

# 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 as 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 among the world's tallest trees and once covered much of the upper North Island. They are part of New Zealand's history, and an essential part of the ecosystem as they are home to many other trees, plants and threatened wildlife.

A collaborative effort is needed to ensure the survival of kauri as a species. The six agencies working together to protect kauri, known as the Joint Agency Response team, have committed to co-ordinating a management approach across all land in affected regions.

While each agency involved has unique expertise to offer the response, all share a common mandate to protect New Zealand's environmental, social and cultural values.

PTA, or kauri dieback as it's more commonly known, is a serious threat to kauri forest 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. Affected trees show yellowing leaves, canopy thinning, dead

branches and lesions that bleed resin across the lower part of the trunk.

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.

Formally identified in April 2008, this *Phytophthora* is new to science and there is limited information on its impacts, how it spreads and effective treatments, and there is currently no known cure. A technical advisory group (TAG) has been established to provide the Joint Agency Response team with information and advice as to the biology, ecology and potential surveillance and management tools for this *Phytophthora*. The TAG has identified areas of research that need to be undertaken so that a better understanding of the disease is obtained and appropriate measures are put in place to manage it.

"This information will allow us to develop future management plans and a co-ordinated way forward that ensures kauri ecosystems and individual trees are protected. We are aiming to have these plans finalised by the end of February," Joint Agency Response Manager Fiona Bancroft says.

The Joint Agency Response team has prioritised immediate research in three particular areas: getting good methodology in place by optimising sampling and diagnostic techniques; defining symptoms that can be linked to PTA; and developing detailed best practices, including control/hygiene methods to limit any



Canopy thinning and bleeding lesions on kauri trees as a result of kauri dieback. Photo courtesy Auckland Regional Council.

further spread. The research will be contracted and take place over the coming months as environmental conditions make it feasible.

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.

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) – has been set up by the Joint Agency Response team to provide more information, including details about particular regions. A free phone number – 0800 NZ KAURI – has also been set up so that the most up-to-date information is readily available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Joint Agency Response team is striving to ensure the integrity of kauri ecosystems, protect high value kauri areas and iconic kauri trees.

■ Lisa Gibbison, Communications Adviser, MAFBNZ, [lisa.gibbison@maf.govt.nz](mailto:lisa.gibbison@maf.govt.nz)