



Report 10.432  
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Committee Council  
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## **Review of the Regional Possum and Predator Control Programme within the Wellington region**

### **1. Purpose**

To seek approval to bring forward funding of \$100,000 from the Bovine Tb Reserve in 2010/11 to enable an earlier start to the Regional Possum / Predator Control programme (RPPCP) in areas recently declared bovine Tb free.

### **2. Consideration by Committee**

The matters raised in this report were considered by the Catchment Management Committee at its meeting on the 3 August 2010 (Report 10.393).

The recommendations contained in this report have been endorsed by the Committee for the Council's consideration and decision.

### **3. Significance of the decision**

The matters requiring decision in this report have been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002.

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking into account the Council's significance policy and decision-making guidelines. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance.

### **4. Background**

In March 2008 the Catchment Management Committee was asked to provide guidance for a future strategic direction for the control of possums and other predators within the Wellington Region.

Report 08.137 identified that Animal Health Board (AHB) cessation of vector control would significantly affect the density of possums and other predators in affected parts of the region. Significant biodiversity benefits are evident if regular, sustained possum and predator control is implemented. Therefore, GW needed to determine the extent of the replacement control programme to maintain the gains realised by the bovine Tb vector control.

Report 08.137 provided seven options for possible future control programmes. These ranged from “do nothing” (option 1) to GW managed possum and predator control programme (option 7), with an additional focus on high biodiversity value sites (high quality native ecosystems). Option 7 was recommended by staff as the optimal option for maintaining the social, economic and biodiversity gains of the Tb programme. This option also supported the GW objective in the Regional Policy Statement of protecting and enhancing biodiversity throughout the region with a particular focus on threatened ecosystems.

In July 2008, report 08.518 was presented to the Catchment Management Committee summarising the results of community consultation. Consultation occurred with over 600 affected landowners, and also included other strategies such as press releases, email distributions and individual phone calls. Despite landowner response being low, there was overwhelming support for the introduction of a Regional Possum Predator Control Programme (RPPCP) with option 7 receiving the highest level of support.

The consultation documents also included a proposal to implement control over 60,000ha in the west of the region where no bovine Tb control had occurred in the past.

The consultation indicated the community was prepared to support funding a programme of significant size.

At the meeting on 4 September 2008 the Catchment Management Committee supported the recommendations of report 08.604, and proposed the following expenditure for the RPPCP:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
\$1.296M	\$1.539M	\$1.785M	\$1.462M	\$1.916M	\$1.782M

Note that the above costs included undertaking new work in the western parts of the region, and control in Tb free areas which are largely located in northern Wairarapa.

During 2009 the world-wide financial crisis and the recession affecting New Zealand forced Council to re-consider future expenditure. As a result the funding for RPPCP was significantly reduced. Funding for some monitoring was allowed for the 2010/11 year followed by a moderate level of control commencing in 2011/12. The following financial commitments were included in the current LTCCP and subsequent Annual Plans:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
\$0.0M	\$0.03M	\$0.19M	\$0.194M	\$0.301M	\$0.495M

The decision to defer and reduce funding for the RPPCP has had the following negative effects:

1. Removed the likelihood of possum control in the western side of the region in near future

2. Excluded funding required for additional control in high biodiversity value areas and support for existing KNE sites (e.g. Mt Bruce Pukaha)
3. Significantly delayed proposed control within the AHB Tb free areas.

The likely effect is a deterioration of biodiversity in threatened ecosystems and gradual loss of the benefits realised through the bovine Tb vector control programme.

#### 4.1 AHB Tb Free areas

In June 2008, AHB vector control was removed from over 18,700ha.

Bovine Tb freedom declarations will occur over several years, as indicated below.

Hectares	Tb freedom declared
18,748	June 2008
18,720	June 2010
11,290	June 2011
35,014	June 2012
<b>83,772</b>	<b>Total area</b>

Under the current LTCCP, no possum control will occur in these areas for at least three years from cessation of control. Over this timeframe the area will be subject to an increasing possum population due to breeding and reinvasion. A clustering of possums is expected to occur within the most favourable sites, which will increase the negative biodiversity impacts.

#### 4.2 Significance of the RPPCP

The RPPCP is critical to maintain the biodiversity gains of possum reduction achieved within the AHB Tb free areas. Based on staff experience and scientific research, possum population densities of up to 5% RTC (RTC – number of possums caught per 100 trap nights - used as a possum population density indicator) are regarded as necessary to maintain the biodiversity values and protect primary production in an area. The original RPPCP was costed to maintain populations at approximately RTC 5% with minimal control inputs. Once these populations reach an RTC over 8%, considerably more control effort is required, resulting in significantly higher cost of control.

After three years of no possum control it is expected that the RTC index will increase to 5% with further increases of 4-8% annually in subsequent years. A further compounding issue is a secondary breeding season which occurs when conditions are favourable. This is expected to be a factor in causing rapidly rising RTC indexes and has been identified in field experiences throughout AHB operational areas. To prevent the possum population increasing excessively in the areas where AHB control ceased in June 2008, it is imperative that possum control is not delayed any longer.

Increased possum populations will also have a migration effect on neighbouring areas under the AHB programmes causing an increased possum population, resulting in greater frequency of control and higher costs.

### 4.3 Proposed Works Programme and Funding

The programme proposes setting up a permanent bait station grid throughout all rollback areas with spacing ranging between 1 per 4 to 10 hectares, dependant on habitat. Each station will be re-baited a minimum of twice per year. Approximately 11,120 bait stations will be required.

Some possum monitoring is proposed to determine the possum population trends and if the control inputs are sufficient to hold the possum population below an RTC of 5%.

The current strata boundaries for these projects have been developed using best practice developed through the bovine Tb control programme. Future management strategies will be based around smaller blocks and specific control requirements. Staff will engage with local communities to identify opportunities to utilise local help to manage control inputs. Options to share labour costs will be explored in order to maximise the area 'treated' under the programmes

It is estimated that this possum/predator control will cost around \$130,000 if implemented in 2010/11. As only \$30,000 is available in the 2010/11 Annual Plan, it will be necessary to utilise funds held in the Bovine Tb Reserve. The Reserve currently totals \$496,700 with approximately \$112,000 being deducted annually to maintain the Bovine Tb land area rate at \$0.30 per hectare. A review of how the regional share component of the AHB National Bovine Tb Strategy will be funded is required during 2010/11.

## 5. Communication

The decision of Council will be communicated to affected landowners, Federated Farmers, and to the wider farming community through the Wairarapa Hill Country Advisory Committee.

## 6. Recommendations

*That Council:*

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the contents of the report.***
3. ***Approves the inclusion of \$100,000 from the Bovine Tb Reserve into the 2010/11 Biosecurity Department Annual Plan to facilitate commencement of the Regional Possum/Predator Control Programme.***

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:



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