

Report on Biosecurity Advocacy on Ferries in the Hauraki Gulf Jan/Feb 2015



A report for the Auckland Council Biosecurity-Environmental Sciences Division

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1.0 Introduction

The Hauraki Gulf marine park is one of New Zealand's national treasures. It brings many aesthetic, environmental, social and economic values to the Auckland Region and New Zealand. The Hauraki Gulf Marine Park has been the fruition of many years work by the Auckland Council and Department of Conservation collaborating in the Treasure Islands initiative. Considerable ongoing effort is being made to create as many of these islands as possible as 'Pest-free' habitats for New Zealand endangered native species (Auckland Council, Department of Conservation & Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, 2015).

However, as most of these islands can be accessed freely by private vessels and public ferries, maintaining this pest-free status and the high standard of values of the Hauraki Gulf Islands is difficult due to the high risk of introduction or re-introduction of a range of invasive species (Auckland Council, Department of Conservation & Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, 2015).

The Treasure Islands initiative is a mechanism for education of the public about the value of the islands of the Hauraki Gulf as well as providing information and actions as to how the public can contribute to this cause by checking for stowaways and, therefore, reducing the risk of transport of invasive species to islands.

As such, the effectiveness of the communication in the Treasure Islands advocacy role is essential for the success of this initiative to allow the dissemination of knowledge to the public in a manner that will stimulate a change in their behaviour by checking for pest species before travelling to the islands. In a study by Tyrell (2012), it would appear that public awareness of biosecurity risks and knowledge of preventative actions had risen in Auckland residents since the previous survey in 2009/2010. It was suggested in this study that this increase in awareness was due to the advocacy efforts implemented under the Treasure Islands campaign. Therefore, the need to continue this advocacy role is vital for the future protection of the islands of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park as well as public awareness of the collaboration and conservation initiatives of Auckland Council and the Department of Conservation.

2.0 Aims/objectives

The aim of the Treasure Islands advocacy position in January/February 2015 was to communicate with passengers on the Hauraki Gulf ferries with the objective of increasing public awareness of the biosecurity risks to the islands of the Hauraki Gulf. In addition, the aim was to provide members of the public with knowledge and skills which will enable them in the future to contribute to the protection of the islands of the Hauraki Gulf from incursions of invasive species.

3.0 Methods

A total of 24 days between 23rd December 2014 and 26th February 2015 were spent in provision of an advocacy service aboard a number of ferry companies; Fullers, Sealink & 360 Discovery, to the islands of the Hauraki Gulf; Rotoroa Island, the Coromandel Peninsula, Great Barrier Island and Rangitoto Island. Communication was initiated with passengers during this period with the aims of discussing biosecurity risk for the islands of the Hauraki Gulf.

The following points outline the key initiatives during this advocacy role.

- The key messages promoted to the public were the biosecurity risk to the islands of the Hauraki Gulf, to educate the public to “*check for stowaways*” and why this is important and the actions they can adopt to “Protect the Treasured Islands of the Hauraki Gulf”
- An active attempt was made to engage with each group of passengers and raise the awareness of Biosecurity measures and the “*Treasure Islands*” programme. Distribution of information brochures on *Rainbow Skinks*, *Argentine Ants*, *Kauri Die back*, and *the Hauraki Gulf* were provided to those with specific interests.
- An effort was made to communicate effectively with members of the public on the ferries, at the wharves and also while walking along tracks on the various island locations, in order to reach as many people as possible.
- Treasure Island promotional hat and shirt as well as Auckland Council identification was worn with a high visibility biosecurity monitoring vest.

- Multiple piers along the Auckland waterfront were visited; the Fullers piers, 360 Discovery Piers, and the Sealink Piers, and communication was initiated before boarding the ferries.
- Priority was directed towards people potentially posing the greatest risk such as people and vehicles with “*High risk*” commodity loads such as building materials, plants and domestic animals. This included many Great Barrier Island residents or relations, trampers and campers who were a risk of spreading Kauri Die and invasive species.

4.0 Results

Communication was initiated with a total of 911 ferry passengers during the period of 23 December 2014 to 26 February, 2015. Of these, 185 passengers went to Rotoroa Island or the Coromandel Peninsula using the 360 Discovery ferry company lines, 543 passengers were on Fullers ferries to Rangitoto Island and 183 were on Sealink ferries to Great Barrier Island (Table 1).

Table 1: Interactions of passengers traveling via ferry to the various island destinations per sailings each day.

| Number of interactions per sailing various locations | Rotoroa / Coromandel | Rangitoto | Great Barrier |
|--|----------------------|-----------|---------------|
| | 54 | 42 | 28 |
| | 36 | 54 | 3 |
| | 24 | 32 | 50 |
| | 27 | 27 | 27 |
| | 16 | 25 | 26 |
| | 28 | 30 | 49 |
| | | 51 | |
| | | 47 | |
| | | 40 | |
| | | 36 | |
| | | 26 | |
| | | 22 | |
| | | 111 | |
| Average interactions per sailing (per day) | 31 | 42 | 31 |
| Total (911 interactions) | 185 | 543 | 183 |

The following are a list of comments in relation to methodology of communication, success of the communication technique and response of the public to the Treasure Islands advocacy message.

4.1. Comments on role of advocacy

- a. In general the message was well received by passengers and a high degree of interest resulted from initiation of communication. Some children were particularly interested as conservation has become part of the school curriculum. However, many were distracted by the sights and excitement of a day out. It was observed over the course of this summer that passengers travelling to the same island in general had similar knowledge of biosecurity and its risk. Rangitoto visitors were generally young family parties or young or elderly couples who appeared to know very little about biosecurity efforts. Great Barrier residents and relatives had extensive knowledge of biosecurity protocols but had conflicting ideas as to what should be done in the future. Rotoroa/ Corromandel visitors were middle aged families and couples who were generally appreciative of conservation initiatives and willing and open to learn more about conservation and biosecurity actions and plans.
- b. Generally people were curious but assumed initially, especially on Rangitoto, that the work was being done by DoC due to the branding on the high-vis vest. At times, this helped to initiate conversations with passengers. There was a less positive and more sceptical response to Auckland Council compared with DOC, mostly on Rangitoto.
- c. Most respondents were appreciative of the effort being made for the upkeep and protection of the Hauraki Gulf Islands. However, a handful of businessmen (one in particular on the Rangitoto summit) objected that the council were spending money on initiatives that they deem as 'unnecessary'.
- d. Visitors to Rangitoto were often 'spur of the moment' travellers due to the easy access from Auckland. These passengers were typically young family groups that travelled with open, unchecked, possibly old bags and dirty shoes that could have picked up invasive species such as seeds or harmful microbes. Their understanding of the biosecurity risk appeared to be limited.

- e. Confusion was often encountered with the term 'Treasure Islands' as people, particularly overseas visitors, associated this with the novel or Pirates of the Caribbean.
- f. Branded clothing: reactions were generally positive to the high-vis vest and established curiosity from the 'Conservation dogs' branding on the vest, which helped initiate communication with passengers.

4.2 Approach of interviewees

It was noted that different approaches yielded different results in the willingness of individuals to stand and listen, take note of what was being said and take the message to heart.

- a. It was found that too direct an approach often resulted in a somewhat defensive, quick chat with minimal cooperation on the interviewees' part. It appeared that jumping straight into the desired topic led to guarded looks as if to say "what does she want from me & when will she go away?" and less positive interaction.
- b. A softer approach resulted in the best outcomes, by approaching and enquiring about the passengers and their intentions for the. Results of these interactions were more favourable with participants being more approachable and an increased likelihood to communicate. This raised the interest of the individual and allowed the conversation to be directed towards the desired discussion.
- c. A handshake directed towards less inclined persons broached the standoff divide and usually resulted in effective communication.
- d. Not approaching passengers also proved to be a productive strategy, as it made passengers take the initiative to engage and make the first approach out of curiosity. This was usually initiated after eye contact with the individual and a warm smile directed their way. Being approached by passengers meant that they showed the most open communication and were the least defensive of passengers when conversing about the Treasure Island goals.
- e. Passengers have been more receptive when they had time to sit and chat during the sailings. They were less receptive to communicate when time pressures only allowed the provision of promotional information

4.3 Knowledge base assessment

- a. There appeared to be an overall lack of understanding of the Treasure Island brand and the overall aim of the program, especially travellers to Rangitoto Island. The most knowledgeable were people from or visiting relatives on Great Barrier Island. The people going to the Coromandel Peninsula were most knowledgeable about Kauri Dieback but lacked other biosecurity knowledge.
- b. Once engaged in conversation, most people knew the fundamentals of biosecurity as experienced mainly from the airport and were eager to learn more about island biosecurity. However, use of biosecurity language and terminology was a barrier to effective communication at time, as some terms were completely foreign and needed extra explanation.
- c. There was a risk of overloading people with too much information resulting in a loss of interest.

5.0 Discussion/ Recommendations.

5.1 Role of Advocacy:

The advocacy role on ferries was found to be an excellent opportunity for the educating of the public and increased awareness of the biosecurity risk to the islands of the Hauraki Gulf. It is recommended that this Auckland Council biosecurity advocacy role is continued, particularly during the summer months when passenger numbers are at an annual peak. It is also suggested that a representative or spokesperson be appointed as a biosecurity advocate on the islands for the ongoing communication of the biosecurity message. On busy sailings it is recommended that a Council representative continue to travel with the passengers on the ferries to allow time to engage in effective advocacy.

To avoid the confusion regarding "Treasure Islands", it is suggested that the brand be changed to "Our Treasured Islands" of the Hauraki Gulf, as this concept was better understood by the public. A local Great Barrier Island couple sailing around the island made a suggestion that, due to unreliable internet connection over the island, that resident awareness may be increased by posting biosecurity updates on Great Barriers weekly paper along with information on pest species and their threats such

as including rainbow skinks & Argentine ants. As long as these posts are free of charge, it is suggested that this would be a good opportunity to expand to other local publications in the Auckland area.

Due to issues in the past of access to passengers on the wharves, it is suggested that ongoing communication is maintained with the security staff in these locations.

5.2 Approach to Public:

It was apparent that people responded better to the messages if they initiated the approach to the biosecurity representative. However, this should not be the only form of approach, as people may be apprehensive about approaching but, with some gentle prompting, can become eagerly engaged in discussion. Spending time at the start of a conversation showing interest in the interviewee is vital for positive engagement. Approaching with a handshake and a smile reaches most people and breaks the ice in initiating the conversation.

In numerous situations, people were very interested to learn about the biosecurity success stories and how these were achieved. Full briefing of the interviewer on these successes would greatly help in promoting the positivity of the work being done.

Many Great Barrier residents were vocal and knowledgeable about biosecurity efforts and were very keen to give recommendations as to future endeavours. It is recommended that this interaction is encouraged by public meetings on the islands as well as the posting of articles in the local island paper.

Visual communication on clothing in a positive context, such as 'Help with island conservation & biosecurity' may increase interest and appeal to the public.

5.3 Knowledge Base:

It would appear that, apart from Great Barrier Island residents, there was a lack of knowledge of biosecurity risk to the islands of the Hauraki Gulf and actions that the public can undertake to reduce this risk. Although most people are aware of general biosecurity strategies undertaken at the airport, this did not seem to be extrapolated

to other situations, such as the Hauraki Gulf Islands. Therefore, this advocacy role is seen as being a pivotal strategy for the education of the public in biosecurity and the protection of the unique island habitats. To enable early exposure of visitors and residents to the idea of island biosecurity, it is suggested that 'Our Treasured Islands' is promoted at the domestic and international airports and other public transport services such as buses and taxis.

A good working relationship has been established with the Sealink boat crew and shore staff of 360 Discovery and Fullers, thus the cooperation from these companies facilitate the use of these implemented strategies and promotional messages and could be increased in the future.

Although the posters on wharfs and boats are interesting, additional simple messages are suggested as options for future promotions. The yellow and black biosecurity signage of the past is well recognised and is highly visible and, as such, a simple message such as in Figure 1, may increase awareness in the public.



Figure 1: A suggested example of simple biosecurity signage.

(adapted from Treasure Islands - Check for Stowaways, 2011).

6.0 Conclusion:

It is clear that the ongoing battle to protect the islands of the Hauraki Gulf still has a long way to go as far as public awareness is concerned. Use of staff and students in an advocacy role on the ferries of the Hauraki Gulf for the promotion of biosecurity strategy, advertising at and on public transport services and inclusion of articles in local island papers is suggested as important strategies for the ongoing communication of the Treasure Islands initiative.

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