

## **Report 99.459**

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Report to the Landcare Committee  
from Geoff Cameron, Manager, Natural Forestry

### **Possum Control Operation : Wainuiomata and Orongorongo Water Collection Areas**

#### **1. Purpose**

To inform the Landcare Committee about the successful completion of the possum control operation in the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo water collection areas.

#### **2. Thorough Preparation Paid Off**

The process of investigating possum control alternatives, analysing information and recommending an option culminated in Report 99.12 to the February Committee round. This stressed the link between sound catchment management, the Regional Policy Statement and the *Council Lands Animal Pest Management Strategy*.

After completing a wide-ranging communications programme, obtaining WRC resource consent and Medical Officer of Health approval, the operation was endorsed through Policy and Finance Report 99.154, in April.

#### **3. Operational Details**

The aerial application 1080 poison (three kilogram of cereal bait per hectare) was completed in the Wainuiomata catchment on 11 June, and the Orongorongo catchment on 24 June.

The operation was controlled by the Biosecurity department as part of their ordinary work schedule. A map showing the GPS printout of the helicopters flight path is Appendix 1; this map shows they avoided the main water courses and the control area as required.

The WRC consents department audited the operation to ensure consent conditions were complied with; they were.

The Medical Officer of Health audited both the operation and the pre-operation communication process to ensure their conditions were complied with; they were.

This was a special operation for Water Group and Landcare staff. For Biosecurity it was “another day at the office” and their usual high standards applied.

Up-to-date post-operation trap-catch results will be presented at the Committee meeting.

#### 4. **Safety Aspects**

In addition to the normal safety procedures followed by Biosecurity department staff, Landcare staff implemented the following:

- waterway patrols to ensure no dead possums fell into the streams or rivers.
- nets across main rivers to catch any dead animals missed by foot patrols.
- track patrols to ensure no baits landed on boundary tracks, or deliberately placed there.

Also the Water Group organised a series of extra water tests; all clear of 1080.

A security guard at the Reservoir Road gate ensured only authorised personnel had access to the area when the operation was in progress.

#### 5. **Other Incidents**

The death of a dog near the private huts in the Orongorongo valley was reported, supposedly after eating a poisoned possum. The entrance to that valley, and all walking tracks, were well sign-posted advising of the use of 1080. At the reported time of the dog’s death (June 26), the operation had only just been completed. Little rain had fallen, and nets were strung across the rivers. It is therefore likely the dog wandered into the catchment. This was the only reported dog death, and it has not been confirmed that 1080 was the cause. Landcare staff have not found any by-kill of birds or other “desirable” creatures.

#### 6. **Future Action Against Possums**

Landcare staff will set-up bait stations in the most appropriate places to control any re-invasion from surrounding properties.

Biosecurity staff will monitor possum population recovery in three years time (2002). A maintenance operation has been planned for five years time (2004), but the precise timing will depend on the success of this operation.

Landcare staff will monitor the vegetation condition recovery, especially identified rata trees. Surveys to assess other ecological benefits will take place as resources allow.

## 7. **Future Action Against Other Animal Pests**

The Animal Health Board supported a trial to maximise deer by-kill. Because the timing of the drop was delayed, trial conditions were not optimal with few deer poisoned. The results will be confirmed after another deer pellet survey next March/April.

A goat hunting contract will be advertised shortly. Goats have caused environmental damage in both catchments.

Deer and pig control will be ancillary to the goat contract initially. The possibility of public hunting under a block system will be addressed as part of the preparation of an access policy scheduled for review this Spring.

Small animal pests such as rabbits, hedgehog, feral cats and mustelids will be controlled by the Ranger; in accordance with the *Animal Pest Management Strategy* and consistent with Regional Parks practice.

## 8. **Conclusion**

The Council has started the “all pests” approach to controlling animal pests in the Wainuiomata and Orongorongo catchments. This will have advantages to the Water Group in reducing possible sources of microbiological contamination of source water, as well as reducing turbidity by allowing a more complete vegetation cover.

The control of animal pests on a large scale will enable the natural ecosystems in the catchments to recover. The catchments have high environmental values. They contain the last significant remnant of lowland podocarp forest in the southern North Island, high altitude beech forest and important wetland associations. Animal pest control will maintain and ultimately enhance their biodiversity. This will help achieve Council’s Regional Policy Statement objectives.

## 9. **Communication**

This operation is an opportunity to present the Council as an effective steward of its water supply catchments and forest lands. A media release has been prepared along the lines of this report, and another will follow when the trap catch results are finalised.

**10. Recommendations**

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

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