

Pukekura Park trees may have kauri rot

By MATT RILKOFF - Taranaki



photo - MARK DWYER/Taranaki Daily News
ROT SUSPECTED: Pukekura Park curator Chris Connolly

A ruthless tree killer could already be destroying New Plymouth's much loved kauri stand in Brooklands Park.

Though not native to Taranaki, a stand of approximately 200 kauri have been healthy residents in the park since they were planted in 1935.

But just days ago, six were found with suppurating lesions at the base of their trunks, one of the symptoms of kauri rot - the disease ravaging kauri forests in Northland and Auckland.

Other symptoms of the often fatal disease include yellowing leaves and dead branches.

"At this stage we don't know if it is or isn't," said Pukekura Park curator Chris Connolly yesterday.

"We are concerned about it and we need to be cautious about it. It would be a tragedy to lose these trees."

It is suspected the *Phytophthora* taxon agathis disease, also known as kauri dieback, can be spread through the dirt on the bottom of shoes.

If that is the case, it is possible it reached New Plymouth on the footwear of trampers or walkers who had recently been in infected areas in the north.

Most of the bleeding trees are beside or near the well-used walking track that runs parallel to Brooklands Rd. "This is all conjecture at this point.

"We're not sure how it is spread and we don't know if the disease in the north is connected with what is happening in the trees here," Mr Connolly said.

Tissue samples would be taken from the trees if that was recommended by the New Zealand Forest Research Institute and further action would depend on test results.

Whether the bleeding trunks here and the dying trees in the north are connected or not, the pathogen has attracted the attention of Green Party Biosecurity spokesman Kevin Hague.

He is urging the Government to institute an awareness campaign to prevent the spread of kauri rot by restricting movements around affected stands of trees and by strict cleaning of boots and tyres.

"Kauri rot is the didymo of the forest and it's now time for the Government to step up to the plate and address this threat to our heritage with urgency," he said.