

Executive summary

This report reviews the Taranaki Regional Council's performance and achievement on its pest animal management functions for the 2008/2009 year. The report also fulfils the Council's statutory obligation under section 85 of the Biosecurity Act to review and report back on its performance as the management agency with respect to activities undertaken under the *Pest Management Strategy for Taranaki: Animals*.

Set out below is a summary of the main activities carried out by the Council in 2008/2009:

- Supporting the 'Self-help Possum Control Programme' on the Taranaki ring plain continues to be the main focus of the Council's pest animal management activities. This programme focuses on the Council treating properties and then facilitating the land occupiers' maintenance of reduced possum numbers.
- As of 30 June 2009, 3,753 properties comprising approximately 228,418 hectares, has been incorporated in the Self-help Possum Control Programme and occupiers are undertaking possum control maintenance.
- The Council provided property specific advice and other assistance to properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme on 3,762 occasions.
- The Council inspected 639 properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme. Six Notices of Direction directing occupiers to control possums were issued – all of which were complied with.
- Monitoring highlights the importance of regular and ongoing possum control by land occupiers in the Self-help Possum Control Programme. Prior to possum maintenance, the mean residual trap catch for the 256 properties monitored was 11.8% (over the Council's target of 10%). After possum maintenance, the mean residual trap catch for the 204 properties monitored was 6.9% (below the Council's target of 10%).
- The Council undertook targeted possum control on 38 properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme to protect the integrity of the Programme.
- Planning for possum control on privately owned land adjacent to Egmont National Park has commenced and is well advanced. However, the planned commencement of the control was deferred until August 2009 at the request of the Department of Conservation to align with their timeframes and ensure the best pest and biodiversity outcomes.
- The Council responded to 382 public enquiries pertaining to pests – most enquiries pertained to Argentine ants, possums, mustelids and rabbits.
- Through the Council's pest management activities, significant parts of Taranaki have effective long term pest control, which contributes towards community efforts to enhance agricultural production and indigenous biodiversity and amenity values in the region.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This report reviews the Taranaki Regional Council's (the Council) performance and achievement on its pest animal management functions for the 2008/2009 year.

The report also fulfils the Council's statutory obligation under section 85 of the Biosecurity Act 1993 to review and report back on its performance as management agency with respect to activities undertaken under the *Pest Management Strategy for Taranaki: Animals*.

1.2 Background

The Council has accepted responsibility for pest animal management in the Taranaki region, a responsibility derived from the Biosecurity Act 1993.

In 2007, the Council prepared and adopted its third pest management strategy – the *Pest Management Strategy for Taranaki: Animals* (the Strategy). The Strategy provides a strategic and statutory framework for the management of 23 harmful animal species identified as pests in the Taranaki region. Pest animals in the Taranaki region in the 2007 Strategy are:

- Rook;
- Brushtail possum;
- European rabbit;
- Brown hare;
- Feral cat;
- Feral deer – red, Sika, sambar, fallow, rusa, white-tailed and wapiti deer;
- Feral goat;
- Feral pig;
- Magpie;
- Mustelids – ferret, stoat and weasel;
- Argentine ants; and
- Pest fish – brown bull-headed catfish, koi carp, *Gambusia* and rudd.

The focus of the Council's pest management activities is on supporting the Self-help Possum Control Programme. Council also undertakes general 'non-strategy' (or *non regulatory*) functions under the Biosecurity Act. Non-strategy functions focus on the provision of advice and information relating to other potentially harmful animals.

1.2.1 Objective

The overall objective for pest animal management activities for 2008/2009, as set out in the Council's 2008/2009 *Annual Plan* is to:

"Control pest animals to minimise their adverse effects on biodiversity, primary production and the regional economy and environment."

1.2.2 Performance measures

In response to the above objective, the Council adopted the following performance measures for 2008/2009, as set out in the Council's *2008/2009 Annual Plan*:

- Implement the Council's *Pest Management Strategy for Taranaki: Animals 2006*:
 - Undertake control of areas within the Programme adjacent to the Egmont National Park in conjunction with the Department of Conservation;
 - Support the *Self-help Possum Control Programme* by ensuring that landholders maintain possum populations within acceptable limits (10% residual trap catch) on land already included (228 000 hectares);
- Commence pest control in selected key natural areas for biodiversity protection;
- Monitor, provide advice on, and, if necessary, implement small-scale control of unwanted animal organisms;
- Undertake surveillance and, where necessary, control of other pest animals, including feral goats, deer, cats, hares, mustelids, pest fish and magpies;
- Advise, monitor and where necessary enforce or undertake control of rabbits and ants; and
- Undertake direct control and eradication of rooks.

2. Report on progress

2.1 The Self-help Possum Control Programme

The implementation of the 'Self-help Possum Control Programme' continues to be the main focus of the Council's pest animal management activities. Possums are arguably New Zealand's number one pest and are having an extraordinary impact on agricultural production, animal health and indigenous biodiversity values. The Programme is effectively a joint programme between the Council and land occupiers and achieves a level of possum control that would otherwise be beyond the resources and capability of any one party to manage alone.

The Self-help Possum Control Programme is focused on the Taranaki ring plain (Figure 1) and its aim is to reduce and keep possum numbers at low levels, i.e. less than 10% residual trap catch (RTC)¹. Each year, the Council facilitates possum maintenance control by providing an advisory, inspectorial, enforcement and operational service for all properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme and for which the Council has, in previous years, undertaken initial possum control.

As at 30 June 2009, 3,753 properties covering approximately 228,418 hectares have been incorporated into the Self-help Possum Control Programme. Except for urban areas, the Programme now covers almost all privately owned land on the ring plain and significant parts of the coastal terraces and frontal hill country. Within the Programme, possum infestation levels have been successfully reduced to a level that protects agricultural production values and animal health on the ring plain. Reducing infestations of possums also protects indigenous biodiversity values on the ring plain and contributes to the protection of such values in Egmont National Park.

In preceding years, the Council has undertaken initial possum control to include new areas into the Self-help Possum Control Programme (typically between 8,000 - 12,000 ha). However, in 2008/2009 the Council determined a *hiatus* on the addition of new areas was appropriate to allow for resourcing of Council support for possum control on privately owned land around Egmont National Park (refer section 2.2 below).



Figure 1: Map of the Self-help Possum Control Programme

¹ For example, out of 30 trap catch nights, less than three possums are caught.

2.1.1 Providing advice to land occupiers

In 2008/2009, the Council contacted 3,762 land occupiers to provide property specific advice and other assistance to properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme (compared with 3,437 in the preceding year).



Council Officer David McMillan discusses possum control with Rahotu farmer Gary Baylis.

Council advice and assistance seeks to co-ordinate land occupiers' possum control efforts and promote regular maintenance. Land occupiers in the Self-help Possum Control Programme were contacted with approximately 70% being advised to undertake possum control that year. Thirty percent were advised they did not need to undertake possum control - as Council was due to undertake control in that area as part of the Mount Egmont operation or because monitoring had confirmed low possum numbers in their area.

Previous concerns raised by Federated Farmers, on behalf of the farming community, regarding the cost effectiveness of ongoing control now that possum numbers are low have been addressed by Council through increased monitoring (to determine if control is necessary that year) and the increased use of self feeding bait stations.

In 2008/2009, the Council also introduced new technology that allows property information on the Council's database to be accessed in the field thereby increase officer efficiency.



Self feeding bait stations have had limited use in the past as they can only be used in fenced off non stocked areas. With more farmers now fencing off riparian margins, there are increased opportunities to safely use these stations

2.1.2 Training and certifying landowners

In 2008/2009, the Council ran three training and certification courses to enable 26 land occupiers and contractors to obtain their controlled substance licences, as required under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996. Two Council staff are qualified test certifiers, and by running the course in-house the Council can assist people to obtain their licences at a greatly reduced cost.

Upon request, the Council provided advice and information to land occupiers on the use of bait stations and leg hold traps. This advice and information helps to ensure land occupiers are setting traps efficiently and according to protocols to reduce the likelihood of by-catch.

The training and certification service is an important component in ensuring possum control does not become too expensive for land occupiers due to the licensing regime and that land occupiers are 'empowered' to undertake effective pest management.

2.1.3 Compliance monitoring and enforcement

The Council monitors land occupier compliance with the strategy rule requiring them to maintain possum numbers at or below a 10% RTC. Throughout 2008/2009, the Council inspected 639 properties to ensure that land occupiers were complying with the Strategy rule.

Compliance monitoring occurs largely in conjunction with the Council's annual regional monitoring (refer section 2.1.4 below), but also in response to public enquiries or complaints. Two hundred and four properties were inspected (as part of the regional monitoring) after the land occupiers' scheduled maintenance control. That monitoring identified 41 (or 20%) properties with excessive possum numbers. In these instances, land occupiers were advised to undertake possum control. Follow-up inspections confirmed most land occupiers had responded to that advice and undertaken the required possum control.

On six occasions, follow-up inspections confirmed that land occupiers had failed to undertake satisfactory possum control and Notices of Direction were served directing them to control possums on their land (compared with the five Notices of Directions served in the preceding year). The Notices of Directions were complied with and no other enforcement action (i.e. default action or prosecution) was necessary. Consequently, through a combination of regular monitoring, early warnings, advice and enforcement, ultimately there was 100% compliance with the Strategy rule.

Table 1 summarises advisory and enforcement activities undertaken by Council in 2008/2009 to facilitate maintenance of the Self-help Possum Control Programme – including a comparison with the preceding year.

Table 1: Measures to facilitate maintenance

Measures adopted	2007/2008	2008/2009
No. of properties in the Programme	3,757	3,753*
No. of properties contacted for maintenance	3,437	3,762
No. of properties inspected	547	639
No. of Notices of Direction	5	6
Other enforcement action	0	0

* Property amalgamations resulted in a decrease in number of properties in the Programme.

** Some properties undertook possum control twice within the financial year, e.g. July 2008 and June 2009.

2.1.4 Monitoring the effectiveness of the Programme

The Council monitors the effectiveness of the Self-help Possum Control Programme in maintaining low possum numbers. This monitoring also contributes to the Council's compliance monitoring programme.

In 2008/2009, the Council randomly selected and monitored 460 RTC lines – 256 lines were monitored prior to maintenance, and 204 lines were monitored after

maintenance. These lines covered approximately 12% of the properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme.

Monitoring prior to land occupiers undertaking their possum work showed that possum levels were, on average, 11.8% RTC. Out of the 256 lines, 101 (or 39%) were over the Council's 10% RTC target.

Monitoring after land occupiers had done their possum work showed that possum levels were, on average, 6.9% RTC (Table 2). This was well below the Council's target of 10% RTC. However, as noted previously, 41 lines (or 20%) exceeded the Council's target. In most cases, the level of non compliance was not significant (e.g. monitoring recorded one too many possums).

However, regardless, Council officers worked with all the land occupiers concerned to ensure additional possum control was undertaken and effective control achieved.

Table 2 summaries the results of Council's monitoring of the effectiveness of the Self-help Possum Control Programme. Based on the monitoring undertaken by Council, the Self-help Possum Control Programme is successfully maintaining possums at very low levels over time (Figure 2). However, the monitoring has also demonstrated the importance of land occupiers undertaking regular and ongoing possum control.

Table 2: Monitoring the Programme's effectiveness

Measures adopted	2007/2008	2008/2009
Number of properties monitored	341	460
Mean RTC prior to control	8.5%	11.8%
Mean RTC following control	7.5	6.9%
Percentage exceeding 10% RTC target prior to control	29%	39%
Percentage exceeding 10% target following control	24%	20%

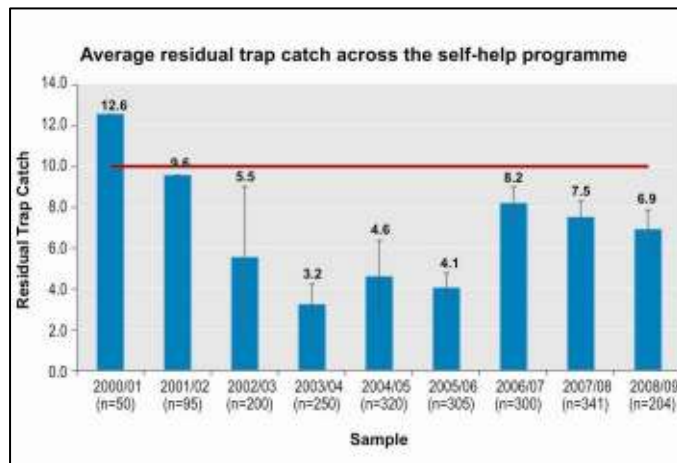


Figure 2: Mean RTC across Programme

2.1.5 Undertaking direct control for land occupiers

In accordance with the Strategy, the Council undertakes further possum control on properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme where, through no fault of the occupier, further possum control is required to protect the integrity of the Programme (i.e. targeted assistance).

Targeted assistance involved Council officers trapping possums on properties where there was a history of pest control but which, for a variety of reasons (e.g. poison shyness, the large amount of bush/pasture margin), needed extra assistance.

In 2008/2009, the Council provided targeted assistance to 38 properties (compared with six properties in the preceding year). Six of these properties were adjacent to

the eastern boundary of the programme to reduce reinfestation from areas not under control. The remaining 32 properties were largely coastal properties where monitoring identified higher than expected possum numbers, despite the land occupiers' best efforts.

2.2 Possum control adjacent to Egmont National Park

This financial year, the Department of Conservation will commence its treatment of the Egmont National Park to reduce possum infestation levels. In conjunction with the Department of Conservation's operation, Council has agreed to treat privately owned land adjacent to the Park and ensure an integrated approach to possum control across both private and public land. This will involve 220 properties covering 15,229 hectares of land.



Targeted assistance - Council Officer setting a leg hold trap

Commencement of the Council's part in the Egmont control programme was scheduled for June 2009. However, the planned commencement of the control was deferred until August 2009 at the request of the Department of Conservation to align with their timeframes and ensure the best pest and biodiversity outcomes. Notwithstanding that, as at 30 June 2009, the Council has completed planning for its part in the operation. Agreement has been reached with the Department on the timing and methods for control, contracts have been tendered, medical officer of health and district council consents applied for, and land occupiers notified.

The Egmont operational area has been divided into three separate contracts. Tenders were received from 13 contractors with the successful contractors due to commence work in August 2009. Possum control requirements for landowners immediately adjacent to the Park were deferred in preparation for this operation.

2.3 Site-led pest control programmes

In recognition of its responsibilities under the Resource Management Act 1991 to contribute to the maintenance of indigenous biodiversity, the Council is becoming increasingly involved in site-led pest control. The Strategy states that Council will consider undertaking and funding the direct control of any pest animal having significant and adverse impacts on indigenous biodiversity values associated with privately owned Key Native Ecosystems (sites identified as having regionally significant indigenous biodiversity values).

As at 30 June 2009, 49 of 103 privately owned Key Native Ecosystems are included in the Self-help Possum Control Programme and therefore are part of a sustained possum control programme. However, in addition, the Council works with land occupiers and community groups to progress biodiversity outcomes.

In 2008/2009, the Council undertook several major pest control operations on Key Native Ecosystems in partnership with land occupiers, other agencies or community groups. These included:

- Assisting the Department of Conservation, East Taranaki Environment Trust and the Central North Island Blue Duck Trust with land occupier liaison as part of the stoat trapping programme to safeguard blue duck habitat;
- Assisting Ngati Tama to protect natural values over 1,600 hectares in the Parininihi/Whitecliffs area through aerial possum control. The possum control successfully reduced possum numbers to a 0.66% RTC (down from 16.0% RTC in 2006). Council officers also provided technical advice and training to Ngati Tama in relation to pest management;
- Assisting the East Taranaki Environmental Trust to safeguard kiwi habitat at Matau/Purangi through the provision of ongoing advice, technical assistance and financial support. Officers also assisted to prepare a marketing proposal to progress predator control over the area, undertook possum monitoring prior to control being undertaken, and assisted with kiwi listening surveys in this area;
- Assisting the Lake Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust with their pest eradication programme through the provision of ongoing advice, technical assistance (such as storage and monitoring of bait) and financial support. Officers also assisted during the two aerial bait applications and a small ground application due to a pest incursion into the reserve;
- Monitoring rodent and possum infestation levels prior to control being undertaken at Umutekai Bush; and
- The control of rabbits and hares to protect newly established plantings at the Sandy Bay Key Native Ecosystem.



Assisting with aerial possum control in the Parininihi/Whitecliffs area

For further information on the Council's biodiversity activities, refer to the *Biodiversity Annual Report 2008/2009*.

2.4 Other pest management

2.4.1 Eradication of rooks

The Council remains committed to eradicating rooks from Taranaki. Rooks are extremely difficult birds to control and, once established, can represent a serious problem.

In 2008/2009, the Council received four enquires regarding rooks. Officers responded to public reportings of the bird. Investigations resulted in two confirmed sighting of an individual rook in the Toko and Patea areas. Control could not be achieved, however, no nests were found. Council intends to recheck these areas in the nesting season in September.

Activities to control rooks for eradication purposes have so far prevented the establishment of rooks in Taranaki thereby protecting agricultural and horticultural production values, and indigenous biodiversity values in the region.

2.4.2 Argentine ant programme

In 2008/2009, the Council carried out an intensive publicity campaign around all known infested areas. This involved setting up an Argentine Ant road show. The display was visited by approximately 150 people with many of them bringing ant samples in for identification.

In 2008/2009, the Council responded to 215 public enquiries relating to Argentine ants (up from 186 the previous year). Most enquiries were seeking Council assistance on identifying suspected Argentine ant infestations and advice on control. All enquiries were responded to and typically involved Council officers visiting affected land occupiers.



Argentine Ant road show

Of note, the Council supplies, at cost, *Xtinquish* ant bait and *Ant Stop Granules* to affected land occupiers (the only two pesticides available in New Zealand that are known to be effective against Argentine ants). From next year, however, the manufacturer has indicated that bait will only be available through their agents – this is likely to significantly increase the cost of control.

Over the 2008/2009 summer, the Council undertook intensive monitoring of known and suspected Argentine ant infestations. The monitoring confirmed substantial increases in the number of known infestations, and an expansion in their range (Table 3). The monitoring also addressed the feasibility of eradicating Argentine ants from Patea (a task identified in the Operational Plan). However, monitoring identified the Patea infestations to be too widespread for eradication to be cost effective. This along with the discovery of

Table 3: Number of Argentine ant infestations in Taranaki

Area	Estimated number of infestations		
	2006/2007	2007/08	2008/2009
Waitara	400-500	200	200
Bell Block & environs		400	430
Blagdon	20	60	70
Tukupa		30	50
Oakura & environs	20	60	80
Patea	20	30	60
Fitzroy	0	0	60
Waverley	0	0	10
Belt Road	0	0	25

three new infestations at Fitzroy, Waverley and Belt Road indicate that this pest is becoming more wide spread and established in the region.

2.4.3 Control of other pests, including rabbits, feral goats, deer and magpies

Most pest control undertaken by the Council is associated with the Self-help Possum Control Programme. However, the Council also enforces Strategy rules to ensure that rabbit infestation levels do not affect neighbouring properties, and, as circumstance permit, the Council will provide assistance to support Council programmes or in response to public requests.

In 2008/2009, the Council received and responded to 29 requests for information in relation to the control of rabbits (compared with 24 requests in the preceding year). No enforcement action was necessary with regards to rabbit control. In addition, in support of its Riparian Management Programme, the Council controlled rabbits and hares in six area covering approximately 18 properties to protect new planting. This work resulted in the control of 184 rabbits and 95 hares.

In 2008/2009, the Council loaned magpie traps to land occupier seeking to undertake the voluntary control of magpies. In response to public enquiries, the Council also undertook the control of magpies where they were harassing pedestrians and cyclist. The service resulted in the destruction of 303 magpies.

The Council continued its support of the North Taranaki Branch of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Ten traps have been loaned long-term to the Society resulting in the capture of both stray and feral cats – mostly in and around New Plymouth. Results from the Society combined with cats caught during other Council operations have resulted in 127 cats being caught.

2.5 Respond to requests for information and other enquiries

Each year, the Council receives numerous requests from the public for information on pest management. All public enquiries are recorded and responded to and a report made with respect to each investigation. Council's response varies from providing advice and information over the telephone and the distribution of information pamphlets and booklets to providing property specific advice and other assistance related to pest control.

In 2008/2009, the Council received and responded to 382 specific requests from the public for information on pest animals (plus 42 relating to other invasive animal species, e.g. wasps). Most public enquiries relate to requests for information on the control of Argentine ants (due to the publicity programme), and to a lesser extent possums, mustelids and rabbits (Table 4).

Table 4: Number of pest related enquiries

Pest animals	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/08	2008/2009
Possums	40	22	42	45
Rabbits	20	30	24	29
Rooks	11	2	1	4
Feral goats	4	3	3	1
Hares	4	1	5	3
Mustelids	47	40	38	37
Feral deer	3	0.	0	1
Feral pigs	2	0	0	1
Magpies	31	26	21	22
Feral cats	13	18	27	23
Argentine ants			186	215
Pest fish			0	1
Total	175	142	347	382

In 2008/2009, the Council also undertook a number of publicity and education activities (as identified in the Operational Plan). These involved the Council visiting properties in known sighting areas for rooks to increase local awareness and encourage public reportings of any sightings. In consultation with the Department of Conservation, the Council also comprehensively reviewed and updated its fact sheets on feral goats, deer, and mustelids. A new fact sheet addressing pest fish was also developed.

Through its education programme, the Council made presentations to school and community groups. Pest management presentations typically cover an outline of pest animal threats, a visit to the pest depot, and a demonstration of the tools used to control pests. During 2008/2009, nine groups visited the pest animal depot involving a total of 241 people.



Council officer, Lou Rata, responding to a public request for information on pest management

The Council's pest advisory service facilitates land occupier and community efforts or ability to control pests and contributes towards the protection of agricultural production and indigenous biodiversity and amenity values.

2.6 Monitor, provide advice and, if necessary, implement small-scale control of unwanted animal organisms

No small-scale management programmes under section 100 of the Biosecurity Act were considered in 2008/2009. Notwithstanding that, there were other harmful animals that are not declared to be 'pests' or 'unwanted organisms' that Council officers provided advice on and occasionally controlled.

Council also responded to 42 requests for advice and information in relation to the control of other animals not declared to be 'pests' or 'unwanted organisms'. These primarily related to the control of bees and wasps, and spiders etc. The Council responded to all enquiries within 24 hours.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, with one exception, the Council met all its performance targets for 2008/2009 in out in the Council's *2008/2009 Annual Plan* for its pest animal management functions. The one exception was a delay in possum control associated the Mount Egmont control programme at the request of the Department of Conservation. The control has been delayed until August 2009 to achieve the maximum pest and biodiversity outcomes.

Set out below is a summary of the main activities carried out by the Council in 2008/2009:

- Supporting the 'Self-help Possum Control Programme' on the Taranaki ring plain continues to be the main focus of the Council's pest animal management activities. This programme focuses on the Council treating properties and then facilitating the land occupiers' maintenance of reduced possum numbers.
- As of 30 June 2009, 3,753 properties comprising approximately 228,418 hectares, has been incorporated in the Self-help Possum Control Programme and occupiers are undertaking possum control maintenance.
- The Council provided property specific advice and other assistance to properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme on 3,762 occasions.
- The Council inspected 639 properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme. Six Notices of Direction directing occupiers to control possums were issued – all of which were complied with.
- Monitoring highlights the importance of regular and ongoing possum control by land occupiers in the Self-help Possum Control Programme. Prior to possum maintenance, the mean residual trap catch for the 256 properties monitored was 11.8% (over the Council's target of 10%). After possum maintenance, the mean residual trap catch for the 204 properties monitored was 6.9% (below the Council's target of 10%).
- The Council undertook targeted possum control on 38 properties in the Self-help Possum Control Programme to protect the integrity of the Programme.
- Planning for possum control on privately owned land adjacent to Egmont National Park has commenced and is well advanced. However, the planned commencement of the control was deferred until August 2009 at the request of the Department of Conservation to align with their timeframes and ensure the best pest and biodiversity outcomes.
- The Council responded to 382 public enquiries pertaining to pests – most enquiries pertained to Argentine ants, possums, mustelids and rabbits.
- Through the Council's pest management activities, significant parts of Taranaki have effective long term pest control, which contributes towards community efforts to enhance agricultural production and indigenous biodiversity and amenity values in the region.

This report will be forwarded to key interested stakeholders for pest management.