

Report 99.228

12 April 1999

File: Y/4/0/1

Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee
from Wayne O'Donnell, Manager, Biosecurity

Regional Pest Management Strategy – Ferrets in Captivity

1. Purpose

To advise the Committee of recent regional council initiatives concerning the keeping of ferrets in captivity and to seek Council approval to support these initiatives.

2. Background

The Wellington Regional Council's recently amended Pest Management Strategy (PMS) for pest animals identifies ferrets as a Regional Surveillance Pest Animal. Under this status, Council will monitor the range and population of ferrets, provide advice to ratepayers, and undertake control in Key Native Ecosystems.

Rule 13.5.2 applies, as follows –

“No person may knowingly communicate, or cause to be communicated, or release, or cause to be released, or sell, or offer for sale, or hold in any premises where animals are offered for sale, or act in such a manner as is likely to encourage or cause the propagation, breeding or multiplication of mustelids, except in accordance with The Wildlife (Farming of Unprotected Wildlife) Regulations 1985.”

Council staff would have preferred to prohibit the keeping of ferrets for sale as pets. However, the 1985 Regulations specifically allow this to continue, despite it potentially conflicting with the objectives of the Department of Conservation, the Animal Health Board and a number of regional council PMS's.

3. Amendments to the Regulations

The 1996 Waikato PMS placed a total ban on the keeping of ferrets in captivity. As pest strategies developed under the Biosecurity Act cannot

derogate from the Wildlife Act and its Regulations, it became necessary to amend the PMS to ensure it remained lawful.

Waikato Regional Council, in collaboration with three other councils (Northland, Auckland and Bay of Plenty) has written to the Minister of Conservation seeking a review of the Regulations. The councils have requested that PMS's be allowed to override the 1985 Regulations with regards to the keeping, selling and transporting of ferrets. A simple way of removing the current problem would be to amend the Biosecurity Act to exclude the reference to the 1985 Wildlife Regulations.

4. Council Support

It would be appropriate for this Council to support the initiatives taken by the four northern councils. There is significant anecdotal evidence that ferrets are capable of escaping from captivity, can survive in the wild and will predate on native species.

During Council's Bovine Tb vector control activities, we have identified Tb infected ferrets on numerous occasions. There is strong evidence that ferrets are transmitters of the disease.

Ferrets have also recently been implicated in a number of unprovoked attacks on children, with serious consequences.

The 1985 Wildlife Regulations were developed to govern the farming, breeding, selling and transportation of mustelids. The Regulations were primarily drafted to allow the farming of ferrets for their pelts. This industry has now been abandoned with many ferrets turned loose into the wild. The Regulations are now being used to control the ferret pet industry, a task they were not designed to do.

5. Recommendation

- (1) *That Council supports the initiatives taken by the northern regional councils to have the Wildlife (Farming of Unprotected Animals) Regulations reviewed.*
- (2) *That Council writes to the Minister of Conservation requesting that a review of the Regulations occur as soon as possible.*

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission by:

Wayne O'Donnell
Manager, Biosecurity

Colin Wright
Divisional Manager, Wairarapa