

**Report 99.84**

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Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee  
from Ray Clarey, Senior Biosecurity Officer (Animals)

## **Key Native Ecosystem Management: Update Report**

### **1. Purpose**

To update the Committee on pest animal control operations in Key Native Ecosystem Management Areas.

### **2. Background**

Key Native Ecosystems (KNEs) are areas of prime native habitat which are of regional significance. They are primarily native forest remnants but may include wetlands and dunelands with significant flora or fauna value. The Council has undertaken consultation with a wide range of interest groups in an endeavour to identify all potential KNE sites in the Wellington Region. The Ecolsite database held by the Department of Conservation (Wellington Conservancy) together with the recently completed Wairarapa Plains Protected Natural Areas Survey has provided a sound ecological information base.

### **3. Prioritising and Control**

Potential sites can include a range of native ecosystems such as QE II covenants and City Council Reserves. Areas administered by the Department of Conservation are excluded as they are managed separately under a 'Conservation Management Strategy'. Each potential site is assessed and given a priority score based on native flora and fauna values, susceptibility of the habitat to possum damage and the value that is placed on the site by the people of the Wellington Region.

Priority sites are programmed for possum control. The control of goats and mustelids (ferrets, stoats and weasels) are also considered, but the current emphasis has been on possum control. The scope of KNE protection and enhancement is limited by the objectives of the Regional Animal Pest Management Strategy (RAPMS) for the Wellington Region. It is envisaged that a more holistic approach, which includes incentives to exclude livestock, will be considered when the RAPMS is reviewed in 2001.

Many of the highest ranking KNE sites are located within the greater Wellington metropolitan area. These have scored well because of their flora and fauna values, accessibility to the public and the total exclusion of livestock.

### **3.1 Joint Ventures**

The Biosecurity Department is keen to pursue joint funding ventures for possum control on sites of ecological value. Each proposed venture is assessed on merit with funding and other Council assistance limited to a single financial year. To date, joint ventures have been established for KNE works with Wellington, Hutt, Upper Hutt and Porirua City Councils. There is potential to establish joint ventures with either of the four District Councils within the region.

The Upper Hutt Branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society has been extremely proactive with two KNE projects. They have supplied volunteer labour and been responsible for the greater part of the day to day field work. The Society is fortunate to have an enthusiastic and dependable organiser. Their efforts are appreciated.

The YMCA Conservation Corps based in Masterton has also assisted with KNE possum control following instruction from Council staff. The Corps supplied labour and transport, and utilised materials provided by Council on two KNE sites.

### **3.2 The Size Of The Problem**

To date, about 300 sites (160 in the Western Zone, 140 in the Wairarapa) have been inspected and allocated a regional priority score. In the 1997/98 financial year 18,000 hectares were treated to protect 14 KNE sites. This year the programme is to treat 10,783 hectares to protect 24 KNE sites. Whilst the area to be treated is less this year the work required is more intensive due to their location within metropolitan areas. Risk management costs are also higher when associated with urban areas.

### **3.3 Future Work Programmes**

Future KNE work programmes are expected to be of a similar amount with priority given to maintaining possum numbers to very low densities in those sites previously treated. There is a proposal to gradually include (over successive years) those areas on the Wairarapa Plain not already part of formal Bovine Tb vector control. This amounts to some 13,500 hectares centred on the outskirts of Masterton (5,298ha), Clareville (2,664ha) and Battersea (5,539hs) areas. The treatment of these areas will have positive outcomes in that:

- it complements the Bovine Tb eradication scheme by reducing possum reinvasion into previously treated areas and will provide total possum control coverage from the Tararua Ranges to the sea.

- protects and enhances several native mistletoe sites as well as fostering the other benefits of KNE programmes.

Indicative costs have been prepared and approval will be sought to include these areas in successive Annual Plans.

It should be noted that a large number of Key Native Ecosystems (KNE) are incorporated into operational areas of the regional Bovine Tb vector control programme. KNE funds may be used within these areas to assess conservation values and to promote voluntary protection of these sites by the occupier. Council's intention is to ensure that maximum control benefits accrue by co-ordinating operations where possible.

#### **4. New Mistletoe Sightings**

During preliminary KNE survey work three previously unregistered sites of the native mistletoe *Ileostylus micranthus* were discovered by staff. The 'finds' are important as this mistletoe has an endangered status on the mainland. One of the main threats to the plant is possum browse. Two of these sites are in close proximity to Masterton and outside any current possum control areas. The other site is within the Morisons Bush KNE management area.

#### **5. KNE Branding**

The Council's Corporate Relations team has been working with the Pest Animals Section towards developing a unique logo and signage for KNE purposes. Members and Councillors of the committee would have already been exposed to the logo concept, that of a native pigeon in association with the letters 'KNE'. The next progression is to develop a suitable sign for display at KNE sites. QE II Trust covenants have discreet signage and it is considered that KNE sites should also be defined. The proposed signage is planned to convey that the site is special and is being cared for by the Regional Council and other sponsors. Recognition of other sponsors for a particular site would be included on the sign.

The current concept is for the sign to be ovate in the shape of an egg. Eggs are common to most animal life, particularly to birds, reptiles and insects. Eggs convey the concept of a new beginning, an expectation of new life. Appropriate signage of KNE sites will help signify the commitment of the Regional Council to this conservation project.

The KNE programme is steadily growing. With the recent release of the Biodiversity Strategy by DoC/MFE there is likely to be increased interest in KNE type projects in the future.

**6. Recommendation**

*That the report be received and its contents noted.*

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