



Report 07.118
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Committee Parks, Forests and Utilities
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Release of robins in East Harbour Regional Park

1. Purpose

The purpose of the paper is to ensure the Committee is comfortable to commit to long-term rat control in a selected part of the East Harbour Regional Park. This is a prerequisite to the release of robins.

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

MIRO, has been working to restore the ecological health of the forest in East Harbour Regional Park since 1996. They originally formed as a subcommittee of East Harbour Environmental Association to undertake pest control in the northern forest in association with a Hutt City Council possum busters' campaign.

Since that time the MIRO forest health programme has grown. After two major possum control operations completed by Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) in 2001 and 2004, possum numbers were reduced to low levels. MIRO has maintained these low possum numbers by servicing a trap network in the 1,500 ha forest. Over 30 volunteers spend around 2,000 volunteer hours per year tramping into the forest, clearing traps and renewing bait stations near the traps. These baits are to keep rats from eating the possum trap lures.

In 2006 GWRC established a 300 ha intensive rat control zone in the heavily forested headwaters of Gollans Stream between the Butterfly Creek picnic area and Hawtrey. This area is regarded as the "Mainland Island", within which rats are being controlled by the use of a 150 m by 100 m bait station grid. The bait stations have been filled on a monthly basis and rat numbers have fallen steadily.

MIRO's vision for East Harbour Regional Park is to restore the natural ecosystems. Part of this vision is to reintroduce species lost to the park. Last year MIRO established a bird reintroduction subcommittee and gathered information from experts to determine which species would be suitable for release into the Mainland Island. Robins were selected because:

- They are the easiest to introduce
- There are source populations available
- The Department of Conservation (DoC) advised it was likely to support the release
- The habitat is suitable for this species, and
- They can be seen by members of the public.

DoC has approved, in principle, MIRO's request to transfer a threatened native bird species.

MIRO would like to release 20 pairs of robins. It is not certain where the birds would be sourced from at present but DoC is likely to require that the birds be sourced from a distant population, such as Wanganui. DoC will require that predator levels in the Mainland Island be maintained to appropriate levels for the species being released. The requirements for a robin release are that rats are kept below the level of 5 percent tracking rate.

4. Comment

4.1 General

MIRO seeks GWRC's approval to release robins in the Mainland Island site. MIRO's proposal is consistent with the objectives and policies of the East Harbour Regional Park Management Plan.

The MIRO volunteers are focusing on keeping possum levels below 5 percent RTC (a possum monitor completed in June 2006 showed possums to be at 1.7 percent RTC). Rats in the Mainland Island are being controlled through a GWRC funded contract. Rat numbers have been falling since the intensive control zone was initiated in August 2006. The latest rat tracking monitor (completed in August) has shown rats to be at 18 percent inside the Mainland Island and 52 percent outside. It is thought that rats inside the Mainland Island will be below the 5 percent tracking rate by the end of the year. MIRO is committed to keeping the possum numbers down.

4.2 Cost

The cost of the robin introduction has been estimated to be \$8,000 to \$10,000. MIRO proposes to raise this money itself through fundraising efforts. However, more than one release may be required, as it is possible that the robins could disperse into the surrounding unprotected area. MIRO is not requesting funding from GWRC for this work. The earliest reintroduction would be in April/May 2008.

In order for DoC to approve the robin release, GWRC would need to commit to continuing to fund the filling of the bait stations in the Mainland Island area at approximately \$25,000 a year. Currently, the Mainland Island pest control costs are incorporated into the current budget for East Harbour Regional Park pest control. Therefore, no extra funding would be required.

5. Communication

We will be in contact with MIRO members. As part of the approval, we will recommend to MIRO that GWRC be acknowledged in any communications arising from the robin release.

If the request is granted, press releases will be developed about the decision and, when it is done, highlighting the release.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. **Receives** the report.
2. **Notes** the need for ongoing funding within the Parks' budget of approximately \$25,000 a year for rat control.
3. **Approves** the release of robins by MIRO into the Mainland Island site in East Harbour Regional Park.

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Attachments

- 1 East Harbour Regional Park Mainland Island restoration area
- 2 MIRO's outline of a proposal to transfer North Island robins from Waitotara Valley, Wanganui to East Harbour Regional Park
- 3 MIRO's letter