
Submission to Auckland Council on;
Draft Weed Management Policy for parks and open spaces.
April 2013

“I have been staggered at the massive increase of wattle spreading yearly through these areas... where there were two there are now twenty”

Muriwai Resident

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“...we need to have a 'one-stop-shop' type arrangement with a localised common weed management vision for the park, roads, private land, the forest, the beach...”

Muriwai Resident

Background

The Muriwai Environmental Action Community Trust (MeACT) is an organisation set up in 2011 to bring together residents in an effort to assist with efforts by various agencies to improve the environment in Muriwai and also to initiate projects that will enhance and protect the natural environment in Muriwai

MeACT sees its role is as a facilitator of action for the environment and our community, so we welcome and support anyone who has a great idea and wants to get involved and do good work for the community.

By supporting local projects with funding, management assistance and effective communications we aim to ensure our contribution to the community is effective, valued and long lasting.

Our aim is to encourage anyone who is interested in environmental preservation and our community to join us in developing and implementing a wide variety of exciting projects to enhance our environment for future generations to enjoy.

MeACT is structured as a Registered Charitable Trust with a board of Trustees drawn from individuals in the community who have a shared vision to improve the environment and community.

We engage with over 300 supporters in the community on a regular basis and run a range of working groups, training courses, and projects throughout the year from 'weedbusting' on private property through to working with DOC and Auckland Council on pest control and re-vegetation.

Our philosophy is to..

To be inclusive;

MEACT operates free of a political agenda or a singular ecological philosophy. Members of all ages, interests and levels of experience are welcome to join.

To get things done;

Each year, we want to be able to look back on what we as a group have achieved for the environment, and by association the community, and know that we have made a positive tangible difference.

The development of project plans will be driven by the trustees and managed and implemented by members and supporters of MeACT.

To think long term;

Some projects can potentially require a commitment that may outlast the individual members of the Trust and our goal is to establish the means, both financially and practically, to see these projects through with and for future generations.

“...current road maintenance practices remove vegetation, causing bare patches that are at risk of being colonised by weed species...”

Muriwai Resident

MeACT's Role in Weed Management in Muriwai

Most of our projects focus on pest control of some kind whether it is weeds or animal pests.

We are currently engaged in a major re-vegetation project on public land in Muriwai working with Auckland Council and private funders; in addition we are in the planning stages of setting up a community composting facility to deal with weed and vegetation material both on private and public land to convert it back into compost for the community.

As an organisation we are focused on working with Auckland Council to build on existing resources and budgets to obtain better results for the environment in Muriwai.

Sometimes there are areas where budgets do not allow weed management to take place, and we aim to fill the gap that often see's nothing happen and the weed problem grow worse over time.

Our Submission

We distributed a copy of the draft plan to our supporters for comment and received feedback from a number of residents, some comments were simple, and others provided detailed analysis and suggestions around weed management.

We have put together a submission based on the feedback received from residents and our experience over the last three years working in the community with agencies such as Auckland Council and DOC in the on-going battle against invasive weed species in Muriwai.

The Trusts primary concerns, echoed by feedback from the community, are around:

- Lack of coordination and an Integrated Effective Interagency plan on Weed Management and Eradication. This was a consistent theme in feedback we received.
- Use of Agrichemicals in Weed Management.
- Ensuring Agencies are working closely with interested Community Organisations to ensure both an effective and tailored approach to specifically local issues.
- Auckland Council and it's CCO's working with local Community Organisations to better allocation resources for Weed Management by exploring better ways of sharing the costs and allowing communities to take ownership of their specific weed issues.

“I wonder if a controlled team of un-employed, could be organized by Auckland Council... in conjunction with Government”

Muriwai Resident.

Draft Policy Overview

The draft policy supplied indicates eight areas of focus;

- 1. Take an integrated approach to weed management**
- 2. Ensure best practice in weed management**
- 3. Minimise agrichemical use**
- 4. Minimise non-target impacts of agrichemical use**
- 5. Ensure public health and safety**
- 6. Protect and enhance the environment**
- 7. Empower the community to manage weeds**
- 8. Deliver weed management which is value for money**

MeACT’s comments on main areas of draft policy

1. Take an integrated approach to weed management

We support the proposal to aim for an integrated approach to weed management.

Auckland Council Parks and Recreation departments cannot act in isolation of other agencies such as Auckland Transport, LTSA or MPI for example, as often the efforts of one i.e. mowing of grass verges on roads by Auckland Transport can create a problem for Parks by encouraging spread of weed species.

This should encompass an integrated approach in terms of different agencies and sub-contractors of those agencies actively working together to coordinate efforts to avoid duplication, poor allocation of resources both physical and financial, and agencies acting independently of each other in a way that inadvertently undermines each other efforts.

An integrated approach should also include all agencies involved in weed management sitting down and agreeing on a plan, possibly a five year or ten year plan so there is an agree coordinated approach to weed management.

An integrated approach would assist in delivering on all the other objectives of this policy, especially in the areas of best practice and effective use of budgets.

2. Ensure best practice in weed management

Best Practice needs to occur across all agencies involved in weed management, including contractors employed by Auckland Council and the various CCO’s.

By coordinating efforts and having a joint working group involving all agencies best practice is more likely to be effective.

3. Minimise agrichemical use *and*

4. Minimise non-target impacts of agrichemical use

Both 3 & 4 are of continuing concern to residents in the Muriwai community and was a issue raised by a numbers of respondents in the community.

While sometimes agrichemical applications may be unavoidable and our Trust does use agrichemical's for Weed Control in some circumstances, in every instance this should only be because *all other* options have been exhausted.

Too often it appears that agrichemicals are used by Auckland Council and CCO sub contractors because this is a quick, cheap and easy short term solution. Unfortunately it often does nothing to improve the long term problem and undermines the efforts of residents to engage in their own weed control.

While Auckland Council has detailed agrichemical use policies, sub-contractors don't seem to observe or be constrained by Council policy.

Residents are concerned that discussion about the best long term options for weed control are not being discussed, and the first port of call before agrichemicals are used should be the Community Groups that have a stake in Weed Control.

5. Ensure public health and safety

There have not been high levels of concern raised about H&S in regards to particular plant species causing concern, however there are H&S concerns in regards to agrichemical application – see above.

6. Protect and enhance the environment

Sometimes this basic premise of Weed Management seems to be lost in the fight against weeds. For example road berm management in the Muriwai area has seen sub-contractors damage and kill the native species we are meant to be protecting while undertaking 'weed management'.

7. Empower the community to manage weeds

Auckland Council could in fact deliver on a number of the goals of the draft policy by engagement with Community Organisations such as ours.

The residents have a vested interest in effective weed management but in order for Auckland Council's efforts to be effective long term it needs the support and engagement from local residents.

We have developed some effective working relationships with officers within Council, and feel that this is one area that with minimum cost Council could take it's weed management policy to a different and more effective level.

8. Deliver weed management which is value for money

As a charitable trust that operates effectively hand to mouth the idea of working with Council to develop and effective partnership for weed management in Muriwai is appealing.

We have already raised funds from both private organisations and through applications to Council EIF funds to manage weeds in Muriwai.

Long term it will be a cheaper option for Council to allocate more funds to programs like EIF where Locals have direct 'buy-in' through Community Groups like ours, than by pouring money into the coffers of private sub-contractors whose motivations are not always aligned with effective long term Weed Management.

"...homeowners may take on more responsibility by removing these species if more investment from the council in the form of advocacy and education was made..."

Muriwai Resident

Detailed Comment & suggested Actions on Draft Policy

1. Take an integrated approach to weed management

Prevention

The draft document mentions weed hygiene however current road maintenance practices are causing weed spread e.g. flail mowing cuts weeds such as blue morning glory, plectranthus and tradescantia and enable them to spread as they grow from fragments.

Some current road maintenance practices remove vegetation, causing bare patches that are at risk of being colonised by weed species. It also makes roadside's prone to erosion - photo of Motutara Road after flail mowing.



Actions:

Better analysis and consultation on control practices need to be undertaken at a local level by ALL Agencies to deal with some of the issues caused by sub-contractors.

Control

More environmentally sensitive and cost-saving methods could be considered such as using natural succession from weeds to native plants. This worked well in Waitakere for roads with gorse and could be applied to other areas.

Actions:

Consultation on control practices need to be undertaken at a local level by ALL Agencies directly with Community Groups and those parts of Auckland Council working on the ground such as Parks to ensure a locally tailored program is agreed upon.

Education

Training of all maintenance staff, contractors to ensure they understand how their activity can affect weed spread, control.

Education of community focussing on those that aren't necessarily interested e.g. one neighbour controls their pampas bush but the neighbour directly next to them thinks it's pretty and wants to keep it (as well as the plectranthus, agapanthus, and Japanese honeysuckle).

Actions:

An effectively implemented policy for all agency staff and contractors on weed control and issues around Agrichemical application.

Work with Community Groups to create a long term local weed control program that reaches all residents.

Cooperation

Stakeholder manager for different sections of the roadside corridor would be advantageous.

There needs to be someone from Auckland Transport working closely with AC Biosecurity and Biodiversity for control of weeds on roadsides to work. Roads lead people to some of the more spectacular and sensitive natural environments and therefore should be controlled in a way that does not harm the native flora and fauna. They in turn need to work with the local community.

By effectively working together all agencies and the community will achieve a better more cost effective outcome long term.

As a local resident said in their comments to MeACT;

"I would like to see more cohesion with the different agencies, i.e. Transit, DOC, and Auckland Council in to the management of weeds in the overall scope of the park so that the spread of invasive's [sic] such as Pampas, wild ginger and Woolly nightshade are brought to a halt."

For example, there are areas of Motutara Road that have weeds just establishing but the community cannot get too due to health and safety issues (vehicles travelling round blind corners). A coordinated approach to these areas would be helpful.

Actions:

Auckland Council to consider stakeholder managers for large geographic area to work with agencies and community groups.

Get all agencies to agree on a five or ten year plan with broad objectives so everyone is working towards the same goal.

2. Ensure best practice in weed management

We found that there is some information that is still not available in the pest control guidelines on the old ARC site. It would be good to have these updated, incorporating lessons learned from Auckland Council and feedback from community groups.

Consider assisted natural succession of weeds to native plants i.e. retain native vegetation while controlling weeds that are shade tolerant and leaving those that need light to be eventually shaded out (e.g. gorse).

Work with large private land owners and managers to ensure weed management on their land is not undermining work being done on public land. For example in Muriwai the forest managed by Hancocks has become a 'reservoir' for weed species that are spreading onto public and private land.

In the words of a local resident;

"Hancocks must be forced to attend to the stands of wattle proliferating in their pine crop using the unemployed may be the only way they will agree to get on with their responsibility of weed control...there are many other weeds ...castor oil plant etc establishing in the new plantings area."

Actions:

Update and improve information available on the Auckland Council web site.

Plan for replacement of weeds, not just about their removal.

Ensure private property owners, especially large land holders such as forestry managers are not undermining weed management efforts through inaction.

3. Minimise agrichemical use

4. Minimise non-target impacts of agrichemical use.

By not encouraging weeds and creating habitat for them (bare ground through over spraying, scraping with flail mower) agrichemical use is reduced.

A typical comment from residents would be:

"We across the road from water reservoir at XXX Motutara Road, we do not want any chemical spraying around this area as it could have an impact on our garden which is facing the road and could lead to our vegetables/fruit trees being damaged. Only have an organic garden with free range chooks."

Agencies and their sub-contractors need to respect the wishes of residents who want to maintain 'chemical free' properties and should work via a community liaison officer with local groups to create a clear way of identifying properties that should not be sprayed with agrichemicals and a way for those property owners to control weed species on their roadsides.

Consult better with the community around different options for weed control and the costs involved so residents understand the decisions being made around agrichemical use and are given the opportunity to engage in the decision making process.

Actions:

Ensure 'flail mower' use is effective long term – not indiscriminate.

Consult the community through community groups on agrichemical use and provide a range of control options.

6. Protect and enhance the environment

Some current road maintenance practices are destroying native roadside habitat and allowing colonisation of weeds. It also looks unsightly and can cause erosion.

Some weed species (e.g. pampas, tradescantia) are important habitats for native species e.g. ornate skink. Even in a predominantly native habitat weeds may be the only ground cover there and its control will destroy habitat, leaving a population vulnerable. This is where ways of controlling weeds while maintaining value is a positive thing e.g. a potential bio control agent gradually breaks down tradescantia and lets other plants through, and replaces habitat without kicking the skinks out.

The above points need to be considered with the development of effective community education programs.

Actions:

Ensure all work is actually working towards a long term goal of weed eradication.

Develop effective community education programs.

7. Empower the community to manage weeds

Auckland Council needs to lead by example e.g. roads to Muriwai rife with weeds and the beach is visited by over 1 million people per year.

As mentioned, it can be dangerous for community to control weeds at their property boundary and support from Auckland Council is essential (e.g. blind corners on roads).

One resident commented;

"I have been a resident of Muriwai for the last few years and I'm particularly concerned about the Woolly nightshades growing along Muriwai Road (large matures) and several younger Woolly's growing along Motutara Rd just before Coast Rd on the left hand-side. Many residents need to be informed of the risks these types of invasive species have on not only the health of ecological sensitive bush remnants but also the health of humans. By being proactive, homeowners may take on more responsibility by removing these species if more investment from the council in the form of advocacy and education was made."

Community can help monitor by comments, both good and bad being sent to a stakeholder liaison person.

New residents who move out from the city are often unaware of what species are invasive weeds and native because the environment in Muriwai is quite different from the city. They also are often unaware that their initial efforts can cause more harm than good.

MeACT are currently working on a 'Welcome to Muriwai' kit for new residents to explain about issues such as a septic tank management and where to get help about specific issues that comes with living in a rural area. Weed management will be included in this kit.

Actions:

Auckland Council should be setting an example by ensuring that busy roads in communities are better cared for.

Better support possibly via funding for Community Groups to support resident's efforts to control weeds on private land and a community education program including a 'Welcome to Muriwai' new residents kit.

8. Deliver weed management which is value for money

If weed management is only focused on short term management of weeds, is it going to be value for money especially long term?

We would argue that short term goals that can be quickly and cheaply met by sub-contractors diminish the long term chances of effective coordinated weed reduction and eradication.

Long term some of the actions today will be more costly for Council and by extension rate payers. In order to break the cycle Auckland Council needs to work with community groups where is can to involve those within the communities who wish to work on long term solutions to weed management.

It will be cheaper for everyone long term for direct stakeholders such as residents to manage solutions in partnership with Council and private enterprise through sponsorship and volunteer work and effective weed control on private property, than the reactive approach currently taken by Auckland Council, CCO's and their contractors.

Do sub-contractors have a long term financial interest in permanent weed management solutions?

Actions:

Auckland Council should work in partnership with local stakeholders and allocate funding towards groups who develop long term plans that involve volunteer work and private sponsorship in an effort to create permanent weed management solutions.

Specific Comments and Suggestion on wording of draft policy

1. **Page 4**, second to last paragraph "...the policy aims to influence and empower other landowners to work towards achieving the vision...."
2. **Page 5**, second to last paragraph "...the policy does propose to influence and empower...". This is all good in principle, however how will this occur in reality? Perhaps the policy might need to be strengthened to include financial/manpower/resource assistance for private property owners with land that is located 'proximate' to regional parks.
3. **Page 6**, Figure 1 table - bottom left box might also include "beaches and waterways/streams".
4. **Page 7**, vision statement - needs to include some reference to "replanting with appropriate species" as part of the on-going management after the weeds have been removed. The discussion on Page 7 might also benefit from having a statement along the lines that weed management is not a 'quick fix' and sometimes success might be an intergenerational process, particularly for large areas.
5. **Page 8**, Objectives - support for these, including in particular the "education" and "cooperation" objectives.
6. **Page 12**, "empower the community to manage weeds", fourth paragraph - note that in some cases it is not just 'adjoining' properties, but those that are 'proximate'. For example, in the case of Muriwai, public parkland surrounds our 'village' settlement and we basically live 'within' the wider park landscape, therefore whatever private properties do (or don't do) in terms of weed management will impact on the wider parkland (either positively or negatively).
7. **Pages 14-17**, action plan – this is a good idea this could work for Muriwai so long as we can have a 'one-stop-shop' type arrangement with a localised common weed management vision for the park, roads, private land, the forest, the beach, etc with one person as the point of contact within Auckland Council that is responsible for coordination of all weed/vegetation management within our patch.

We could then map our (MeACT) area of responsibility so that we can communicate this common vision spatially and effectively. This will also help us see what those in our immediate neighbouring areas are doing (or not doing).

Conclusions

MeACT is supportive of the direction of the policy as drafted with supplied submission outlining areas that we think need attention and consideration given to their weighting within the policy.

Areas that Auckland Council should be giving consideration to in this policy are:

- Lack of coordination and an Integrated Effective Interagency plan on Weed Management and Eradication. **Effective communication and coordination and an agreed long term plan** between all agencies, sub-contractors and community groups should be a **minimum requirement** if Auckland Council is serious about managing weeds AND managing the cost of their control long term.
- Use of Agrichemicals in Weed Management, how the community are fairly consulted about their use and respecting the views of people who have concerns about their use and offering a range of alternatives for the community to consider.
- Ensuring Agencies are working closely with interested Community Organisations to ensure both an effective and tailored approach to specific local issues.
- Auckland Council and it's CCO's working with local Community Organisations to better allocation resources for Weed Management by exploring better ways of sharing the costs and allowing communities to take ownership of their specific weed issues and being open minded to partnerships between business, private property owners, community groups and funding agencies in making creative community based decisions around long term weed control.

Submitters Details

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MeACT would like to thank all those in the community who took the time to submit on this issue.

The submission is made up of the feedback received from residents, supporters and members of MeACT

April 2013.