



Report 08.604  
Date 15 August 2008  
File WB/01/16/01

Committee Catchment Management  
Author Wayne O'Donnell, Manager, Biosecurity

## Maintaining the Gains - The Future of Possum / Predator Control

### 1. Purpose

To seek the Committee's support for a new strategic management programme for future control of possums and predators within the Wellington region.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3) (b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

### 3. Background

Report 08.137 to the March 2008 Committee meeting identified two major events that would impact on the future control of possums and predators within the region. The first related to the planned cessation of Tb vector control in northern parts of the region, commencing in 2009. Secondly, there is an opportunity to consider incorporating the future management of possum and predators in the Regional Pest Management Strategy during the five year review process.

Report 08.137 highlighted the benefits to the regional economy and biodiversity that has resulted from implementation of the Bovine Tb National Pest Management Strategy (TbNPMS) from the mid 1990's. The report outlined seven options for management of possums / predators within the proposed Tb free areas to ensure some of these benefits could be maintained. The options ranged from doing nothing (i.e. landowner initiated control) to a control programme managed by Greater Wellington (GW), with an additional option of more intensive pest control in high valued ecosystems to maximise biodiversity gains.

The Committee agreed that a landowner survey canvassing opinion on options 5, 6 and 7 was necessary to determine whether there was support for a future 'maintain the gains' programme and, if so, what option was preferred. Staff

were also asked to further investigate the selected options and report back on costs, benefits and funding options.

Report 08.518 to the July Committee meeting provided results of the landowner survey, outlined the options preferred by those that responded and gave approximate costs for undertaking the two preferred options. The report also identified the beneficiaries and exacerbators of the options. Finally, funding options were considered, including the use of targeted rates, annual charges or regional rates.

Staff were requested to report back to the September Committee meeting with a costed, summary proposal including further development of the funding options.

#### **4. The Proposal**

The proposed management programme can be divided into three separate components:

1. maintaining low possum / predator densities in northern areas of the region where Tb vector control has permanently ceased;
2. undertaking a new possum control programme in the Western parts of the region (approximately 60,000ha) over a number of years;
3. establishing new Key Native Ecosystem sites in the northern Tb free areas and western areas, as funding permits.

In summary, the proposal aims, in northern areas of the region, to maintain the widespread biodiversity gains achieved by regular vector control under the Tb strategy.

The Western areas (Western Zone) proposal is to progressively work towards a possum free region over a number of years, providing benefits to landowners and communities who currently sit outside any GW pest control programme.

The KNE programme requires intensive pest control inputs. Sites are selected for their regional and or national significance based on rare / threatened species indicators. The aim of this programme is to protect and enhance the biological diversity of these ecosystems for current and future generations.

This proposal will initially consider potential sites in new Tb free areas, then expand into areas of the Western Zone as funding allows. The Western Zone has a large range of high value ecosystems that are not available in the Wairarapa (e.g. coastal wetland, dunes, escarpments and lowland forest).

A summary proposal of the programme is provided as Attachment 1. The estimated costs to undertake these activities are available as Attachment 1A.

## **5. Programme Implementation**

Attachment 2 contains the proposed schedule of works over the six year period 2009/10 to 2012/13. Attachment 3 maps the proposed Maintain the Gains and Western Zone possum / predator control programme for the same period.

The programme is based on undertaking possum / predator control in the Tb rollback areas every second year. This accounts for expected low residual possum densities following cessation of Tb vector control. The aim will be to reduce possum densities to a 3% residual trap catch index (RTC) initially and then monitor to determine control frequency. Maintaining possum RTC to <5% is considered sufficient to maintain the various biodiversity benefits afforded by the Tb vector control programme.

In the Western Zone, possum / predator densities are likely to be very high (25%+RTC). This, coupled with high human occupation, is likely to result in elevated initial control costs. However, maintenance costs are expected to be 25-30% less. Western Zone operations are planned to be undertaken every second year following initial control. The initial operation is aimed to achieve a target of <5%RTC.

Trend monitoring will be used regularly to determine whether work needs to proceed. The Tb vector control programme has clearly shown how important trend monitoring can be to achieve operational savings, allowing other work to be fast tracked or reinvestment of funds into other activities. A relatively small monitoring budget has been included in this proposal.

Attachments 4-7 highlight the potential KNE sites for all proposed possum / predator control areas included in the five year plan. These sites have been identified through the GIS based KNE lowland forest selection model and the DoC Recommended Areas for Protection database. Other ecosystem types identified include wetlands from the GW inventory, and coastal sites from the Department of Conservation Ecolsites inventory.

The new KNE budget in this proposal is relatively small, considering the intensive pest management (plants and animals) required to achieve biodiversity gains. The KNE option may be able to be progressed if savings from the parts of the programme are realised through trend monitoring. In some sites (i.e. wetlands, dunes), possums will not be the main pest preventing biodiversity gains. Weed or pest plant control may be the main focus in these areas.

## **6. Benefits and Costs – Who Should Pay?**

A workshop was recently held with experienced Biosecurity staff to identify the potential beneficiaries and exacerbators of a new programme; consider the range of funding options available, review the advantages and disadvantages of each option, and, finally, to agree on a preferred option for recommendation to the Catchment Management Committee.

## 6.1 *Beneficiaries*

Beneficiaries were identified as follows:

- All landowners where work is undertaken;
- All landowners adjacent to where work is undertaken;
- Regional community with regards to enhancements to regional biodiversity, and maintaining regional economic growth;
- Catchment communities with regards to protection of soil, soil conservation measures, flood protection measures and water quality;
- National community (Crown) with regards to enhancements to national biodiversity (particularly threatened or endangered flora and fauna), and to maintaining national economic growth;
- Industry stakeholders with regards to maintaining production / economic benefits;
- Stakeholders involved in implementation of the TbNPMS with regards to minimising risks of reintroducing Tb into the wild animal population.

## 6.2 *Exacerbators*

Exacerbators were identified as follows:

- All landowners in or nearby the programmed control areas where suitable habitat exists (this includes land in the adjacent region);
- All landowners in or nearby the programmed control areas who are not undertaking any pest control activities;
- All nearby Crown land that is not included in a formal possum / predator control programme;
- The Crown with respect to past biosecurity decisions allowing these pests to be imported and released into the NZ environment.

## 6.3 *Apportionment of Costs*

The staff analysis concluded that costs should be apportioned as follows:

	National (Crown)	Regional	Local
MTG/WZ	10%	80%	10%
Biodiversity (KNE)	20%	80%	

For comparison purposes:

Tb vector control	50%	6%	44%
-------------------	-----	----	-----

The local share of the Tb vector control programme is funded 40% via industry levies and direct contributions, plus 4% paid as part of the regional share

through the Bovine Tb land area rate. It is acknowledged that landowners will pay different amounts depending on the type of farming undertaken.

For this proposal, the regional share would be funded by regional ratepayers and the local share by affected landowners. Funding options to collect these shares are discussed in section 7 below.

## **7. Funding the Programme**

### **7.1 Overview**

The completed analysis has confirmed that landowners who will be involved in the proposed programme should pay some percentage of the implementation costs as they receive a direct benefit. A fundamental benefit is the reduced risk of Tb reintroduction via illegal liberations of infected wildlife (e.g. feral pigs and deer). The risk reduction occurs by maintaining a low possum density, thereby minimising the ability for transmission between the vectors.

It is recommended that the local share should be spread across all landowners, not just those who gain immediate benefit. This reflects the Councils aim to eventually include all Tb free areas in the programme overtime.

The analysis completed above indicated that landowners should contribute 10% towards the general Maintain the Gains programme, including the new work proposed in the Western Zone. This figure takes into account the 44% that landowners currently contribute towards the Tb vector control programme (plus the portion they contribute to the Crown share via taxes).

The benefits to the regional community are outlined in section 6 above and in report 08.607 in this order paper covering Tb vector control funding. The analysis concluded that the region should contribute 80% towards the biodiversity (KNE) programme and 80% towards the general Maintain the Gains programme.

It has been concluded that the Crown is both a beneficiary and exacerbator of the proposed possum / predator control programmes. However, Crown contributions towards Regional Pest Management Strategies have always been insufficient. The last Budget improved the Crown spend to \$5M p.a. across the entire country. However, these funds are only allocated where the Crown is deemed to be an exacerbator. There is no funding available to reflect national benefits that may accrue from regional council activities on private land. Discussions will continue to occur with Crown representatives to progress an increase in Crown funding. In the interim, the Crown share (20% for biodiversity and 10% for general possum / predator control) will need to be funded by the regional community.

A review of the following funding options was concluded:

- General rate (capital value)
- Targeted rates (either capital or land value, land area)
- Uniform annual charge (fixed, capital or land value, area)

- A mix of the above to reflect different benefits

## **7.2 New Rate Proposals**

The internal review concluded that the best funding fit was a combination of rates and charges.

### **7.2.1 Land Area rate**

A land area rate was considered the best option to recover the 10% local share. The current Bovine Tb land area rate is well understood and accepted by affected landowners. However, it is suggested that the minimum sized area for rating should be 4 hectares, compared to the 10 hectare minimum applied to the Bovine Tb rate. This change reflects the increasing costs associated with consultation, communications and fieldwork on smaller lifestyle properties. These properties generally have higher percentage habitat cover compared to larger farmed holdings.

### **7.2.2 Uniform Annual Charge**

The regional share represents a combination of benefits, with biodiversity and the environment being the main reason for regional intervention. These benefits apply to the entire regional community at various levels. The best funding fit was deemed to be a uniform annual charge, applied equally to every rateable property.

Further consideration was given to amalgamating all RPMS biodiversity focused costs into the single annual charge. This would make the programme costs more transparent. Reporting of annual work programmes would then occur collectively via the annual RPMS Operational Report. In 2008/09, a total of \$868,700 is budgeted for biodiversity operations (mainly KNE & Reserves). The current KNE programme is funded by general rate. Fifty percent of Reserve operations are funded by the affected Territorial Authority.

## **8. Rating Impacts**

A six year budget has been prepared as Attachment 1A for the proposed Maintain the Gains / KNE programme. The budget has been prepared following site visits to all Western Zone areas and a comprehensive analysis of contractor cost information collected via the Tb vector control programme. This review has concluded that operational costs for Western Zone operations are likely to be initially higher than first estimated, mainly due to increasing subdivision and 'urbanisation' of the rural landscape. However, to counter this, a reduction in total area controlled has been included for initial operations. Operations have been planned to increase steadily over the first five years to minimise changes to the proposed rating systems.

Attachment 1A also contains cost details for the proposed Biodiversity Annual Charge and the Area Rate. The totals indicated are based on the percentage shares outlined in section 6.3 above.

The Biodiversity Annual Charge includes the existing KNE spend, which is currently funded by general rate. The charge, applied equally to all rateable properties, ranges from \$10.91(excl GST) in 2009/10 to a maximum of \$16.87 when the planned expenditure cap of \$2.5M is reached.

The Area Rate has been calculated using 4ha as the minimum property size for rating purposes. An estimation of rateable hectares has been made as this information was not available from the City and District Council at the time of writing. This rate is proposed to be applied to all rateable properties over the region. The rate ranges from \$0.25/ha in 2009/10 to \$0.43/ha when the \$2.5M cap is reached.

## **9. Funding the Tb NPMS Regional Share**

Report 08.607 in this order paper reviews options for funding of the regional share component of the TbNPMS beyond 30 June 2009. The report highlights that there is no contractual obligation for GW to continue to fund this activity.

The GW decision on Tb funding has significant impacts for the proposed Maintain the Gains programme. Firstly, a decision to cease funding would make available approximately \$350K of general rate funds. Secondly, the annual collection of \$143K of Bovine Tb rates would not be required. This is currently collected on a land area basis at \$0.30/ha for all properties exceeding 10ha in operational areas. Finally, GW could determine to utilise the Reserve fund, which exceeds \$600K, for the Maintain the Gains / KNE programme.

Should GW decide to continue to fund the total regional share of the TbNPMS then the entire maintain the gains proposal (excluding the current KNE programme) would require new funding (i.e. \$1.29M in 2009/10).

## **10. Communication**

Consultation is envisaged with the regional community through the proposed LTCCP.

## 11. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. **Receives** the report.
2. **Notes** the content of the report.
3. **Supports** inclusion of the new strategic management programme for possums and other predators, as outlined in this report, within the proposed 2009-2019 LTCCP for community consultation.
4. **Supports** the principle of a new biodiversity uniform annual charge and land area rate to fund the proposed management programme.

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Wayne O'Donnell  
Manager, Biosecurity

Geoff Dick  
Divisional Manager, Catchment Management

Attachment 1:	Summary Proposal
Attachment 1A:	Estimated Costs 2008/09
Attachment 2:	Schedule of Operations
Attachment 3:	Mapped Schedule of Operations
Attachment 4:	} Potential KNE Sites
Attachment 5:	
Attachment 6:	
Attachment 7:	