Pollution in paradise - Little O stream a shocker

This is the first time I have ever written to the editor of a paper about anything, but this morning while walking with my friend I had the opportunity of looking over the bridge at Little Oneroa.

The sight that met my eyes both saddened and horrified me - old tyres, numerous plastic bottles and several broken pipes feeding into the revolting murky water. Obviously the stream has suffered some kind of erosion since I last looked. This has undermined the trees closest to the edge.

My family come to Waiheke every year from Germany. The highlight for them has always been to spend as much time as possible on the beach at Little Oneroa. The talk when they arrive back in Germany is about the waves, the beach, the playground, the shop, the grass and yes, the ducks. Please would the council make it a priority to clean it up before 1 February when the family arrive again?

It is meant to be the show place for our clean green image. At the moment it is certainly not.

Sandra Alley, Surdale

Part of nature

The call to stop using chemical herbicides at Whakanewha by Meriel Watts has opened a timely debate.

The keys to successful manual weed management are understanding that we are part of nature, how natural processes work, and that it takes time to tip the balance back to healthy ecosystems. We can make the change, if we understand how.

Once grasped that our most dangerous weeds are the stranglers (moth plant, honeysuckle and asparagus), and that there are beneficial weeds commonly perceived as ‘bad’ we are on the way to managing our problem.

With due regard to Andy Spence, the “beautiful wetland sequences you now see on the Whakanewha foreshore” are artificial and not providing adequate ecological protection to this vulnerable edge where run-off water should be filtered of contaminants before it enters the tidal zone.

A natural restoration of this ecotone, where two plant communities integrate, rather than mowed and sprayed grass, would bring back shoreline plants such as pohuehue, manuka and flax.

Spraying gorse and woolly nightshade populating sunny grassland only exacerbates the problem, allowing invasive weeds such as moth plant to enter the picture. Left alone, woolly nightshade overshadows gorse which becomes nitrogenous litter, further enriched by woolly nightshade leaves, creating a nursery bed for myriad native seeds transported by natural processes (birds, wind) from nearby bush. A diverse and ecologically appropriate new forest is born. These groves have an energy that will never be found in the ‘sprayed dead then planted’ scenario.

It is equally crucial to understand how ghastly that Monsanto invention glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, and other ‘safe’ and ‘convenient herbicides’ can be. Wake up Waiheke, glyphosate products are banned in the Netherlands and France, with Brazil soon to follow, and Sri Lanka and El Salvador both also trying to totally ban it, because the insidious long term effects to health are devastating.

Land use reflects land values. Let’s give our island the respect it deserves.

Daphne Mitten, Rangihoua

Ticket prices

Will the approximate 16 per cent decline in average gasoline prices over the past four months lead to any ticket price reductions from Fullers? After all, we’ve lost count the number of times they’ve announced immediate increases following a rise in the price of oil.

If no reduction now, why not?

Stephen Picard, Oneroa

Plum duff?

We have three koreru pigeon on our plum tree nearly every night. First they eat most of the blossoms on the plum tree, now they are gobbling up all the green plums - over a period of weeks, of course. Do you think they would make a good plum duff for Christmas?

Peter Green, Oneroa
long term detrimental effects on human health and the environment.

And for those who argue that chemicals are a cheaper option their use is, in effect, a “deferred” cost as down the track we create a polluted, degraded environment. Vast amounts of money is then poured into trying to restore fish stocks and making rivers and beaches safe for swimming. Not to mention the adverse effects to health, despite Andy’s (unprovable) claim that “thousands have enjoyed the park with no ill effects as a result of the use of glyphosate / Roundup”.

Jo Davies, Rocky Bay

Forwarding the debate

Thank you to both Andy Spence and John Smed for their thoughtful letters on weed management. It is a timely opportunity for this long overdue debate. Firstly John, there is a long history of successful non-chemical weed management on Waiheke, throughout New Zealand and around the world. Landcare Research has some good programmes in this area. I can certainly demonstrate some methods and it would be an excellent idea to involve Gary Wilton as you suggest. The weed advisory group WRAP has been discussing the idea of a public workshop on weed management, in conjunction with the Local Board and Council.

Part of that would be identifying what weeds really do need to be controlled. I agree that references are of prime importance, but there are too many to put in a letter. Can I therefore direct you (and anyone else who is interested) to the Weed Management Advisory: http://weedmanagementadvisory.wordpress.com. There you will find, under Reports and Papers, my 2009 monograph on glyphosate (Roundup), plus the 2012 update. These have more than 350 references. A 2014 update is needed because of the phenomenal number of new scientific papers showing adverse effects of glyphosate.

The problem with putting glyphosate on kikuyu at the edge of a wetland is that some of that glyphosate ends up in the wetland and is washed out into the wider marine environment.

Glyphosate is now widely recognised in the scientific world as destabilising aquatic ecosystems. Because glyphosate contains phosphate, its partial breakdown results in the release of phosphate which acts as a nutrient to some algal species; yet glyphosate is toxic to other phytoplankton, diatoms and microorganisms, resulting in a destabilising of the aquatic ecosystem, long-term population shifts, turbid water and algal blooms. It is also toxic to crabs, tadpoles and fish. Auckland’s marine sediments already have a high loading of glyphosate because of years of over-enthusiastic use.

It’s time Waiheke stopped adding to that loading, especially if we think a marine reserve is a good idea, and started providing a model for how to treat aquatic ecosystems.

Another unfortunate ecological effect of glyphosate is its tendency to encourage the growth of root rot pathogens Phytophthora and Pythium. Anyone remotely connected with the walking festival will now be aware that Phytophthora is not a good idea in our native bush (think kauri die-back disease). Andy, you said that thousands have enjoyed Whakanewha with no ill effects from herbicide use. With respect, you wouldn’t have a clue if that is true or not. You would know if someone dropped down dead at the feet of a sprayer, but you would not know if someone got breast cancer, skin cancer, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, reduced testosterone, kidney disease, gut dysbiosis, birth defects, headaches or one of a number of other effects that may result from exposure to glyphosate (references can be provided for those effects not described in the monograph).

In recent years, we have unfortunately developed a cultural belief that all weeds are bad and that a chemical herbicide is the only way to manage them. This has resulted in such a dependency on glyphosate that in the US it contaminates groundwater, rivers, streams, rainfall and breast milk. It probably does here too; we haven’t looked yet.

On a more positive note. It was good to see the article on the biological control for honeysuckle. That is a great way to go. There are biological controls available for a number of other weeds on Waiheke, and I look forward to more releases that can help clean up the unwanted weeds without damaging our health, environment or wallets.

Meriel Watts, Te Whau

Beyond expectations

Please pass on a big thank you to the people of Waiheke Island for the most wonderful walking festival. My husband and I came from Sydney, Australia to ex-