



PRESS RELEASE - for immediate release, 14 November 2017

### **WAITAKERE RANGES RĀHUI REQUIRED TO SAVE WAITAKERE KAURI**

The Tree Council, Waitakere Ranges Protection Society, Forest & Bird and the Friends of Regional Parks all stand with Te Kawerau a Maki in calling for Mayor Phil Goff to implement a Controlled Area Notice under the Biosecurity Act to support a rāhui and temporary closure of the tracks in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park in response to the monitoring figures from Auckland Council's recent survey of kauri dieback infection which show it has more than doubled over 5 years from 8% to 19%. The closure would not affect the roads in the park or popular west coast beaches.

Te Kawerau a Maki has written to Auckland Council asking it to implement a Controlled Area Notice under the Biosecurity Act to support the rāhui which the iwi says it will implement before Christmas.

A stakeholder group including all parties plus recreation group and concession holder representatives have been meeting with Council for 6 months but no action has yet resulted and patience is wearing thin.

"Everyone agrees that the rāhui is required before Auckland's forest is inundated with summer visitors and yet the Council continues to drag its heels and make excuses. It's not good enough" said The Tree Council's spokesperson Dr Mels Barton.

"The tracks are in a terrible state and by Council's own admission the current design of the cleaning stations are ineffective. They need to urgently close the tracks in the forest and make a significant investment to upgrade infrastructure so that it is safe to let people back in" said Waitakere Ranges Protection Society President John Edgar.

"This is a precautionary, temporary and essential measure to protect our natural heritage in Auckland's most important and well used native bush" said Friends of Regional Parks Chair Bronwen Turner.

"Auckland Council has a duty to protect the rest of the country's forests from the spread of this infection out of the Waitakeres and into Northland, Coromandel and other locations" said Forest and Bird's spokesperson Nick Beveridge.

The Auckland Council report states that local extinction of kauri in areas like Piha, where the infection is worst, is highly likely within 5 years unless urgent and drastic action is taken now. Extinction of kauri across the entire Waitakere Ranges is possible within a generation.

It is clear the infection is being spread mainly by people, rather than wild animals, as the majority of the infection is along the track network and worst in the areas with heaviest foot

traffic. Compliance by people with phytosanitary measures to scrub and spray shoes, dog feet, tyres and equipment is low and falling.

Auckland Council's own report states that by continuing to allow recreational use that knowingly spreads this Unwanted Organism to uninfected areas the Council is breaching the Biosecurity Act.

The Tree Council, the Waitakere Ranges Protection Society, Forest & Bird and Friends of Regional Parks call on Mayor Phil Goff and Auckland Council to use the precautionary principle and close the tracks in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park using a Controlled Area Notice until they can implement an urgent programme of essential actions required to protect kauri and save them from extinction within the park:

1. Close the tracks in the Regional Park until the following actions are implemented. This includes closing the Hillary Trail, which is a major source of infection. Tracks with infected kauri can be reopened once protective measures 4 and 5 are fully implemented on those tracks, with exemptions to be made only for people who are specially warranted;
2. Close all tracks to healthy kauri immediately, until new knowledge tells us it is safe to reopen them;
3. Apply enforcement measures to people using closed tracks;
4. Accelerate the programme of building boardwalks and "dry" tracks to get people's feet off kauri roots on tracks;
5. Implement improved cleaning station design to make avoidance difficult and staff cleaning stations to educate track users about the importance of hygiene measures;
6. Stop events like the Hillary Trail Marathon taking place on tracks with kauri and move to locations without these precious trees;
7. Implement a programme of phosphite treatment on public land to keep individual trees alive.

The cost of fully implementing the urgent actions required by Auckland Council will be around \$50 million and the Council needs additional government funding to support this work. We call on Mayor Phil Goff and Ministers O'Connor, Parker, Davis and Sage to work together to make this funding available. Enforcement action needs to be taken against people breaching the biosecurity controls in the park.

"We must take drastic action now" says The Tree Council's Secretary Dr Mels Barton. "The current measures are not working and infection rates have more than doubled in 5 years as a result of inadequate investment. When the required actions have been undertaken to keep kauri safe the tracks can be reopened."

Annalily van den Broeke, Chair of Forest & Bird Waitakere supports this. "Kauri dieback disease is one of the most serious biosecurity issues facing the upper North Island. We support Te Kawerau a Maki in their call for a rāhui and Controlled Area Notice to ensure the future and habitat of our native flora and fauna. To ensure that pest management programmes will be able to continue to protect the birds a system with warrants would work well within a rāhui/CAN situation."

**Comment:**

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**Links:**

<http://www.thetreecouncil.org.nz>

<http://www.waitakereranges.org.nz>

<http://www.forestandbird.org.nz>

<http://www.forparks.org.nz>