

## Biosecurity series

### Priority possum control in the Waikato region

# What you as a land occupier need to know

Possum control will commence in your area soon. In undertaking this work we want to work with local communities and interest groups in a combined effort. This factsheet provides background information on what you can expect from Waikato Regional Council and its possum control contractors and vice versa. Some frequently asked questions are also included.

### Possum control and the Regional Pest Management Strategy

Waikato Regional Council is responsible for protecting and enhancing the environment within the Waikato region. One of the activities undertaken by Waikato Regional Council is pest management, which is implemented through the Waikato Regional Pest Management Strategy – 2008-2013 (RPMS). Possum control for community and regional benefit is a principal component of the RPMS.

### Why possum control in your area

The possum control soon to be carried out will help to achieve one or more of the following outcomes:

- enhance and protect biodiversity values
- maintain the gains made through past possum control operations (for example, Animal Health Board, Department of Conservation, or previous community possum control schemes)
- stabilise and improve the health of upper river catchments, through establishment of dense forest canopies and understories.

### Funding for possum control

All land owners within the Waikato region pay a targeted biosecurity rate regardless of whether they live in town or the country. This rate pays for a wide range of animal and plant pest services and initiatives. Possum control has benefits right across the regional community – including freedom from bovine Tb, healthy forests and more productive home gardens. Rates fund 100 per cent of the possum control costs in identified priority areas. Where Crown land is involved, Waikato Regional Council endeavours to obtain equitable funding from the relevant departments, such as the Department of Conservation (DOC).



### Performance-based contracts

Waikato Regional Council uses professional pest control contractors to carry out all possum control work. They are engaged on performance-based contracts to achieve a target set at five per cent residual trap catch (RTC) or less for ground control operations, and three per cent RTC or less for aerial control operations. The RTC is the number of possums caught per 100 traps using a standard trapping protocol. If the contractor does not achieve the agreed target they are not paid and must undertake additional work until they reach the target. By using performance-based contracts Waikato Regional Council is protecting ratepayer investment and guaranteeing results.

## What you can expect from our possum control contractors

### Initial meeting to discuss timing and type/s of control

Prior to any control on your property, you will be visited by a pest control contractor who will discuss the timing and type/s of possum control proposed for your property with you.

The amount of possum habitat on your property (trees, bush, river margins or limestone outcrops, for example) will determine how much possum control will need to be carried out and for how long. If you have no shelterbelts or significant vegetation then possum control is unlikely to be carried out on your property.

The contractor will also discuss the preferred methods to be used on your property and how they may affect your day to day activities. The proposed method will be discussed and agreed with you, and a record kept by the contractor.

You will be asked to sign a property entry advice form under section 109 of the Biosecurity Act 1993. This notice acknowledges that you agree to allow access for the control work and agree on the control method. Health and safety considerations will also be discussed to reduce the likelihood of workplace accidents.

### Legal steps for control access

To make the possum control in the area as effective as possible, it is necessary for the contractor to gain access to properties that have possum habitat regardless, of whether the land occupier feels control is necessary.

If a land occupier is reluctant to grant access, Waikato Regional Council will try to work together with them to reach an agreeable outcome. However, if required, access to control pests may be obtained legally.

If a land occupier does not give access consent, the contractor will contact Waikato Regional Council's project manager and a decision made on the next steps. This is likely to involve the project manager and a local land owner steering group member meeting with the land occupier to discuss their concerns and try to reach a suitable agreement.

If, at the end of such meetings and subsequent phone conversations, the land occupier is still not willing to give consent, a legal process involving both the Biosecurity Act and Wild Animal Control Act 1977 may be implemented.

During the course of this legal process, and subsequent possum control, costs additional to those normally borne may be incurred by Waikato Regional Council. Under the Biosecurity Act, Waikato Regional Council is entitled to recover any actual and reasonable administration and control costs from the land owner/occupier.

## Final check before control

Before entering a property to commence possum control, the contractor will either revisit or phone land occupiers and reconfirm the details previously agreed. Contractors need to remain flexible at this point as there may be issues not previously thought of, for example stock rotation changes and fencing implications, which need to be noted.

On the day that control work commences, the contractor will advise the land occupier specifically where the contractor will commence control and the way in which the control will be undertaken. When control is completed the contractor will contact the land occupier again to advise them that control is completed. If this is not possible, a letter will be left for or sent to the land occupier.

## What happens after control is completed?

Once the contractor is close to completing control to their satisfaction they will contact the Waikato Regional Council project manager and call for a 'performance monitor'. This monitoring is undertaken to determine whether or not the contractor has met the target, which in turn determines whether or not the contractor gets paid. The monitoring contractor is completely independent of the control contractor, in fact monitoring contractors are not permitted to undertake possum control in regions where they undertake possum monitoring.

The monitoring is carried out by using leg-hold traps in lines of 10 traps set at predetermined sites in the control area. Not every property will have monitor lines on them – they are chosen at random and any possums caught represent results across the whole area worked. If the performance monitor returns an RTC higher than the target, the contractor will have to return to the operational area and undertake further work, at their own cost, and then call for an additional monitor. All additional work and monitoring is paid for by the contractor undertaking the possum control.

Once the contractor successfully meets the target they will supply Waikato Regional Council with a post operational report. Waikato Regional Council will then meet with the local land owner steering group to discuss the operation and how it went, write a letter to land owners outlining the results of the control operation and also produce a media release outlining the same information which will be sent to local newspapers.

## Frequently asked questions

*I do possum control myself. Why do contractors need to do what I'm already doing?*

Possum control contractors are engaged to do control over the whole of the designated area for a set period of time. Although you already maybe doing control on your own property, contractors are able to do more intensive control and are required to reduce possum numbers to a very low level quickly and efficiently to meet their performance requirements. Land owners doing any intermittent control during these times may compromise the outcomes, such as inducing trap shyness. Overall, this situation should be good for landholders as it means that your time is freed up to concentrate on other work on your property.

*How much say do I get on the types of control to be used on my property?*

The contractor will visit you and discuss with you the method of control proposed for your property. There may be instances where your preferred method may not be suitable for your property and the contractor will discuss the other options available. We try to be as fair and flexible as possible. Some methods of control are more expensive than others and if you prefer an alternative method which is more expensive than that proposed you will be required to pay the difference.

*Will my livestock be adversely affected?*

No. If ground control is to be undertaken using toxins, these will be placed out of the reach of stock and will be in specific delivery systems, such as bait stations and/or bait bags. If aerial control is to be used where stock graze, the contractor will discuss a grazing plan with you to ensure that all stock are well away from the area where the aerial control will be undertaken.

*Will my pets have access to the traps and poisons being used?*

If control is to be undertaken using toxins then bait stations will help ensure that access for pets is avoided. The lures that are used to attract possums will not be attractive to cats and dogs. Also, if control is to be undertaken using trapping, the lures used to attract possums will not be attractive to pets. Some toxins used have antidotes widely available through vets, such as vitamin K1 for brodifacoum poisoning. If there are any concerns whatsoever, the contractor may offer to use cage traps or some other alternative method. As a general precaution you should discourage scavenging of possum carcasses in areas where control has taken place. If you do have concerns, feel free to raise them with the contractor when they visit you.



*Can I be forced to have possum control on my property?*

The Biosecurity Act authorises Waikato Regional Council to obtain access to a property without consent, in certain circumstances. However, this is seldom necessary. Waikato Regional Council enjoys a lot of positive interactions with Waikato land owners in controlling possums. By far the majority of people are united against the damage caused by possums. We endeavour to meet and discuss options and methods face to face and resolve issues together through common sense dialogue. However, if the need arises we won't shy away from taking enforcement action to ensure the integrity of control.

*What occupational safety and health (OSH) notifications am I required to give?*

Under section 16 of the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992, people who control workplaces (such as farmers) have a simple duty to warn visitors of any work related, out-of-the-ordinary hazards that they know about that could cause serious harm (for example tree-felling, blasting). This duty extends to pest control contractors who are legally authorised to be on your property, but only where they have given you verbal notice of their visit. You need only give a verbal warning. You are not liable if anyone comes onto your land without your permission and suffers work related harm.