

## Agencies Join Forces to Fight Kauri Disease

Six government agencies have joined forces to try to stop the spread of a disease that affects kauri trees.

The newly identified disease – Kauri dieback (*Phytophthora taxon Agathis* or PTA) – has been confirmed attacking trees in Northland, Auckland and on Great Barrier Island.

The six agencies – MAF Biosecurity New Zealand (MAFBNZ), the Department of Conservation (DoC) and four regional councils (Auckland Regional Council, Northland Regional Council, Environment Bay of Plenty and Environment Waikato) – have set up a response team to identify and manage the risks to kauri.

Kauri is a nationally and regionally significant species that is a taonga of great significance to Māori and has cultural value for many New Zealanders. Kauri are part of New Zealand's history and an essential part of the ecosystem as the forests are home to many other trees, plants and threatened wildlife.

PTA, or kauri dieback as it's more commonly known, is a serious threat to kauri forests and individual kauri trees in the upper North Island. Believed to be a soil-borne disease caused by a soil pathogen, PTA is specific to kauri and can kill trees and seedlings of all ages.

It is believed to be spread mainly through soil and soil water movement, and it is strongly suspected PTA can be transferred by people, tracked from place to place on shoes, equipment and tyres.

PTA has been found at sites in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park and at DoC reserves at Great Barrier and Trounson Kauri Park in Northland. Symptoms of kauri dieback have also been observed in other areas within the greater Auckland region.

Until more is known about PTA, one of the strongest chances of containing it lies with public education. The Joint Agency Response team has been liaising with iwi, local councils and landowners in the upper North Island, as well as members of the public using kauri areas, asking for their help in stopping the disease from spreading further.



A thinning canopy on a sick Kauri tree

Information sheets and track signs have been distributed encouraging simple behaviours people can adopt right now to stop further spread – namely keeping to defined tracks in parks and reserves, and cleaning footwear and tyres, or any other equipment that comes into contact with soil, before and after leaving kauri forest areas.

A specially created website – [www.kauridieback.co.nz](http://www.kauridieback.co.nz) – and a 0800 number have also been set up (0800 NZ KAURI).

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*Photos courtesy of Auckland Regional Council*

## The 10th International Symposium on the Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms, Wellington, November 2008

More than 260 scientific researchers, regulators, policy makers, industry and non-government organisation representatives from 34 countries came together to exchange knowledge, experiences and results of the latest research on the safety of genetically modified organisms. This was a fantastic information-sharing opportunity for New Zealand researchers, iwi/Māori and regulators as New Zealand has one of the strictest regulatory regimes for GM in the world.

ERMA New Zealand played a significant role in supporting, organising and participating in the symposium. Authority members Kieran Elborough and Max Suckling both gave presentations and ERMA New Zealand staff members ran regulator workshops. Ngā Kaihautū Tikanga Taiao Tumuaki, Glenice Paine, and member Darcia Solomon also attended. There was a media session and an evening forum open to all members of the public. Several journalists attended the media session and produced some positive articles and radio interviews.

An interesting presentation on the monitoring of GM crops and how they are controlled was a highlight. Different countries used different methods to do this which led to valuable sharing of information. All the speakers said more research needed to be done. Genetic modification may have benefits to offer, but this fast moving technology is also perceived by many as risky.

Although this was the first visit to New Zealand for some participants, many were only able to stay for the duration of the symposium and they made the most of it. Participants were often seen taking in the sights of Te Papa during their spare time. The symposium began with a pōwhiri held in the museum's beautiful marae. This was the first and only experience of Māori customs for many of the overseas delegates and most seemed to enjoy the occasion, although the prospect of a hongi had several people feeling a little anxious the night before!