

## SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS: CAULERPA RESPONSE

Hauraki Gulf Forum, 12 June 2023

### *Acknowledgements*

We acknowledge the matters set out in the letter sent to ministers by Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea together with Ngāti Hei in May. Until recently MPI's processes and governance have failed to properly reflect the concerns of both ahi kā and the community on Aotea.

We acknowledge the tireless work of Local board Chair Izzy Fordham on the governance group to date as the only Aotea resident included.

We acknowledge the people of Okupu and the western bays of Aotea who have been directly affected by this infestation and those whose vigilance led to its discovery in the first place, and the work of Glen Edney in recording the spread of this marine scourge in Schooner Bay as part of the Aotea Ahu Moana project.

We echo concerns about the slowness of the response and the poor and slow response from councils.

### *Context*

- The quality of Aotea's marine environment is recognised in the Auckland Unitary Plan – in particular, Port Fitzroy and the north east coast of Aotea
- There are 350kms of coastline.
- Aotea is still home to at least 7 species of seabird, including tākoketai/black petrel (primary breeding site), Cook's petrel/tītī, grey faced petrel/oī, gannets (the largest colony in the region on Mahuki), kororā/penguins, diving petrels/kuaka, and fluttering shearwaters. Birds breeding on the Mokohinau group and Cuvier/Repanga also fish in Aotea's western waters.
- Caulerpa is the 4<sup>th</sup> invasive species to be detected in Aotea waters in recent years – sea squirt, fan worm, Asian Paddle crab were the first three.
- Aotea is a sentinel site for Aotearoa for marine invasives – due to the prevailing currents and winds and the patterns of yacht movement
- Yet there is no regular MPI surveillance of our waters and only annual visits from an Auckland Council divers
- Caulerpa was discovered by a botanist in a kayak and paddle crabs by a local doing cockle surveys with his kids at the local primary school who happens to be a marine biologist
- Chris Olivier told us this morning it's already round the south coast and on the reefs off Tryphena.

### *Issues of concern on Aotea*

- Huge concern, anger – and now grief – over the further spread around the coast, to the south coast, and to Port Fitzroy and the Broken Islands, in particular, and Port Abercrombie,

Rangiwahakaea Bay, Waikaro Point, Rakitū, Harataonga, all other anchorages around the island. **Just follow the yachts and the dredges.**

- Impact on fish stocks and on marine biodiversity – the dramatic reduction found to have occurred in other sites (estimated at up to **50% of Fish Biomass** in the Mediterranean) would be **catastrophic for seabirds, for fish species relied upon for food, for the recovery of scallops and koura.**
- **Preventing further spread around the coast of Aotea** – understanding the potential vectors, and putting structured and well-resourced surveillance in place in anticipation of spread.
- **Eradication** – if it is possible, how it will be done and how the community will be involved in the process (in the water and on the land)
- **Engagement and communication with the community** – this has to date been very poor, especially in relation to removal of beachcast caulerpa at Okupu and ongoing surveillance and management.
- Opportunities for **use of the extracted caulerpa biomass** – there are many innovative businesses who are actively setting up for this on Aotea, which is a leader in sustainability practices.
- The need for an **Aotea marine biosecurity surveillance and response capability** – with benefits for the wider HGMP. If Aotea was a dairy farm, we would be wall to wall with biosecurity and surveillance by now to stop the spread of this ecosystem catastrophe.
- Instead, Aotea detected it, and then **waited almost 2 years**, while \$3m was spent on governance that lacked sufficient input from ahi kaa or community, loss of trust, and has led to **uncontrolled spread** around the south eastern coastline of Aotea.
- At this point, given the spread outside the Controlled Areas already detected, and the slowness to trial multiple removal tools in and off the water, it is as if **Aotea has been abandoned.**

*What do we want to see from the Forum?*

We thank the Forum for the opportunity for MPI, Auckland, Northland and Waikato regional council representatives, tangata whenua and community representatives to come together to discuss this crisis. **This is the first time that this has happened.** Please continue to bring the parties together in this way.

We thank the Forum for the resolutions that it has drafted on this matter. However we ask you to go further and to use your influence to call for:

1. A new, cross-agency **collaborative response model** to enable local surveillance, control and possible eradication. The current model has failed and endangers the Park.
2. Immediate release of **funding to establish an Aotea specific response project**, with locally based management, surveillance equipment and diving capability, training and compliance, and access to the full range of proven control and removal tools.

3. As a precaution, **ban the use of all bottom contact fishing methods (dredge, trawl and bottom long lining) along the west coast of Aotea and near other suspected sites**, until there is data on the depth caulerpa can grow to in our waters and exclusion zones can be defined.

*What do we want to see from the central and local government?*

**1. Containment and eradication must be attempted immediately to contain the spread:**

- a. Accept the offer of technology and support from California and immediately begin a pilot of removal from the known Aotea sites
- b. Simultaneously begin the eradication of caulerpa from Great Mercury and Bay of Islands sites
- c. Establish a coordinated but locally focused eradication programme structure that ensures local ownership and that lessons learned can be quickly adopted elsewhere.

**2. Immediate increase in surveillance to prevent further spread:**

- a. Around Aotea – at the most likely spread sites, following likely pathways, and around the northern New Zealand Coast at probable anchorages e.g. Kawau, Coromandel, Northland coast.
- b. Build locally based surveillance capability at each site to ensure local capacity is fully leveraged and teams can access the tools and science available
- c. Tools to support community, iwi, commercial fishing, boating and other interests to be alert for and report the spread and to share information on detection.

**3. A fit for purpose whole of Government response that is proportionate to the scale of the impact of this incursion:**

- a. Provide for an immediate Caulerpa Response budget in the order of A Rena, fruit fly or *Mycoplasma bovis* response, to ensure the eradication and surveillance activity required can begin now
- b. Quantify the economic damage to the regional and national economy of a wider infestation
- c. Conduct an Impact Assessment of a wider infestation on cultural values, fisheries, marine biodiversity and the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park
- d. Re-engineer the governance and programme structures to reflect the need for:
  - i. rapid local response and governance
  - ii. technical operational oversight and coordination
  - iii. mana whenua interests across multiple sites
  - iv. science-based monitoring and evaluation of how caulerpa behaves in NZ waters
  - v. broader community engagement in the risks and response.

Thank you for your time today.

*Kate Waterhouse, Chair*

*Barry Scott, FRNZ, Trustee*