
REPORT 1
(1215/13/IM)

FERAL GOAT ERADICATION FOR SOUTH WEST WELLINGTON – EXTERNAL FUNDING PROPOSAL

1. Purpose of Report

To brief the Makara-Ohariu Community Board on the Department of Conservation Biodiversity Fund as a potential funding source for the feral goat eradication project, and provide an overview of how the project could operate should the funding application be successful.

2. Executive Summary

The eradication of feral goats from the south-west of Wellington has been discussed for many years. There is now an opportunity to apply for external funding to implement this project. It should be noted that there is no guarantee of funding success, however the project has significant biodiversity outcomes, considerable support from key agencies and most importantly, growing support from key landholders.

3. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Makara-Ohariu Community Board:

- 1. Receives the information.*

4. Background

The eradication of feral goats from the south-west peninsula was first raised by one of the major landholders and rapidly gained support from local government and the Department of Conservation due to the ongoing issue of reinvasion to reserves and important conservation areas. It was adopted as an action by the Wellington City Council in the Biodiversity Action Plan (2007), although the need for external funding was identified.

The south-west peninsula was once predominantly forested with trees such as tawa, rimu and northern rata. Remnants of the original forest and coastal escarpment habitats remain, however the majority of the area has been cleared

and farmed, with relatively large areas now reverting to scrub. This scrub tends to be dominated by either gorse or tauhinu, although there are areas of manuka/kanuka shrubland and grey scrub – both of which are uncommon within Wellington but are very important transitional communities in ecological succession and essential habitat for lizards, insects and some birds.

Where seed sources are available, and pests controlled or eradicated, the areas of scrub will in time become native forest. Goats are seen as a primary threat to this succession. The removal of goats will reduce the consumption of palatable plant species in the understorey and significantly contribute to forest regeneration and restoration.

Goats were absent from the area until the 1980s when they were introduced for farming and controlling gorse. Economic downturn and the withdrawal of government farming subsidies resulted in abandonment of many of these farming ventures and a resultant significant feral goat population.

The concept of feral goat eradication in south west Wellington has now been discussed for many years, and it has always been acknowledged that firstly the commitment and support from major landholders in the area is needed. There is now considerable support for this project from major landowners and with the recent advances in reducing some of the feral goat populations on some of the larger blocks the timing for an eradication effort has never been better.

In 2008 Wellington City Council commissioned a Goat Eradication Plan for South-West Wellington (Wildland Consultants). This identified some of the biological values impacted by goats, assessed the feasibility of the project, and recommended how it could be implemented; focussing south of the Makara and Ohariu Stream confluence. The cost of the project was estimated as around \$435,000 over three years.

A relatively short and sharp eradication effort is preferred as it is more likely to succeed and be more cost effective than a longer campaign. It will also capture the interest of the rural community, to whom feral goats can be a considerable pest, and engage them in the issue of biodiversity. A longer programme is less likely to succeed in eradication and would instead change to an ongoing control programme requiring significant amounts of ongoing funding.

5. Discussion

5.1 Funding options

The estimated \$435,000 for the project targeting primarily private land is currently beyond the capacity of any one organisation to fund. There are some national funds targeting biodiversity enhancement on private land, and the Department of Conservation Biodiversity Funds is a key potential funder, although under increasing pressure as other government funds are under review (for example, the Ministry for Environment Sustainable Management Fund). It is estimated that a fund application for the feral goat eradication project would be in the vicinity of \$385,000 with the remainder coming from in-kind

contributions from Wellington City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council and potentially the Department of Conservation Poneke Area Office.

The Biodiversity Condition Fund aims to improve and maintain the condition of areas of indigenous vegetation, species and habitats on private land. Funded projects often involve, for example, fencing, weed control, restoration planting or pest control. Councils may apply on behalf of private landowners.

There are generally two Biodiversity Funding rounds per year. The next round is expected to open in June 2010. There is a general guideline of \$60,000 per year maximum for a single project and a guideline for the maximum project term of three years has been also adopted. While the feral goat eradication project fits within the three year time frame, it is for a larger sum than would normally be considered. Department of Conservation note that in setting the limits as a guide it is accepted that in some exceptional cases applicants may still wish to bid for an amount in excess of the fund limit. These applications will still be accepted, but any approvals would be made as an exception and would need a very persuasive application in both instances. Prior discussion with the Fund Manager is recommended in such cases.

It remains to be seen as to whether or not this project would meet such an exception, however there are a number of factors in its favour, including: the application being on behalf of the Community Board, support (including in-kind funding) from both Greater Wellington Regional Council and the Department of Conservation (Poneke Area Office), the fact that the project covers over 12,000 hectares of private land, the existing biodiversity values, and the potential biodiversity gains from excluding goat browse. Written support from major landholders will also be key, and this has already been obtained from some.

5.2 Project implementation

Assuming the funding application was successful, the following outlines a proposed programme is outlined below. Note that this will be refined over the next few months in consultation with key stakeholders, including Greater Wellington Regional Council and Department of Conservation.

- Commitments of support from the contributing agencies (Wellington City Council, Department of Conservation Poneke Area Office, Greater Wellington Regional Council) and major landholders will be formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- The appointment of a coordinator (who may also be the principle hunter in carrying out the feral goat eradication). The Wellington City Council will contract the coordinator and administer funds on behalf of the Makara-Ohariu Community Board. Similarly, any hunting contracts would be managed through Council and in accordance with Council standards.
- Months 1-3: The coordinator will work with the major landowners and with the Makara-Ohariu Community Board in gaining support and permissions from any other landowners, including smaller holdings. This will also be an education opportunity to provide all landowners of

South-West Wellington with information on the biodiversity values in the area and general biodiversity management and restoration. The coordinator will also work with the Wellington City Council in establishing a database system for recording sightings (presence and absence) and kill rates.

- Months 4-5: Wellington City Council will establish a monitoring system on Council land within the management area to measure progress. A standardised vegetation monitoring system including exclosure plots will be used. Any domestic goat herds within the management area will be identified and mapped. District Plan rules on containment and identification of domestic goats will be enforced.
- Months 5-36: As the required permissions are gained, the coordinator will implement a phased eradication programme in accordance with the Goat Eradication Plan for South-West Wellington (Wildlands 2008). This is based on ground-based hunting across manageable sized blocks within the hunting area, sweeping from the east to the west. It is recommended that professional hunters are used to minimise the risk of missing any feral goats. The costs are based on hunting until a complete sweep of the block results in zero encounters of feral goats or fresh goat sign.
- Regular surveillance of eradicated blocks is also important with any sightings responded to promptly. Absences should also be recorded and entered into the database.
- Aerial hunting and/or surveillance may be a possibility where environmental conditions permit, and can be a cost effective approach. Again, experienced professionals must be used.

5.3 Options if funding application is unsuccessful

It should be noted that the Biodiversity Funds are contestable, heavily subscribed, and generally fund smaller projects. Despite best efforts, it is possible that the application will not be successful. If this is the case, then we will be in a position to review the project and consider either alternative funding sources, or alternative strategies.

For example, the Board may wish to consider seeking funding for a project coordinator to work with the community on gathering views and opinions of pest animals, facilitating local participation in pest control (including feral goats and possums), fund raising for pest control, and working to medium term goals such as keeping pests at sufficiently low densities for some biodiversity outcomes.

5.4 Consultation and Engagement

The proposal to eradicate feral goats from the south-west Wellington was initially community driven. It was consulted on as one of the Actions in the Wellington City Council Biodiversity Action Plan which was approved by Council in 2007.

5.5 Financial Considerations

Aside from the application for additional external funding, this project is not currently seeking any additional resources. In-kind funding and contributions would be made by reprioritising the Council's existing feral goat control programme to fit with the overall control strategy.

5.6 Climate Change Impacts and Considerations

This project would enhance the indigenous biodiversity communities of south-west Wellington. Given that the future impacts of climate change on native flora and fauna are not yet properly understood, providing more extensive and healthy habitats is an appropriate precautionary approach.

5.7 Long-Term Council Community Plan Considerations

Depending on the outcome of the funding application, Council may need to consider additional one-off funding or reprioritisation of existing funds.

6. Conclusion

Should the funding application be successful, then this project will better protect existing biodiversity values by removing a key pest species, as well as significantly facilitating the restoration of indigenous forest habitats.

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Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

This project is consistent with implementing Wellington City Council's Biodiversity Action Plan (2007).

2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

Currently no impact – external funding sought in first instance.

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

No Treaty of Waitangi implications.

4) Decision-Making

This is not a significant decision. The report sets out a process which could be followed should an external funding application be successful.

5) Consultation

a) General Consultation

This is consistent with the Biodiversity Action Plan (2007) and with the resolution of the Makara-Ohariu Community Board's 18th February meeting.

b)

Consultation with Maori

As above.

6) Legal Implications

No legal implications of this report.

7) Consistency with existing policy

This is consistent with Council Policy (both with the Pest Management Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan)