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

Bovine Tb Progress Report – Stage 1 South East Wairarapa

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about recent developments during implementation of Bovine Tb vector control in the South East Wairarapa Stage 1 operation.

2. Background

The South East Wairarapa Stage 1 operation comprises approximately 48,000ha. For management purposes the operation was divided into southern and northern zones comprising 23,000ha and 25,000ha respectively. The Stage 1 operation is flanked in the north by the Te Wharau and Taueru-Maungaraki operations, and in the west by the Ponatahi-Longbush and Martinborough operations. The proposed Stage 2 operation (2003/04) is situated to the south.

Some Committee members will recall that the Council has been seeking to have initial works commenced in South Wairarapa for the last three years. However, limited Animal Health Board funds resulted in deferment until this year. Historically, this area was the centre of a Bovine Tb rating dispute. In the mid 1990's a number of landowners raised concerns about the lack of direct control services in the area.

3. Planning

Initial planning for this operation commenced in March – April 2001. However, some landowner discussions had occurred earlier in late 2000. Due to the rugged and inaccessible terrain, large tracts of land had been budgeted to receive control via aerial 1080 application.

In April 2001, staff and the Regional Animal Health Advisory Committee (RAHAC) Chairman, Peter Gaskin, attended a landowners meeting in Hinakura where a number of northern zone property owners expressed reservations about the use of 1080. From this meeting, and subsequent discussions with southern zone landowners, it was determined that seven properties totalling approximately 12,900ha would oppose the use of 1080. However, it was expected that preferred methods would still be able to be used over the remaining 35,100ha.

Operational planning, including site assessments and detailed mapping, continued on the remaining properties by Bovine Unit staff.

4. Alternative Methods

Those landowners who had given an early indication that they opposed the use of 1080 were provided with options for alternative methods. These included –

- Undertaking the work themselves at their own cost. Animal Health Board performance targets must still be met. The Council would pay for additional management and monitoring costs.
- Agreeing to be part of a tendered contract block with any additional costs over budget being met by the landowners charged on a per hectare rate. Again, the Council would pay for additional management and monitoring costs.

Of the seven identified properties, one has opted to undertake their own work, two have elected to pay additional contractor costs and one has agreed to pay additional costs for the Bovine Unit to undertake alternative control. The three outstanding properties are still undecided, although it appears likely that they will agree to pay additional contractor costs. Three separate tenders have been advertised. Two contracts have been let.

5. Ongoing Changes

The availability of alternative methods has had a snowball effect, with a number of remaining landowners seeking changes to their property control plan. Six properties totalling 2,970ha, in the north-west of the northern zone have decided against a 1080 programme. They have agreed to pay additional contract costs. A further five properties, totalling 4,100ha, in the central northern zone have also decided against 1080 methods. Four of these property owners have agreed to pay additional costs to date.

Two property owners in the southern zone also raised concerns but agreement has since been reached on the use of 1080 methods.

6. The Future

All contracts are required to meet the AHB target to 5% RTC, with no lines over 13.5%. However, it is unlikely that many will achieve an RTC of 2% or less which has consistently been the result for the last 18 aerial 1080 operations. The change from aerial to ground control is likely to significantly impact on maintenance costs in 2002/03.

Aerial control is normally budgeted every three to four years. However, with large parcels of land now receiving ground control it is expected that increased maintenance works will be required. No allowance has been made for these additional costs in the 2002/03 budget. As the anti 1080 stance is likely to remain in 2002/03, three options appear to be available:

1. Landowners undertake their own maintenance control at their own cost;
2. Landowners agree to pay additional costs for contractors;
3. Reduced maintenance occurs, targeting those properties with high Tb risk. This would require increased boundary control adjacent to untreated properties.

There is no doubt that there will be an increase in management and monitoring costs in the future. Changes to the 2001/02 programme has resulted in considerable pressure on vector management staff. Increased monitoring resources will be required.

7. Communications

Council staff will liaise with AgriQuality and the Animal Health Board to determine the most appropriate course of action for 2002/03. Landowners will be contacted individually once an agreement has been reached.

Consideration will be given to holding a meeting with landowners in the Stage 2 operation, later this financial year, to advise them of the situation.

8. Recommendation

That the report be received.

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