

Pest management review FOR Taranaki



Factsheet: 6

Developing a programme to make Taranaki predator-free

The Taranaki Regional Council wants to initiate an innovative change in managing predators to benefit our native plants and wildlife, and the economy.

Introduced predators are a major threat to our native species and economic well-being, but Taranaki is better placed than most regions to investigate opportunities that may lead to it one day being predator-free.

The Council is now reviewing its pest management activities, and is seeking your feedback on the *Taranaki Regional Council Biosecurity Strategy 2017 – 2037*, which contains new and exciting initiatives and proposals.

One is a potentially game-changing trial of enhanced predator control across the Waiwhakaiho area, targeting possums, rats, mustelids (weasels, ferrets and stoats) and feral cats.

If the trial is successful, the intention is to roll it out across the region, with the ultimate goal of making Taranaki predator-free.

What's the problem?

Approximately 40% of the region or 320,000 hectares lies in indigenous bush, forest and wetland. These areas provide important habitat for our native plants and animals.

Across Taranaki's modified and natural landscapes, possums, rats, mustelids and feral cats have caused the loss or decline of many native plant and wildlife species. Some are now extinct in the region because of the impact of predators. Our forests and the dawn chorus have largely fallen silent as introduced pests eat our native birds' eggs and chicks, prey on nesting adults, and eat the plants and insects that the birds feed on.

Even across the farm and urban landscapes, possums and other predators are a significant risk to our economy. Possums already impose significant added costs to farmers through interference to farming operations, reduced farm productivity, and costs of control. However, possums, rats, mustelids and feral cats also carry and transmit diseases such as bovine tuberculosis.

In 2016, the Government announced 'Predator Free 2050', an ambitious project that aims to rid New Zealand of possums, rats and stoats by 2050. It opens up new opportunities for support and funding, including \$7 million per annum over four years to support large-scale collaborative predator control schemes.

Taranaki is well placed to work with the Government and other interested players to develop a programme to reduce possum, rat, mustelid and feral cat populations across much of the region. This factsheet identifies the opportunities and outlines a proposal to return Taranaki's dawn chorus.



Possums, mustelids, rats and feral cats have been responsible for the loss and decline of many native species



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What do we currently do?

Due to existing programmes, strong and enduring partnerships, and a track record of innovation and successful results, the Council is well placed to consider whether there is more we can do with predator control. Existing programmes include:

- The Self-help Possum Control Programme
- Community pest programmes
- The Key Native Ecosystems Programme
- The Riparian Management Programme.

Through its *Pest Management Strategy for Taranaki: Animals* there are already rules governing the control of possums. The *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* (see map) is one of New Zealand's largest such projects. The Council undertook initial control to knock down possums to very low levels and land occupiers have successfully maintained those low possum numbers, in accordance with our rules.

The self-help programme has expanded incrementally, with most rateable rural land on the Taranaki ring plain and coastal terraces now covered by possum control.

There is no legal requirement to control rats, mustelids and feral cats, but many individuals and community groups (including this Council) are doing so voluntarily.

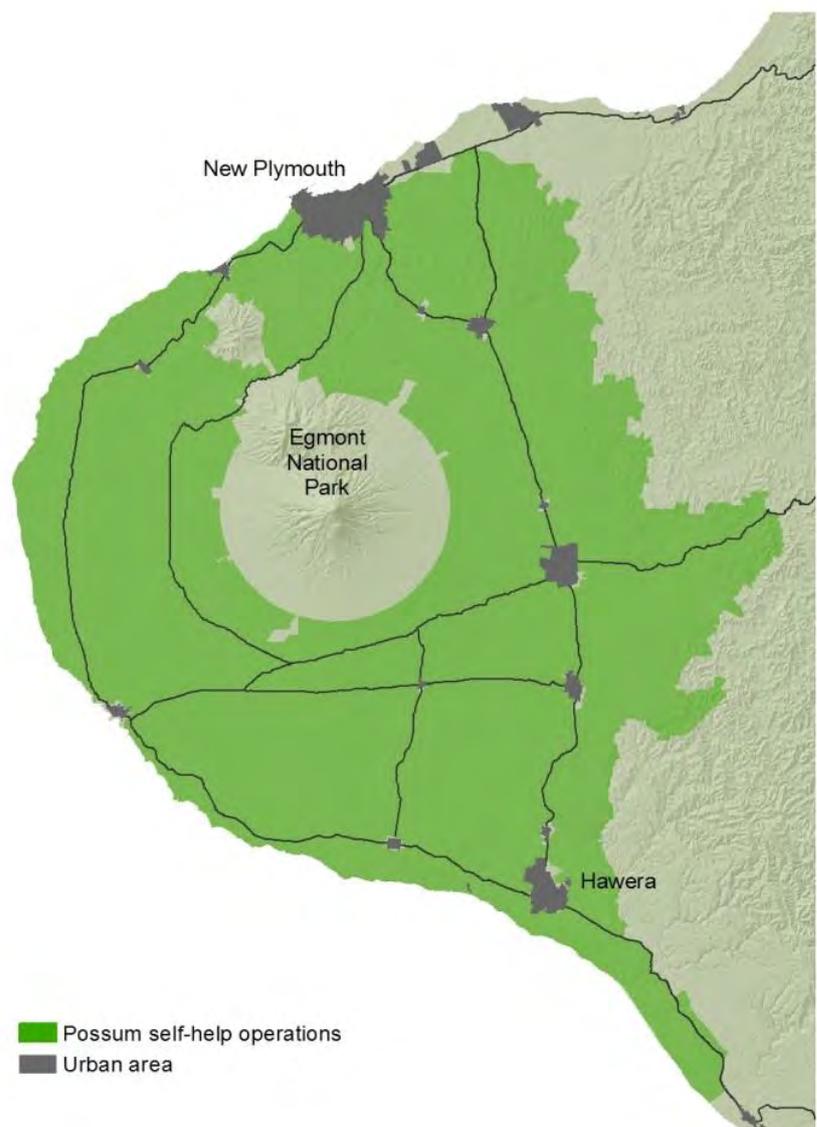
Through its Biosecurity Strategy, the Council is proposing to expand what we do for possums to also control rats, mustelids and feral cats.

This would also align with other Council and community programmes. For example, we are already working with the district council and landowners to control pests in the New Plymouth urban area, undertaking extensive possum control in and around the Egmont National Park boundary in support of the Taranaki Mouna project, which aims to make the park predator-free; and working with interested landowners to undertake predator control as part of the *Key Native Ecosystems Programme*.

Finally, the Council's *Riparian Management Programme*, which involves Taranaki farmers planting and fencing waterways on the ring plain and coastal terraces, has transformed the landscape and is creating wildlife corridors from the mountain to the sea.



Working with others to control predators



Making Taranaki predator-free

The Council aims to develop a predator-free programme to build on its long-running *Self-Help Possum Control Programme*. In size and objective, it would arguably be one of the most ambitious biodiversity projects in the country.

It would be coordinated by the Council and Wild for Taranaki (a community trust channelling the biodiversity efforts of its member organisations), and would be rolled out incrementally to target possums, rats, mustelids and feral cats initially across 235,000 hectares on the Taranaki ring plain.

It would be subject to collaborative funding from external projects such as 'Predator Free 2050' and Wild for Taranaki's 'Restoring Taranaki'.

Landowners and land occupiers will be vital to the programme's success. To ensure their buy-in and effective ongoing control, it would include the following:

Working with the community

- Getting buy-in and commitment to the proposal.

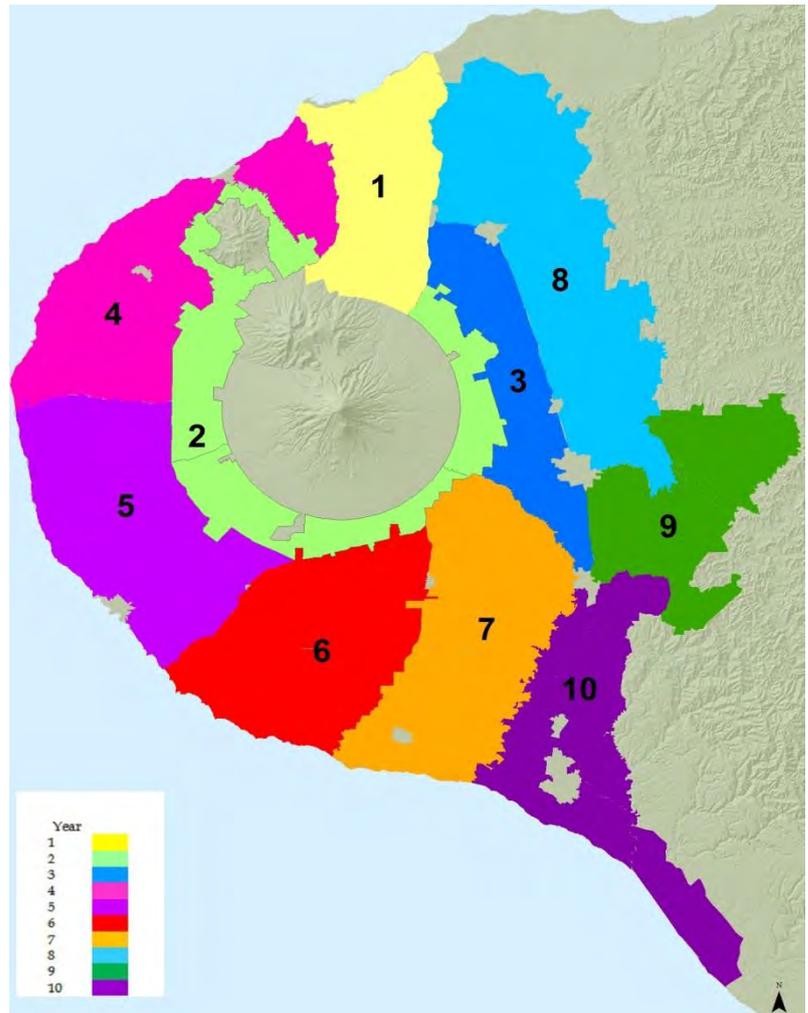
Initial predator control

- The Council would undertake the initial control on properties to be included in the programme, and reducing those predator populations to very low levels.

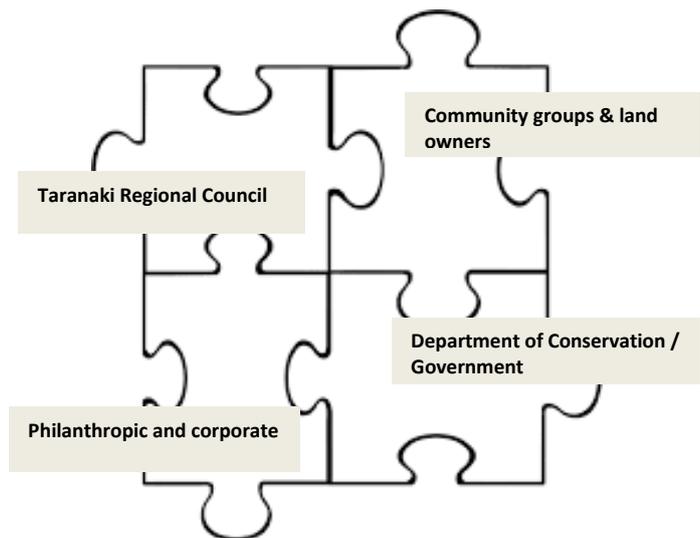
Predator control maintenance

- Following the Council undertaking initial predator control, the landowner or occupier would be responsible for keeping predators at very low levels.

The Council would support them through advice, education and the provision of control products, materials and equipment at cost. It may, in limited circumstances, undertake further predator control where the sustainability or effectiveness of the programme is threatened or where an added level of control is needed to protect Key Native Ecosystems.



The Council aims to break down the job into manageable chunks – rolling out predator control across the region over time.



Potential funding sources

What have we got going for us?

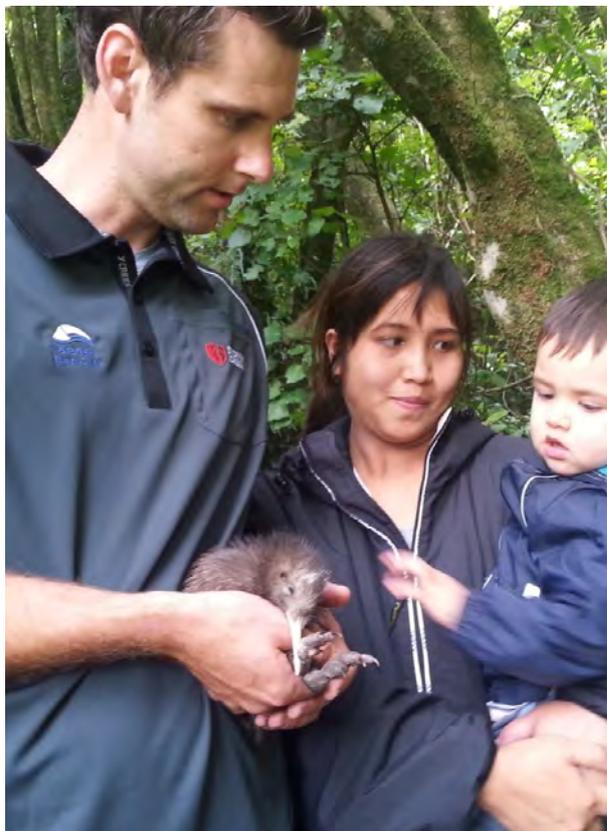
- **Ambition**
The Council wants to initiate a radical change in managing predators in Taranaki to benefit the region's biodiversity. The innovative approach would contribute to the national aspirations of Predator Free 2050, and the Taranaki Mounga project. The programme is part of the Council's Long-Term Plan and pest management review.
- **Momentum**
There are public and private funding opportunities to expand our predator control. Through 'Predator Free 2050 Ltd', the Government has allocated \$26 million to this type of project, based on funding one dollar for every two dollars raised from other sources. It is hoped that the Council can work with Wild for Taranaki to secure funding from other sources over and above the Council and Governments' contributions.
- **Relationships**
The Council has a strong track record of successfully working with individual landowners and community groups to achieve environmental outcomes. The Council is also a member of Wild for Taranaki, which has similar goals and aspirations for the region.
- **Proven track record**
The Council already implements significant and successful landscape initiatives, such as the *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* and the *Riparian Management Programme*, which already cover the ring plain and coastal terraces, and are delivering or contributing to biodiversity outcomes.
- **Innovation**
New technology is being trialled that allows traps to be checked remotely and wirelessly, reducing costs and increasing efficiencies. It has the potential to reshape what is achievable with wide-scale predator control.



Restoring Taranaki for the people, native plants and animals of the region (Wild for Taranaki goal)

What are the challenges?

- It's not cheap. The proposal is subject to the successful negotiation of external funding partnerships. The estimated cost of initial control for the Waiwhakaiho trial over three years is around \$5 million.
- The proposal imposes costs on land occupiers to undertake ongoing (maintenance) predator control.
- Multi-species predator control operations across intensively farmed landscapes have never been undertaken on this scale before.
- New predator control methodologies and technologies need to be developed and tested to determine whether maintenance is achievable and enforceable.
- Additional investigations and responses may be required to monitor and, if necessary, remedy negative outcomes such as the decline in one pest species leading to expansion of another.



Significant effort is occurring across the region to benefit kiwi, including the release and re-introduction of birds into areas cleared of predators

Making aspiration a reality

Something major is proposed for the Waiwhakaiho area (see map), with the Council planning a significant three-year trial to test the feasibility of large-scale predator control.

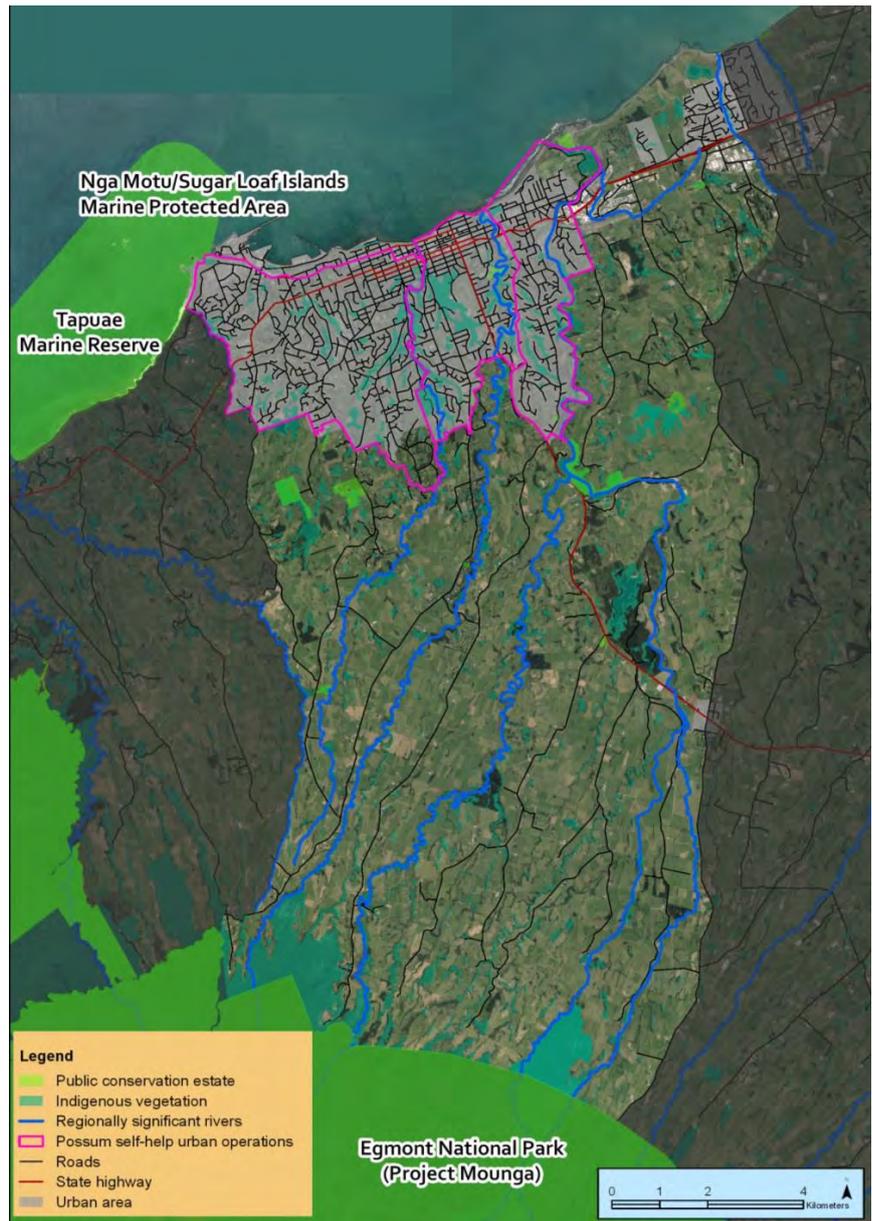
It would cover 12,200 properties (10,220 urban and 1,980 rural) over 13,870 hectares, and aim to protect native wildlife by reducing possum, rat, mustelid and feral cat numbers.

The waterways and their margins provide wildlife corridors from the mountain to the sea. The rural parts are already covered by the *Self-Help Possum Control Programme* and *Riparian Management Programme*, while much of New Plymouth is covered by our *Urban Pest Control Programme*. The upper catchment includes the Egmont National Park, for which pest eradication is planned via the Taranaki Mounga project.

The proposed roll-out of the trial begins with initial predator control over the first year. Years two and three would be aimed at maintaining predator numbers at low levels and preventing re-infestation in the areas next to Egmont National Park, thereby giving planned native bird reintroductions the best chance of success.

If effective, this concept could be incrementally extended as part of spreading our predator-free zone across the region. Native plant and wildlife species would then have a much greater level of protection over almost 270,000 hectares on the Taranaki ring plain and Mount Taranaki.

The Waiwhakaiho trial will cost \$1.7 million for 2017/2018. This funding will be met by a combination of Council, Government and other parties. The trial will not proceed if external funding partnerships are not negotiated.



Waiwhakaiho predator control trial.

What do we hope to achieve?

Expected outcomes of the proposal include:

- The protection of sites and places that provide important habitat for our native plants and wildlife.
- The creation of safe 'bird corridors' from the mountain to the sea.
- Increased survival of native species including blue duck (whio), tui, North Island robin (toutouwai), bellbird, goldstripe gecko, and New Zealand pigeon (kereru).
- Protection of Egmont National Park kiwi populations should they venture onto farmland.
- Further reduction of economic risks, including any new bovine tuberculosis outbreak could be picked up and transferred by ferrets.
- Greater community support and involvement in biodiversity protection through pest control.



Where to from here?

Predator-free Taranaki	
1.	Through the Biosecurity Strategy, investigate public and private interest in large-scale predator control.
2.	Subject to support, leverage Government and philanthropic funding and support for implementation of the predator control trial.
3.	Undertake the trial in the Waiwhakaiho area and test its wider application.
4.	If successful, work with potential partners to develop a large-scale predator control programme.
5.	If appropriate, consider the inclusion of predator control rules as part of a review of the <i>Proposed Regional Pest Management Plan</i> .
6.	Incrementally roll out programme across Taranaki.
7.	Make Taranaki predator-free.

What do you think?

The Council is interested in your feedback:

1. Would you support or oppose large-scale predator control for possums, rats, mustelids and feral cats across Taranaki?
2. Do you think the Council should go ahead with the proposed predator control trial, to be partially funded by the Council with other partners?
3. Would you support or oppose rules that require landowners and occupiers to maintain low predator numbers following the Council's initial control?
4. Do you think large-scale predator control would improve biodiversity and the economy in Taranaki?

Less possums, rats, mustelids and feral cats mean more native wildlife species including (from top photo) the tui, blue duck and goldstripe gecko