine or prevent human access. As a matter of tikanga (customs), the purpose of the rāhui is to enable the environment to recuperate and regenerate without the presence and impacts of humans. Its purpose is both physical and spiritual protection. The placement of a rāhui in this situation is focused on the forest (kauri ecology), and is not limited or constrained by infrastructure or property boundaries. As the forest is more than simply the Waitākere Ranges Regional Park, the rāhui will extend beyond the park boundaries. The Waitākere Ranges Heritage Area is the approximate boundary of the rāhui for two reasons: (1) the Waitākere forest can largely be captured within this boundary, and (2) the WRHAA provides legislative support for the protection objectives of the rāhui.

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In acknowledgement of the distribution of the forest and complexities of landuse, the rāhui takes a pragmatic approach. Within the rāhui area/WRHA public access to parks will be completely prohibited. Access will not be restricted to: (1) beaches (nor open spaces adjacent to beaches), (2) the Arataki Visitors Centre, (3) public roads, or (4) private property.

Private Property

The rāhui will cover areas of private property that fall within and are inseparable from the forest/WRHA, but will not impact upon any private property rights or uses. It is hoped that property owners within the rāhui area/WRHA will understand and respect the rāhui and be empowered to act as part of and guardians to the forest. In essence we want to work in partnership and collaboration with property owners to ensure that the threat of kauri dieback is contained and managed within their individual properties to help safeguard the whole.

Controlled Area Notice

Under the Biosecurity Act (1993) a Controlled Area can be established to control unwanted organisms, which kauri dieback (*Phytophthora agathidicida*) is identified as. Controlled Area Notices (C.A.N.) have successfully been enforced elsewhere in New Zealand for other unwanted organisms and diseases. A C.A.N. may enable a number of bespoke control or management methods and resources depending on the particular threat and situation, including limiting or prohibiting human access. Importantly, a C.A.N. provides a legislative framework of control and enforcement. There is good synergy between a C.A.N. and tikanga rāhui.

We call on the Government and Auckland Council to implement a Controlled Area Notice over Waitākere forest to support the rāhui and help fight kauri dieback.

Warrant System

Waitākere forest faces many risks other than kauri dieback, not least of which are invasive weeds and pests. The management of these pests and weeds is also vital to a healthy forest, and subsequently there is a need for some form of wider pest and weed management to continue within the rāhui area. Although the rāhui is a prohibition on human presence and activity, small numbers of managed organisations whose core purpose is protecting the forest may be authorised by the iwi to continue operations in a controlled manner. This will be implemented via a 'warrant' system where selected partner organisations can continue controlled operations in compliance with minimum kauri dieback standards. The warrant system could later be adapted to a C.A.N. framework as well, should the Government and Auckland Council take a supportive position. Further information can be found at www.tekawerau.iwi.nz.

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Audit and Compliance Monitoring

A key component of the rāhui (and C.A.N process) will be to undertake a monitoring programme to ensure all of the measures in place are audited to assess overall public compliance. We will (working with our partners) undertake surveys and surveillance to assess compliance levels across the area.

Rolling Openings

The key concept of the rāhui is to close the forest completely in order to secure it from further human impact, to allow time for the environment to regenerate and to work through a program of risk assessment, mitigation design and implementation, research, and upgrades. Once this work is completed within a specific area, and if the risks are satisfactorily neutralised or controlled, the area may be re-opened to the public. This approach shifts from the current 'rolling-closures' approach to a more proactive and precautionary 'rolling-openings' approach.

We hope that with the assistance of the Government and Auckland Council we may be able to open specific areas to the public as soon as possible.

A Team Effort

Te Kawerau ā Maki are trying to protect the environment for future generations to come, but we need your help. The community can play a huge role in protecting the forest by respecting the rāhui and not entering forested areas, and by sending the message to others. Public education will be key to controlling the spread of kauri dieback, and community support is important if we are to get assistance by the Government and Auckland Council.

Further information can be found at www.kauridieback.co.nz and www.tekawerau.iwi.nz.

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