

SO WHY DID WE ADOPT THIS NEW PROGRAMME?

The only possum control carried out in Taranaki prior to the self-help possum control programme was the occasional small scale Bovine tuberculosis operation and a few commercial possum hunters harvesting a small number of skins per year when prices were economically viable. These methods of control were not keeping up with the natural population increase.

Possum numbers were extreme, support and involvement by land occupiers was low and the damage was costly.

So, a new programme was devised - one that gained the support and involvement of land occupiers, had a more appropriate role for the Council and was cost-effective for all parties. The self-help possum control programme was born.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

The Council's goal, using a combination of control techniques is to achieve at least a 75 per cent reduction in the possum population.

The Council aims to eventually implement the self-help possum control programme on all rateable land within the region, where economically feasible.

The Council's efforts are geared towards creating a sustainable region, a region that appreciates, protects and enhances its natural environment whilst encouraging development.

In an essence, the Council views the programme as a way of achieving a region that boasts a sustainable and resilient economy that prospers within its natural environment. The agriculture and forestry industries will be enhanced and biodiversity in the region will be protected.

HOW DOES THE PROGRAMME FURTHER THE COUNCIL'S VISION AND STRATEGIC DIRECTION?

The Council's mission is "to work for the present and the future benefits of the Taranaki region by:

- promoting the sustainable use, development and protection of Taranaki's natural and physical resources;

- safeguarding Taranaki's people and resources from natural and other hazards; and
- representing and advocating Taranaki's regional interests.

We will do this in a responsible cost effective way that includes and encourages participation by the regional community and takes account of the Treaty of Waitangi".

The Council's vision is realised by the Council's slogan of "working with people and caring for our environment".

This programme is based on just this - a partnership between the Council and the community with the goal of enhancing and protecting the environment.

Project management techniques

WHAT ARE THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES UTILISED IN THIS PROGRAMME?

An array of techniques are utilised in the undertaking of the programme. They all fundamentally stem from the recognition of the need to bring three components together to realise effective strategies. These are:

1. clear purpose and good product;
 2. capability to deliver; and
 3. support from stakeholders;
- the "should do, can do, people want" success formula.

Specific features of the project management techniques comprise of:

Specialisation: Council Pest Management Officers (officers) are each assigned an area of the region to focus on, thereby enhancing their knowledge of the terrain and familiarising themselves with the land occupiers.

Consultation: Officers then consult with land occupiers in the area to elicit their 'buy-in' to the programme. The programme is only extended to those areas where the Council has obtained at least 75% land occupier support - without this the full benefits of the programme are not achieved.

Information workshops: These are carried out by officers to:

- explain the programme to land occupiers ;and

- encourage additional land occupiers to join the programme.

One-on-one site visits: Officers meet with the land occupiers to determine the appropriate control method for their property.

Planning: A data sheet is compiled by the officers which includes:

- Target species - as and when required, other pest species are also controlled by the land occupier if he/she wishes. However, the main focus is on possum control.
- Land occupier details.
- Property descriptions and details.
- Man-made hazards.
- Dates of initial control and maintenance.
- Monitoring results.

Guidelines are prepared: Officers then provide guidelines outlining the land occupier's responsibilities such as de-stocking, dog or pet control (to avoid secondary poisoning) and to answer any queries that may arise.

Agreements: A *Self Help Agreement* is signed by the land occupier. The agreement sets out the cost sharing arrangement and the land occupiers' obligations to continue ongoing maintenance.

Initial control: Most initial control is carried out by professional contractors on a professional basis. Costs of this control are met 100% by the Council.

Onsite training: Council officers carry out onsite training exercises with land occupiers to familiarise them with the control process.



Pest officers setting a trap during a training exercise

Maintenance: Approximately one year after the initial control is carried out the land occupier is contacted by the Council to carry out his/her own maintenance.

The land occupier is given the choice of one of five options that they find the most appropriate:

1. Obtain a controlled substances licence to carry out their own maintenance.
2. Join a group scheme where one land occupier obtains a licence and agrees to carry out the group's possum control maintenance through a mutual arrangement with neighbours.
3. Employ a 'Council approved' contractor.
4. Full cost recovery. The Council does the maintenance at a specified cost.
5. The land occupier may purchase appropriate traps and use these to do his/her maintenance without the need of a licence.

Maintenance assistance work: On rare occasions, if a farmer despite best efforts is unable to achieve the 75% reduction rate for the possum population the Council will assist him/her with possum control at no cost to the land occupier.

Monitoring: Officers randomly select and monitor areas to ensure that the maintenance is being carried out by land occupiers. If monitoring has not been carried out then enforcement action will be implemented. Monitoring also highlights trends occurring within the possum populations and any problem areas that need to be targeted.

Certified officers: Officers are trained and qualified as test certifiers for issuing controlled substances licenses, and as trainers, and monitors of pest control; reducing both the costs and time for all those involved.

Feedback: Officers are constantly in touch with land occupiers gauging their experiences and success rates with the programme and to determine if any areas need to be fine tuned.

ARE THESE TECHNIQUES EFFECTIVE?

Yes, to date 3,483 properties have been included in the programme, covering a total of 213,162 ha.

Possum numbers have been reduced by 80-95% on the Taranaki ring plain.

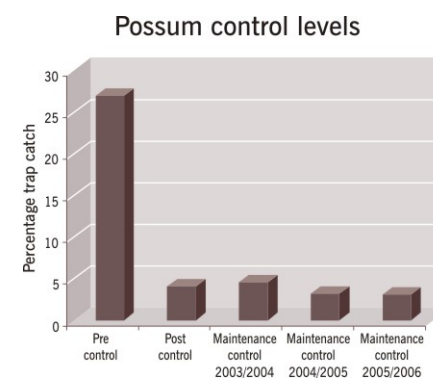
Feedback from the community is positive and land occupiers are continuing to register their interest.

The table below provides a snapshot of the reduction rates in selected operational areas.

Programme implementation and reduction rates of possum populations: selected sites in Taranaki

Area	Size (ha)	Number of properties	Percentage reduction
Croydon	10,708	152	92.2
Manaitai	5,244	81	97.5
Rahotu	11,798	146	97.0
Te Roti	4,235	59	96.2
Waimate	11,402	189	88.0

The graph below shows how possum numbers have been reduced following initial control work by the Council. Subsequent monitoring of maintenance control by occupiers confirms the sustained success of the programme and that occupiers are maintaining possum numbers at low levels.



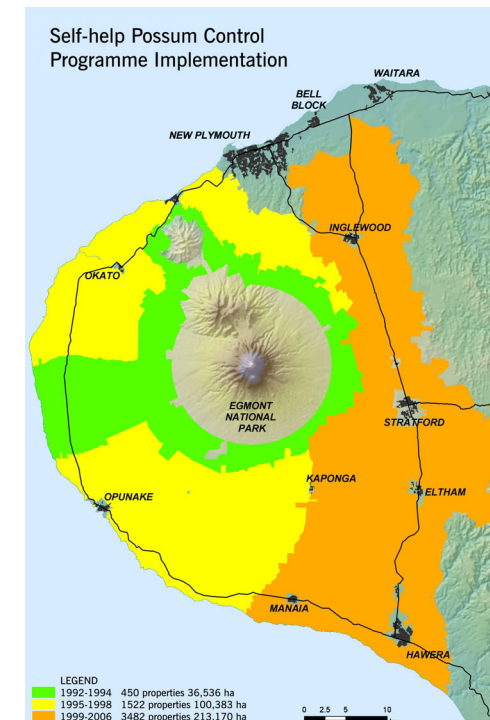
Proactive partnership between farmers and the Council

WHAT APPROACH DOES THE COUNCIL USE TO ACHIEVE 'BUY-IN' FROM STAKEHOLDERS?

The purpose of the self-help possum control programme is to empower farmers to control possums on their land.

There are three phases that the Council employs to achieve 'buy-in':

- **The Council consults with land occupiers** in an area to elicit their 'buy-in' to the programme. The consultation involves contacting every farmer in the area, conducting on-site discussions and carrying out local presentations and workshops.
- In the early stages of launching the programme a video produced by the



Council was used to encourage buy-in and explain the programme [the video is enclosed]. The video is now outdated

- and is in the process of being reviewed by the Council. Leaflets that outline the programme have also been produced by the Council [refer to leaflet enclosed].
- **The costs are shared** between the Council and the land occupier. In the initial operation stage all costs are met by the Council, including chemical, labour and consent application costs. The land occupier pays for the cost of their maintenance.
- **Ongoing support** for land occupiers. Once the initial stage has been completed the pest officers provide ongoing advice, information and training. The ongoing support ensures that land occupiers have the necessary skills, motivation and information to effectively undertake regular ongoing possum control.

Innovation and originality

WHY IS THE PROGRAMME INNOVATIVE AND ORIGINAL?

The programme is innovative and original in that:

- The programme represents a shift away from the traditional service delivery approach to pest management whereby control was undertaken with minimal involvement from farmers. This was the

first anything of this scale in New Zealand.

- The Council now focuses on being a facilitator for farmers undertaking possum control and working with them to achieve effective, co-ordinated and integrated possum control in their area.
- It enables land occupiers to take ownership for the solution to problems rather than rely solely on central or regional government (and paying increased rates) to address the problem. Land occupiers have the motivation to address the possum problem and, with proper support, have the ability to undertake ongoing possum control.
- It is a voluntary approach with land occupiers accepting the imposition of obligations and costs associated with their undertaking of ongoing possum control in return for the Council undertaking initial possum control.
- It is a cost-effective solution to the possum problem providing long-term protection for the land occupier's investment. Land occupiers continue to keep possum levels at low numbers through continued maintenance.
- Maintaining reduced possum numbers is less costly than having to undertake possum control every 5-10 years and significantly reduces possum impacts on agricultural production, ecological values and the risk of Bovine tuberculosis becoming endemic in the region.
- It is a large scale programme not a traditional site-specific control programme. It's a serious effort to address a major issue in the region. It has worked and it is sustainable.

The map on the previous page shows the areas currently in the self-help programme and the growth of the programme since 1992.

The Council was the first agency in New Zealand to consider such a programme. The successful implementation of the programme in Taranaki has led organisations in other parts of New Zealand to adopt variations of this programme. However, to date no other organisations have adopted a comparable programme in size and resource input.

The results

HAS THE PROJECT BEEN A SUCCESS FINANCIALLY?

Yes, the damage from possums on the agriculture and forestry industries, and the regional economy has been reduced dramatically and the region has remained Bovine tuberculosis free.

Possums numbers have declined by approximately 80-95% on the Taranaki ring plain, resulting in the estimated loss from possum damage on the agriculture industry decreasing by \$3.81 million – \$4.52 million per year. The threat of Bovine tuberculosis has also been reduced significantly, along with the damage on the forestry industry in the region.

The Council and land occupiers spend approximately \$2 million per year on the implementation and servicing of the programme – a cost that is easily outweighed by the benefits of the programme for individual land occupiers, the community and the regional economy.

HAS THE PROJECT BEEN A SUCCESS FOR ANY OTHER REASONS THAN FINANCIAL?

Yes, it's enhanced the relationship between the Council and the community and promoted the concept of sustainable management to a large sector of the region.

Since the inception of the programme the Council has undertaken approximately 280 presentations and workshops, all involving community involvement and participation, discussing aspects of both possum control and sustainable management.

The Council has rarely needed to undertake enforcement action to ensure that land occupiers undertake their obligation of continued possum control.

Feedback from the community has been positive – the programme has helped to cement the Council's goal as an organisation working with people and caring for the environment.

Furthermore, damage to indigenous biodiversity has been significantly reduced. The conservation estate in Taranaki and other areas of high conservational value have been maintained and are in current states of rejuvenation – we're protecting

our environment for today and for the future!

WAS THE PROGRAMME THE 'GOOD, SENSIBLE AND THE RIGHT THING TO DO'?

Yes, the programme was the 'good, sensible and the right thing to do' – there where no other options – we could not continue to stand still in the wake of such a possum problem.

The Taranaki economy is built on the agriculture and forestry industries, 59% of our land area is currently used for agriculture production and forestry. These two industries are the backbone of our economy – they need to be protected and enhanced.

Before the implementation of the programme, possum damage resulted in an estimated loss of \$4.76 million per year to the regional economy. The threat of Bovine tuberculosis in the region's cattle and deer herds stood at a further \$35 million. The damage to the forestry industry was substantial, and biodiversity in the region was being jeopardised. The risks were too great!

If we wanted Taranaki to be a region that was prosperous and sustainable we had to take action and fast.

So, this new programme was devised – the self-help possum control programme. The self-help programme is a successful large scale programme built on innovation and partnership.

Without this programme Taranaki would not be the prosperous and sustainable region it is today!

For further advice or information contact:

TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL
Private bag 713, Stratford
Ph: 06 765 7127 or 0800 736 222
Fax: 06 765 5097
Email: info@trc.govt.nz
www.trc.govt.nz



Taranaki's self-help possum control programme: A successful large scale programme built on innovation and partnership



What is the self-help possum control programme all about?

IT'S ABOUT INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIP

It's a programme to reduce and control possum numbers in Taranaki. A distinctive feature of the programme and one of the reasons for its success is that it is a "self-help" programme based on a joint effort between the Council and land occupiers.

The Council focuses on being a facilitator for land occupiers undertaking initial possum control over a wide area and then working with individual land occupiers to achieve ongoing effective, co-ordinated and integrated possum control on their property.



A pest officer discussing the programme with a land occupier

This well understood and widely accepted partnership arrangement between the Council and land occupiers has been fundamental to the success of the programme.

The partnership approach is underpinned by good day-to-day working relationships reinforcing the benefits of the programme,

providing advice and information and dealing with any problems as they arise.

WHAT SETS THIS PROGRAMME APART?

Taranaki's self-help possum control programme is unusual because it is a regional scale, comprehensive pest control programme with high levels of involvement and buy-in from individuals and the community and with significant resources being spent. Thousands of properties and land occupiers are involved in the programme covering over 200,000 hectares of land. The programme now covers almost the entire Taranaki ring plain (around 95% of the ring plain).

The Council and land occupiers have spent approximately \$28 million in the implementation and servicing of the programme since 1992. The self-help possum control programme is therefore a serious community-wide pest control effort on a scale not seen elsewhere in New Zealand.

The need for and expected benefits of the programme

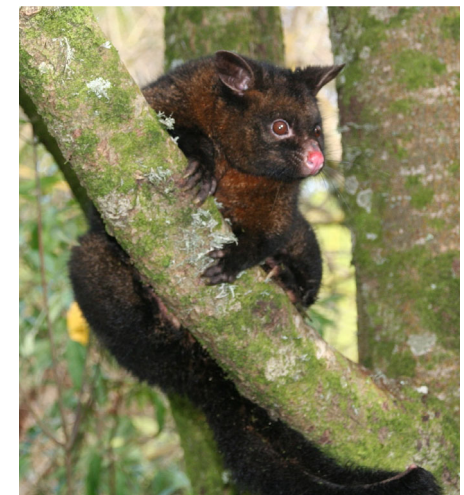
THE NEED FOR THE PROGRAMME

The possum is the dominant pest animal in Taranaki. Possums represent a major threat to the Taranaki region in terms of their actual or potential harmful effects on agricultural production, animal health and indigenous biodiversity values.

Possums impact on:

- **The agriculture industry:** Possums compete directly with livestock for pasture, reducing the capacity of farmland and reducing farm income.
- **Forestry:** Possums reduce the value of plantation forests by a substantial amount. This largely occurs through damage to the terminal shoots of young seedlings, broken branches and ringbarking of pines when in pollen.

- **Possums act as a vector for Bovine tuberculosis.** At present, Taranaki is one of only three regions without endemic Bovine tuberculosis. Should Bovine tuberculosis become endemic in the region, the potential costs to the region's dairy, beef and venison industries would be significant.
- **Possums cause considerable damage to indigenous biodiversity.** The cost of damage to the conservation estate and to other areas of high conservation value is high. With respect to flora species, possums' preference for broadleaf and hardwood species has had a serious effect on the composition of much of the region's indigenous forested areas. With respect to fauna species, possums also eat eggs and chicks and interfere with the breeding of indigenous bird species.



A brushtail possum

What were the actual costs of possum damage?

Before the establishment of the programme there were approximately 4.5-5.8 million possums in the Taranaki region.

The damage from possums resulted in an estimated loss of \$4.76 million to the agriculture industry and the regional economy per year.

The threat of Bovine tuberculosis on the region's cattle and deer herds stood at a further \$35 million.