

# Implementation Committee Agenda - 14 October 2020



Meeting is held in the Council Chamber, Level 2, Philip Laing House  
144 Rattray Street, Dunedin

## Members:

Cr Bryan Scott, Co-Chair	Cr Gary Kelliher
Cr Carmen Hope, Co-Chair	Cr Michael Laws
Cr Hilary Calvert	Cr Kevin Malcolm
Cr Michael Deaker	Cr Andrew Noone
Cr Alexa Forbes	Cr Gretchen Robertson
Hon Cr Marian Hobbs	Cr Kate Wilson

Senior Officer: Sarah Gardner, Chief Executive

Meeting Support: Liz Spector, Committee Secretary

14 October 2020 09:00 AM

## Agenda Topic

### 1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received prior to publication of the agenda.

### 2. CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA

Note: Any additions must be approved by resolution with an explanation as to why they cannot be delayed until a future meeting.

### 3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Members are reminded of the need to stand aside from decision-making when a conflict arises between their role as an elected representative and any private or other external interest they might have.

### 4. PUBLIC FORUM

No requests to address the Committee under Public Forum were received prior to publication of the agenda.

### 5. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

There are no previous minutes of the Committee.

### 6. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS FROM RESOLUTIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

There are no outstanding actions for the Implementation Committee.

### 7. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

#### 7.1 **BIOSECURITY IMPLEMENTATION IMPROVEMENT UPDATE - PEST MANAGEMENT**

To provide an update to the Committee on the programme of transformation underway for the Biosecurity function through a range of business improvement initiatives.

7.1.1 [Attachment 1: RPMP Panel Decision](#)

7.1.2 [Attachment 2: Example Sub Division Resource Consent Pest Management Plan](#)

8. MATTERS FOR NOTING

8.1 [CATCHMENT ADVISORY GROUP REPORT BACK](#)

To report back on the activities and recommendations made by the Council established Catchment Support Advisory Group.

9. CLOSURE

### 7.1. Biosecurity Implementation Improvement Update - Pest Management

**Prepared for:** Implementation Committee  
**Report No.** OPS1014  
**Activity:** Environmental - Control of Pests  
**Author:** Andrea Howard, Manager Biosecurity and Rural Liaison  
**Endorsed by:** Gavin Palmer, General Manager Operations  
**Date:** 14 October 2020

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#### PURPOSE

- [1] To provide an update to the Committee on the programme of transformation underway for the Biosecurity function through a range of business improvement initiatives. Progress in implementing new rabbit management initiatives under the Regional Pest Management Plan 2019-2029 is described, including better engagement with specific communities, tangible solutions to facilitate rabbit control in 'problematic' peri-urban areas and stepped up monitoring and compliance programmes. A decision is sought on future ownership and use of ORC's rabbit control assets.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- [2] Feral rabbits are an intractable burden to many of Otago's communities, affecting environmental values including amenity, soil stability, land-use and conservation. Parts of Otago have experienced reasonably significant changes through intensification of land use in recent times, meaning more landowners are responsible for rabbit management. Increased urbanisation has resulted in greater visibility of rabbits in newly formed peri-urban environs. This is set against a backdrop of increasingly diverse views amongst residents, and wider society, regarding acceptable methods of rabbit control. Changing communities, land-use patterns and attitudes, along with variable success rates of rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) have therefore resulted in further complexities of an already difficult problem.
- [3] The Council's Biosecurity activities are undergoing transformation as a result of its functions being more closely aligned with land and water implementation (rural liaison), a new management role being created and the approval of a new Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP) and associated Operational Plan.
- [4] The Council's RPMP provides a framework to manage or eradicate animals and plants in Otago that have been designated as pests. Councillors have the mandate to decide the level of resourcing devoted to operationalising the Plan, therefore influencing the amount of work able to be undertaken, timeframes to achieve actions and ultimately the biosecurity outcomes reached.
- [5] A range of business improvements have already been made to Council's sustained control programme for the management of feral rabbits. Outcomes sought from the new approach include ORC demonstrating stronger leadership, increasing engagement with landowners regarding their responsibilities, ensuring compliance/enforcement

processes are undertaken, according to best practice and identifying effective ways to tackle rabbit problems in 'difficult to manage' peri-urban/rural-lifestyle areas.

- [6] The programme is an iterative process and is built around demonstrating good leadership, increased engagement with stakeholders and occupiers, being able to pinpoint the focus of control efforts (equally to large farmed areas and peri-urban lifestyle blocks) and stepping up enforcement of RPMP rules following adoption of ORC's Biosecurity Compliance Procedures Manual (developed concurrently).
- [7] Further changes required in the wider Biosecurity function have been identified and a business improvement process is underway to ensure Council meets the objectives of its Regional Pest Management Plan, Operational Plan and better delivers on community expectations.
- [8] Council has retained a number of rabbit control assets (e.g. carrot cutters and mixers and bait feeders) left over from its former Regional Services function which was closed in 2015. Feedback from a public consultation process was strongly in favour of Council retaining these assets and making them available for use by contractors within the region.

## RECOMMENDATION

*That the Council:*

- 1) **Receives** this report.
- 2) **Notes** the recent development and implementation of a programme of work to deliver on Council's feral rabbit responsibilities under the previously approved Regional Pest Management Plan, Operational Plan.
- 3) **Notes** progress made in developing a revised inspection and compliance approach.
- 4) **Notes** increased operational focus on land occupier compliance including land owned or controlled by the Crown, Crown agencies and local authorities.
- 5) **Notes** progress made by the Otago Regional Council to establish and implement a model to support small-scale landowner led rabbit control operations.
- 6) **Notes** the range of business improvements made to the rabbit programme, and wider Biosecurity function, to order to achieve the objectives of the Regional Pest Management Plan, Operational Plan and better meet community expectations.
- 7) **Notes** the planned recruitment of three additional fixed-term positions within the Biosecurity team, two of which will focus exclusively on ORC's Regional Pest Management Plan - Rabbit Programme.
- 8) **Notes** that detailed resourcing required to better deliver a comprehensive rabbit management programme aligned to Council's responsibilities under the Regional Pest Management Plan and communities' expectations will be presented as part of the forthcoming Long-Term Plan 2021-2031 development process.
- 9) **Decides** whether to support Option 1, Option 2 or Option 3 when considering the future use of ORC rabbit control assets.

## BACKGROUND

- [9] During 2019/2020 Council approved a new ten-year Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP, or the Plan) and developed its first formal RPMP Operational Plan<sup>1</sup>. At the same time the Biosecurity and Rural Liaison teams were combined, and a new management role was created at the start of 2020 to oversee both areas of activity (and other biodiversity and freshwater implementation initiatives). These significant changes have provided the opportunity to review existing work plans and priorities, to commence the process to increase capacity and capability within the Biosecurity team and embark on a programme of transformation through a range of business improvement initiatives.
- [10] The ORC's previous Pest Management Plan contained inconsistencies with national policy (a directive issued in 2015) and operational deficiencies which impeded compliance and enforcement options. These issues have been rectified in the new RPMP including the introduction of 'Good Neighbour Rules' requiring all land occupiers, including the Crown, to match the control efforts of their neighbours within specific distances, so that their efforts are complementary.
- [11] While Council's role in Pest Management has fundamentally changed from the former 'hands on' Regional Services model last operated in 2015, it has been slow to transform its day-to-day activities to align with its new roles and responsibilities. Regarding regional rabbit management, this has resulted in lost opportunities and community dissatisfaction.
- [12] Work to improve the situation is well underway, but a transition period is inevitable while new systems, processes and ways of working with the community, including Crown agencies and territorial authorities, are established and embedded. A more rigorous compliance approach will be a 'call to action' for those (public and private landowners) who are not adhering to the RPMP rules. This should result in increased work for contractors, therefore creating a more sustainable environment for these small businesses to operate in.
- [13] In addition to its compliance role, Council has leadership responsibilities for raising community awareness of pest plants and animals, for educating communities about control solutions, for collaborating with other agencies and facilitating individuals and community groups to take collective action to reduce pests.
- [14] The Biosecurity team is currently resourced to deliver only a 'light touch' response to the implementation of the RPMP. This impacts on Council's ability to meet community expectations and obligations under the RPMP and Operational Plan. However, a refreshed approach to Council's Biosecurity function has commenced and a range of operational improvements have been made (e.g. development of formal compliance procedures, recorded in a Biosecurity Compliance Procedures Manual) and further transformational activities are planned.
- [15] The region's geography, being soil types and extensive pastoral farming, combine to create a high-level of proneness to some pests, especially feral rabbits. Our monitoring

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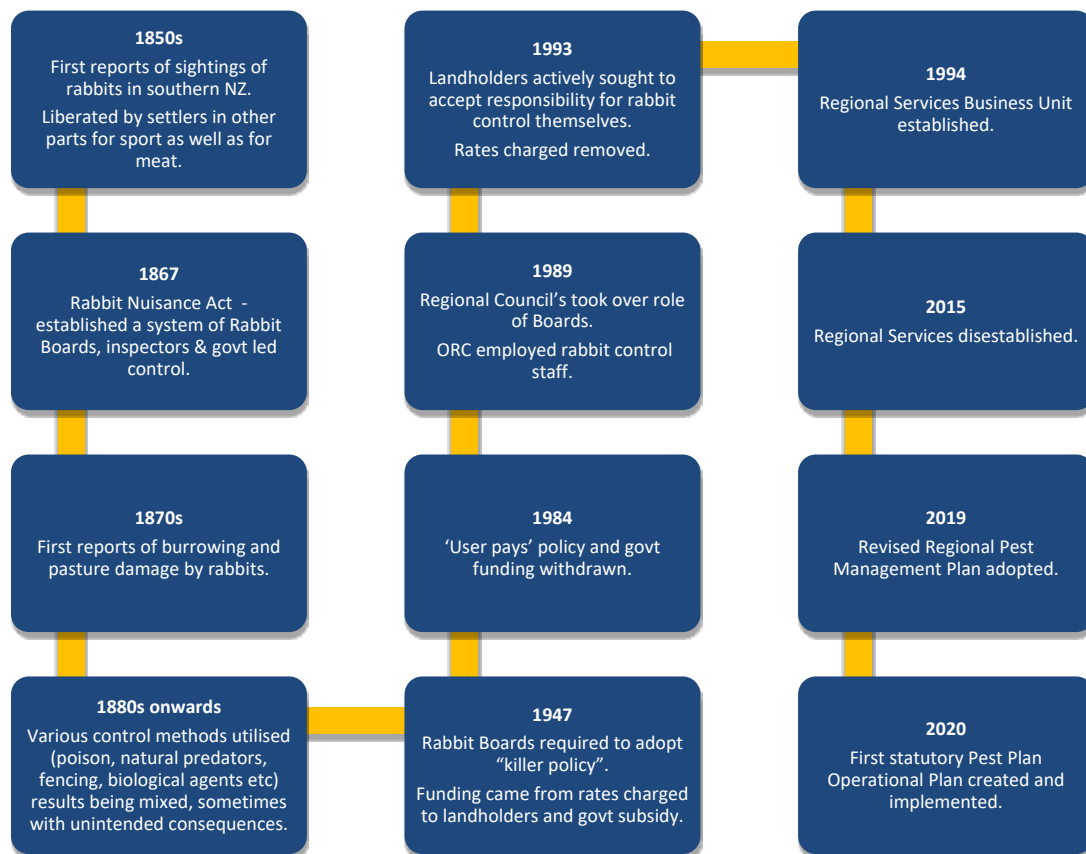
<sup>1</sup> The Operational Plan was submitted to the Minister for Primary Industries on 29 April 2020 as required under Section 100B of the Biosecurity Act 1993. The Minister did not request any amendments to the Plan.

network, alongside feedback from our communities demonstrates that Otago has an ongoing rabbit problem.

- [16] There are a range of tools available to help manage rabbit populations and stakeholders have differing roles and responsibilities as established through the RPMP. Council acknowledges that improvements related to its role are required and this work has begun. Staff are confident that further progress to address the problem can be made within the existing Regional Pest Management Plan framework.

### **FERAL RABBITS AS A PEST**

- [17] Rabbits have caused significant environmental and property damage since they were first introduced in New Zealand in the 1850s for food and recreational purposes. Feral rabbits compete with livestock for pasture, threaten ecological values and create extensive land damage (e.g. soil erosion) from overgrazing, vegetation destruction and burrowing. Despite considerable attention and effort since their introduction, rabbit populations continue to thrive in some areas with no one universally successful, and sustainable, eradication approach available.
- [18] Once established in New Zealand, rabbit populations have had periods of both rapid increase and relative containment. Various control methods have been utilised with techniques (e.g. poisons, shooting, fumigation, natural predators, fencing, biological agents etc) evolving over time and results being mixed, sometimes with unintended consequences (e.g. introduced predators' such as mustelids having detrimental impact on native wildlife). Management of feral rabbits requires sustained, continuous interventions alongside follow up control, public education and advice.
- [19] Central government has played a role in rabbit control since the first Rabbit Nuisance Act was passed in 1867 (Figure 1). In the late 1940s Rabbit Boards were created, and later, in 1967, these entities morphed into Pest Destruction Boards. Board staff were responsible for rabbit management funded from Pest Destruction rates charged to landholders and via government subsidies. A 'user pays' policy was adopted at the same time Pest Destruction Board functions were transferred to Regional Councils. This coincided with the full removal of government subsidies.
- [20] The Council initially employed rabbit control staff but after four years of this model, landholders actively sought to accept responsibility for rabbit control. As a result, landowners were no longer required to pay additional rates to support a collective control system.



**Figure 1: Overview of Rabbits and Rabbit Management**

- [21] In the past, Council has operated as both a regulator and a service provider through its Regional Services Business Unit. This dual role limited options for the private pest control market, particularly when Regional Services was not focused on generating a profit and could therefore effectively undercut the market. The model created a tension between commercial and biosecurity outcomes.
- [22] Council's RPMP classifies feral rabbits as a pest to be managed by landowners under sustained control programmes (see Appendix 1 for Hearings Panel Decisions on Rabbits). This means that while full eradication is not feasible, management efforts by individuals or groups should be focused on containing their presence and reducing externality effects. A fundamental principle is that a landowner shall not exacerbate a problem on a neighbouring property by failing to manage a pest problem on their land.
- [23] Many factors influence the level of feral rabbits in Otago. Urban development has increased in traditionally high rabbit population areas such as Central Otago and Queenstown-Lakes. This has been exacerbated by the rapid conversion of former extensive sheep grazing farmland for the purposes of residential occupation (e.g. lifestyle blocks), viticulture and similar businesses.

- [24] Council has previously submitted to local territorial authorities, such as Queenstown Lakes District Council, regarding the requirement for pest management plans and appropriate pest mitigation measures, such as rabbit fencing to be a condition of consent. However, the requests made by ORC through these submissions have generally not been incorporated into decisions made by the territorial authorities (see Appendix 2 for extracts from the Northlake consent process). Council will reconsider what other strategies it can use, and continue to work with other territorial authorities, to ensure appropriate pest management plans are taken into consideration when new subdivisions consents are granted.
- [25] Changes to land use mean that more landowners are responsible for rabbit management and have also resulted in greater visibility of rabbits in newly formed peri-urban environs. This is set against a backdrop of increasingly diverse views amongst residents, and wider society, regarding acceptable methods of rabbit control (e.g. the use of 1080). Changing communities, land-use patterns and attitudes have therefore resulted in further complexity of an already difficult problem.
- [26] The introduction of rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) as a biocontrol tool has added to the complexity of rabbit management. While undoubtedly seen as a success since illegally released, the impacts 20 years on are being felt around the region. RHD strains still regularly cycle through rabbit populations but effects can be highly variable. In some areas whole valleys can have devastating effects, while other valleys appear to have been 'skipped' by the virus, probably as a result of high immunity levels in those rabbit populations<sup>2</sup>.
- [27] A further release of RHDV1 K5 virus is unlikely to make a significant impact. This virus, together with RHDV1 (1997 release) and RHDV2 (2018) are still active in the rabbit population. Rabbits that are immune, will continue to be immune to specific strains so it is not believed that any further releases would be effective.
- [28] Alternative biological control options, such as gene-drive technology, are only in research and development phases and are therefore not available as control tools. Such interventions would need to be considered, instigated and managed at a national level.
- [29] Night-counting is a method used to determine rabbit trends and has been used in New Zealand since the late 1960s. Councils use a standard procedure for night-counting, so that all data collected in NZ is comparable. The method involves travelling along a set marked route using a spotlight to count the rabbits seen in the light beam. The counts are repeated over several nights. Count routes are selected so that the various levels of rabbit proneness, topography and vegetation found in the region are representative.
- [30] Rabbit monitoring has been carried out using night-counts at 13 locations throughout the region since 2006 (Figure 2). This has provided a long-term database showing trends in rabbit numbers.
- [31] While night-counts are an established and credible form of monitoring, our network does not adequately cover the region and is largely focused on rural areas (compare

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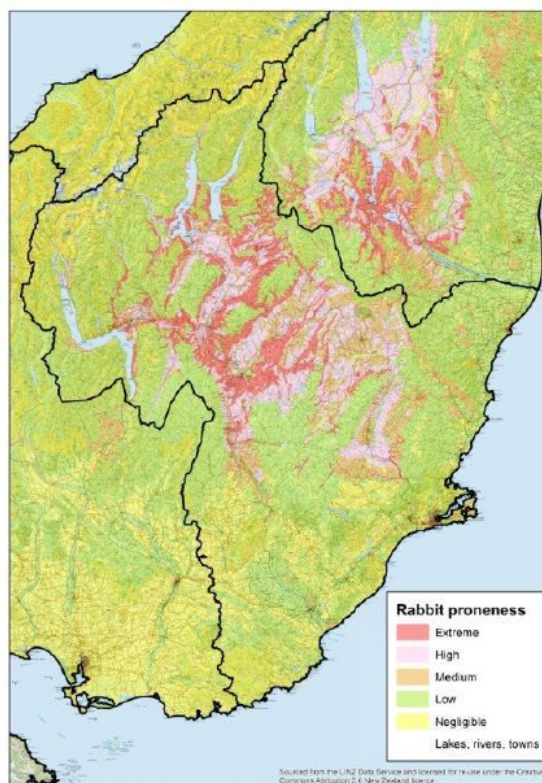
<sup>2</sup> Dr Janine Duckworth, Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research, provided an update on the effectiveness of national biological virus release programmes, including RHDV1 K5, to Council on 15 May 2019.



Figures 2 and 3). Discussions have occurred with Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research about reviewing our monitoring network and data analysis and reporting to ensure it is fit for purpose. A formal review is planned for later in 2020.



**Figure 2: Night Count Locations**



**Figure 3: Rabbit Proneness in Otago**

[32] Data analysed over a ten-year period (2011-2020 - refer to Table 1) of night-counts shows:

- Six sites with a decrease in observed rabbit numbers (Ettrick, Roxburgh, Lindis, Clifton, Fruitlands and Bannockburn).
- Three sites showing minimal change (Lovells Flat, Upper Manorburn and Milton/Table Hill).
- Four sites with a noticeable increase in rabbit numbers (Cromwell, Luggate and Tarras (2 sites)).

**Table 1: Ten Year Data from Night-counts  
(Rabbits per kilometre)**

	2011	2016	2020	10 Yr Change	10 Yr Trend
Ettrick	20.1	2.1	7.6	-12.5	↓
Roxburgh	3.5	0.2	0.5	-3.0	↓
Lindis	1.3	0.9	0.0	-1.3	↓
Clifton	1.0	0.3	0.4	-0.6	↓
Fruitlands	1.1	3.2	0.7	-0.4	↓
Bannockburn	1.3	1.4	1.1	-0.2	↓
Upper Manorburn	0.1	0.1	0.0	-0.1	
Lovells Flat	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	
Milton/Table Hill	0.4	0.1	0.7	0.3	
Cromwell	8.1	8.9	11.9	3.8	↑

Luggate	9.6	14.0	14.2	4.6	↑
Tarras 2	4.7	7.6	17.2	12.5	↑
Tarras 1	3.1	18.5	17.4	14.3	↑

- [33] Other methods of monitoring will need to be developed to track progress towards curbing rabbit populations in peri-urban areas.
- [34] As a result of the 2020 data, planned compliance and community engagement programmes in Cromwell and Tarras will be reprioritised to occur earlier to ensure progress is made on better managing these pests.

**REGIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT– ORC’S FERAL RABBITS PROGRAMME**

- [35] The RPMP rabbit objectives and rules are in line with all other regional councils’ management of legacy pests (including feral rabbits), being occupier control rules and an education and regulatory approach. ORC can assist to make control efficient and connected through a collaborative regional programme.
- [36] With the RPMP becoming operative late last year, it provided the opportunity to overhaul Council’s approach to several high priority programmes. A comprehensive plan of action for rabbits was instigated in May 2020 to give effect to Council’s overall Biosecurity Operational Plan. Outcomes sought from the new programme include:
  - ORC demonstrates good leadership, shows integrity and tenacity and overall adds value to ratepayers.
  - Staff openly engage with landowners regarding their responsibilities and are impartial, professional and helpful in all dealings.
  - Staff can clearly pinpoint what and where the focus for rabbit management will be each year for the next 2-3 years.
  - Inspections, and any resulting compliance/enforcement issues, are carried out generically across the region, following guidelines and processes set out in the ORC Biosecurity Compliance Procedures Manual.
  - Rabbit problems in ‘difficult to manage’ peri-urban/rural-lifestyle areas are effectively planned and managed in the short term, but long-term sustainable solutions are at the heart of all planning and decision making.
  - Stakeholders with an interest or role to play in rabbit management are identified and enduring relationships are built to assist with rabbit control and delivery services.
- [37] The programme is an iterative process and is built around demonstrating good leadership, increased engagement with stakeholders and occupiers, being able to pinpoint the focus of control efforts (equally to large farmed areas and peri-urban lifestyle blocks) and stepping up enforcement of RPMP rules following adoption of ORC’s Biosecurity Compliance Procedures Manual (developed concurrently).
- [38] The rabbit plan of action focuses on five delivery areas (as well as driving programme improvement wherever possible):
  - 1) Raising awareness and the profile of rabbit rules and council’s approach;
  - 2) RPMP led outcomes – property inspections and compliance with rules;

- 3) Facilitating control on peri-urban/rural lifestyle blocks (where the above regulatory approach is not feasible);
- 4) Biosecurity Strategy led outcomes – developing the concept further of larger landowner-led schemes (such as the Maniototo Pest Management Inc.); and
- 5) Research, population trend monitoring, biological control (RHD) immunity testing and overall programme review.

[39] Activities undertaken by Council in the first three delivery areas, and since the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, are outlined below. Landowner led scheme opportunities and research and monitoring are included elsewhere in this paper.

**Awareness and profile lifting:**

- [40] Raising the overall profile and awareness has taken many different forms, ranging from building rapport with DOC, LINZ and territorial authorities (and others) who have direct interests in collaborating over specific projects, through to scoping a series of RPMP roadshows through the region (where rabbits are not the sole focus). There has been a deliberate decision to commence a region-wide awareness campaign once new working principles, staff and systems have been bedded in, including better understanding of the different regional audiences and how best to effectively engage with these diverse groups. This recognises that changing land use in the region has resulted in a greater number of stakeholders, all with different characteristics and levels of understanding of rabbit management.
- [41] Further awareness and profile work planned includes working with territorial authorities to develop a package of what needs to be presented in relation to future subdivision consents – that is, the ‘next Queensberry’ (e.g. introducing rabbit proof fencing requirements, conditions around the developer being required to undertake rabbit control prior to selling sections etc).
- [42] Council will shortly meet with government departments and other territorial authorities within the region to explain RPMP rules, and to inform these organisations that formal compliance inspections will soon begin.

**Property inspections and compliance:**

- [43] With regard to compliance activities and regional (large farm) property inspections, a ‘clean slate’ approach has been taken on the basis of the new RPMP. Following planning and a Modified McLean Scale (MMS) training day, full rabbit inspections commenced in late July, covering three rabbit management units over a 4-6-month period (East Ida, Hyde and Cardrona Valley). Inspections will shortly commence in Roxburgh and Strath Taieri/Taieri Ridge areas.
- [44] Compliance inspections will also take place in the Tarras area, being brought forward to this financial year due to the large increase in rabbit numbers observed in the latest night-count data.
- [45] Compliance rates to date (at end of September 2020) for these large-scale properties have been reasonable, as shown by the results in Table 2.

**Table 2: Summary data from area monitored July to September 2020**

Area	Total hectares	Properties	Compliant	Non-compliant (NC)	Total area of NC on properties	% of areas inspected with NC
East Ida Valley	36,700	13	11	2	300 ha	0.8%
Hyde	6,398	10	7	3	126 ha	2.0%
Cardrona	16,050	14	12	2	100 ha	0.3%

[46] In summary:

- One person can cover about 500-600 hectares of land per day. Lambing often curtails access to properties for a 6-7-week period.
- On the face of it few properties were inspected but this figure masks the total hectares covered in this period, which is significant.
- Within the areas inspected, non-compliance is low.
- Non-compliant properties were sent “request to carry out control” letters, being step one in a three-step compliance process.
- Reinspection work will occur early 2021, allowing time to advance to next steps within the following winter’s poisoning window.

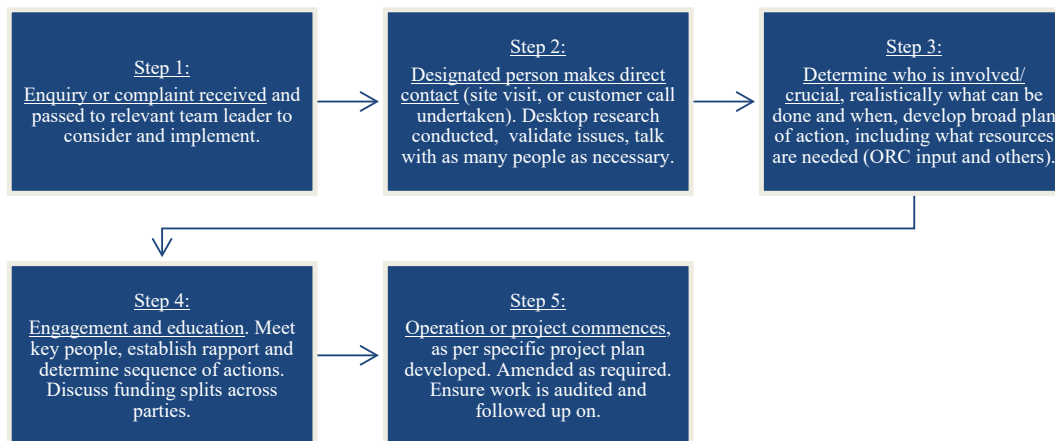
[47] Planning has already commenced on areas to focus on for 2021/22, being:

- Taieri areas (also current year)
- Tarras, Hawea and Lindis – brought forward as per trend monitoring results
- Manuherikia-St Bathans
- Maniototo Pest Management boundaries
- Alexandra, Cromwell and Bannockburn
- Otago Peninsula.

**ORC facilitated small block management initiatives:**

[48] This new approach was developed in light of concerns raised about ORC not doing enough in peri-urban areas to control rabbits. It recognises that compliance processes are less appropriate for small block holdings, as who ‘owns’ the rabbits cannot readily be proven and the Modified McLean Scale compliance test, dependant on land use, is not always the best tool. The approach is therefore one of occupier engagement, collaboration and joint funding to solve solutions. It requires dedicated staff with tenacity and highly developed engagement skills.

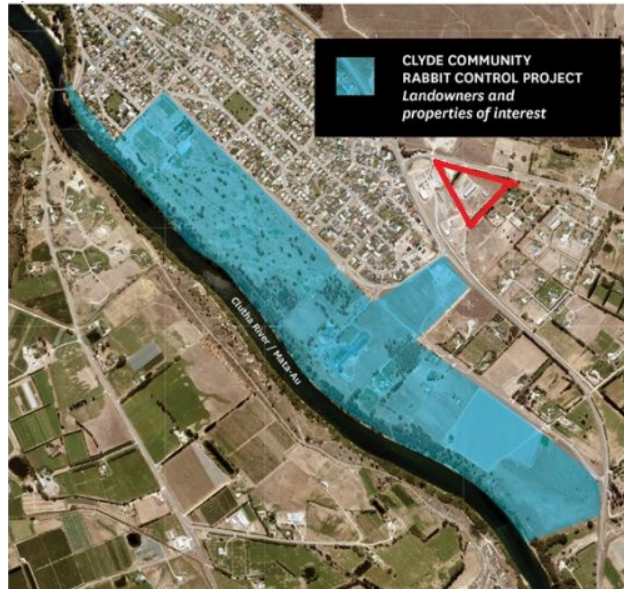
[49] To support this new way of working, a five-step process (Figure 4) has been established to manage moving from an enquiry or complaint to an ORC facilitated project. This process has been used to bring together groups of landowners to define the problem, understand responsibilities and engage a contractor to deliver control work (see Clyde/Dustan Hospital case study below).



**Figure 4: ORC Community Project Initiation Process**

**CASE STUDY, CLYDE RABBITS - ORC’S REGIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE IN PRACTICE**

- [50] Staff received complaints regarding rabbits impacting on the Dunstan Golf Club at Clyde in May 2020. The timing of the complaints provided Council with an opportunity to test its capability under the new RPMP, in terms of responding to complaints from peri-urban areas, implementing the new RPMP rules (where appropriate) and delivering more on community expectations around regional rabbit management.
- [51] From initial field work, there were obvious rabbit issues in and around the hospital area, golf course edge but also on private land (refer to Figure 7). Rabbits were mainly living in scrub cover along the Clutha River margin and feeding on adjacent grass. While some level of control was evident, it was ineffectual.
- [52] Council’s role was to firstly ensure that occupiers were adhering to RPMP rules, and secondly where responsibility for control was not clear (as seemed likely) that the council would step in, pull the parties together and help them to develop their own control solutions. Rabbit levels were assessed as highly variable and could not be pinned to any particular landowner because of the relatively small size of the land holdings.
- [53] The goal was to reduce the short-term impacts of rabbits in and around the southern margins of Clyde, through collaboration with identified land occupiers (whose land either sustained the rabbit population or benefited from rabbit control), by 31 August 2020. Occupiers included: The Crown (DoC, Southern District Health Board), Central Otago District Council (CODC), the golf club and several private landowners adjacent to the Clutha River (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Clyde Community Rabbit Control Project – Scope of Work**

- [54] Rabbit control in any peri-urban environment presents a unique challenge. However, in situations like Clyde pindone poison applied to carrot bait has proven to be reliable and effective and is less toxic than other commonly used vertebrate pesticides. Through wider community notification a large commercial enterprise<sup>3</sup> and further private landowners also joined the initiative using the same contractor to control rabbits on their land.
- [55] The operation appears to have achieved positive outcomes with recent inspections finding no live rabbits (daytime visit and night-time assessment using thermal imaging binoculars) or fresh rabbit sign. ORC assisted with funding various aspects of the operation, such as inspections, landowner engagement, community notification and signage (Figure 6). The costs of control were determined on a per hectare basis for each occupier and a contract for work signed between each land occupier and the contractor.
- [56] The following action points developed for Clyde now form the template of ORC’s approach for future peri-urban rabbit control operations:
- Planning / scoping - validate complaint, research site history, develop a plan.
  - Landowner engagement – identify who is key, bring parties together.
  - Control plan developed and confirmed – including short/long term solutions.
  - Control carried out by reputable and reliable contractors, then audited by ORC.
  - Review operation and plan (amend), occupier meeting and outcomes communicated.
  - Follow-up next season to remind landowners of the need for secondary/ongoing control work.

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<sup>3</sup> Additional land controlled outside of the initial project scope is outlined in red on Figure 5.





**Figure 6: Clyde Project Signage**





Dunstan hospital land provides the perfect habitat for rabbits to thrive.



Rabbits had been undermining hospital buildings, fences and lamp posts.



Contractor applying pindone carrot bait along set lines. Three applications were made a week apart.



Rabbit proof fencing along the Clutha River edge, like this fence along the eastern hospital boundary, is one of the key long-term solutions.

**Figure 7: Rabbit impacts at Clyde and control solutions**

- [57] A roll out of further small-block facilitation projects is underway, with at least six community schemes envisaged being supported this financial year (the Operational Plan approved by Council sets a target of at least two such schemes being established). Planning has already commenced for similar facilitated rabbit control operations around Hidden Hills (Wanaka), Lake Hayes, Albert Town, Gibbston Valley, Queensberry, Otago Peninsula and Moeraki (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Planned Small-Block Facilitation Projects**

2021/2022	2022/2023
Lake Hayes	Revisit previous areas
Hidden Hills Wanaka	Aramoana
Queensberry	Waianakarua
Lowburn/Pisa Moorings	Cape Wanbrow
Moeraki	Taieri Mouth
Albert Town	Springvale
Otago Peninsula	Roxburgh
Gibbston Valley	Millers Flat

- [58] Staff will undertake further assessments to proactively determine any other areas that would benefit from a collaborative approach. These facilitated projects are ‘resource hungry’ and require time and effort to ensure effective collaboration. The extent to how much value ORC can add will be determined by available resources and landowner mindsets. The level of support provided to each scheme needs to remain flexible and specific to that site. ORC’s role in such schemes spans education and awareness, community engagement and facilitation and, where possible, regulatory compliance.
- [59] To date, ORC’s role in facilitated small-block management initiatives has been to undertake property inspections, fund joint signage, organise and lead community meetings and provide administrative support to assist engagement between contractors and private landowners. This collaborative approach has also been used in a few other areas including Hawea and Cardrona.

**BIOSECURITY FUNCTION – BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT PLAN**

- [60] A number of other activities have been progressed to support a refreshed approach to Council’s biosecurity functions. As outlined to Councillors in June 2020, improvements to core business are being progressed, alongside specific initiatives aimed at increasing the team’s capacity and capabilities. Work is underway to ensure ORC is fulfilling its regional leadership responsibilities and a series of internal business improvements have been identified and are being addressed (Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Revised Delivery Approach**

- [61] There has been a focus on increasing the capacity of the team through the addition of three full-time, fixed term Environment Officer roles. All three staff will all be located in Central Otago and recruitment is underway. Two of these roles will be devoted to the rabbit programme with one role supporting existing staff with compliance work and the other leading the small-block facilitation projects. The third new staff member will support increased activity in the wallaby programme.
- [62] Table 4 provides a high-level summary of other activities actioned or underway that will contribute to better operational performance in our rabbit programme. These are grouped under Council’s core RPMP roles for sustained control of feral rabbits.

RPMP Council Roles	Actioned	Planned
<b>Community + Landowner Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clyde Golf course/Dunstan Hospital Project</li> <li>• Lake Hawea landowners rabbit control project</li> <li>• Meeting with Lake Hayes, Gibbston Valley, Albert Town community groups representatives</li> <li>• QLDC dialogue over 2020 poison operations – Lake Hayes Estate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive identification of addition areas for ‘ORC Facilitated’ project status</li> <li>• Commence Lake Hayes Project</li> <li>• Commence Gibbston Valley Project</li> <li>• Commence Albert Town Project</li> <li>• Consider Hidden Hills Project</li> <li>• Regional Roadshow for Pest Management Plan</li> </ul>
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development and implementation of refreshed Rabbit Inspection Plan</li> <li>• Councillor Workshop</li> <li>• Creation of small-block facilitation approach</li> <li>• Two-day team planning workshop</li> <li>• Modified McLean Scale training</li> <li>• Public consultation on rabbit control assets</li> <li>• Development of costed programme for LTP 2021-2031</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased focus on streamlining biosecurity activities to enable biodiversity outcomes (assisted by ORC’s recent biodiversity mapping)</li> </ul>
<b>Compliance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of new compliance ‘standard operating’ procedures</li> <li>• Revised compliance template letters</li> <li>• Development of new Compliance Support Officer role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings with TLA/s DCs</li> <li>• Meetings with Department of Conservation, NZTA, Kiwi Rail</li> <li>• Audit of crown owned land</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring + Reporting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with Manaaki Whenua about redesigning monitoring network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review monitoring network</li> <li>• Investigation into surveillance technologies to better understand frequency and distribution</li> </ul>

<b>Biocontrol</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immunity testing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussions with central government regarding further biocontrol options</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft terms of reference for regional Biosecurity Technical Group</li> <li>• Engagement with Maniototo Pest Management Company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biosecurity Technical Group established</li> <li>• Advocate for consideration of RPMP rules during regulatory consent process for major land use changes</li> <li>• Pest Control Contractor’s Forum – issues and opportunities</li> <li>• Consideration of options to support/improve contracting market (e.g. skills training)</li> <li>• Development of recommended pest contractor list</li> <li>• Engagement with Telford/Otago Polytechnic on opportunities for training, interns and collaborative opportunities</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Summary of Rabbit Programme Business Transformation Activities (Past Six Months)**

[63] In the wider team (encompassing Biosecurity and Rural Liaison), four staff have recently been recruited to support operational activities and business transformation. One person has started work, with the remaining commencing in November and December. These roles are:

- a. Compliance Support Coordinator – Biosecurity
- b. Performance and Development Specialist
- c. Project Delivery Specialist
- d. Partnership Lead – Biodiversity

[64] For Biosecurity, these roles will enable an increased level of support for delivery of compliance activities, a dedicated point of contact for complaints and opportunities, improved business planning, continuous assessment of performance against operational plans and other key performance indicators, and resource to focus on identifying and implementing business improvements.

[65] Regional strategy is non-existent in some areas, so an initial focus will be on working with key stakeholders to develop collaborative, region-wide strategies for managing pests such as wilding conifers and lagarosiphon. There will also be opportunities to apply a more strategic framework over operations to better align biosecurity priorities to biodiversity outcomes.

[66] The Biosecurity function would also benefit from utilising modern technology to support operational work, grow surveillance capacity and introduce inspection efficiencies. Artificial intelligence cameras are in the process of being installed by the ORC at the Aviemore Dam to detect wallaby movement. Thermal imaging via helicopter or drones would also improve our ability to identify and protect the region against pest plants and pest animals.

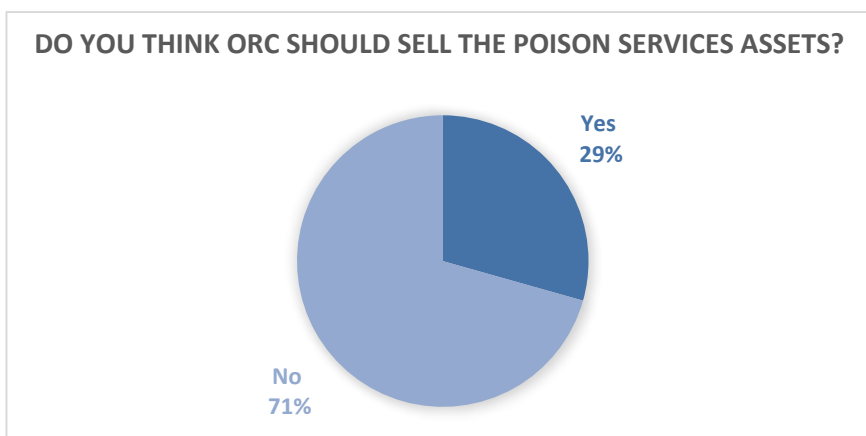
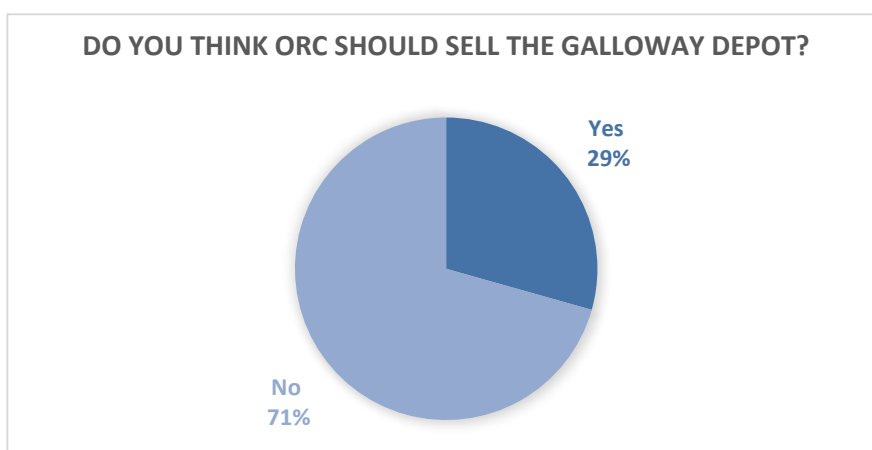
**RABBIT CONTROL ASSETS**

[67] Council still holds a number of rabbit control assets (e.g. carrot cutters and mixers and bait feeders) left over from its former Regional Services function which was closed in 2015. Most of the equipment was purchased before 1990, and while some items will



now be redundant, others could be repurposed for use (e.g. reliance cutters and screeners, oat cookers and bait feeder/ploughs).

- [68] Public input was sought on what do with the equipment and the site in which the assets are currently stored. A short survey was developed on the ORC's 'Your Say' website and publicised via Facebook and On-Stream. The survey link was also sent to over 100 individuals or organisations who were categorised as stakeholders. The survey ran from 6 May until 6 June 2020.
- [69] A total of 160 people completed the survey. Submitters were overwhelmingly in favour (71% for each question) of Council retaining the rabbit control assets and the building in which they are housed.



- [70] Council's Biosecurity Strategy signalled the intention to facilitate and assist landowner and community groups to undertake rabbit control programmes. One way for ORC to support this outcome is by providing support to contractors so they have greater capabilities to undertake control work. The equipment requires a high level of knowledge and skill to operate so would need to be managed accordingly.
- [71] As most of the rabbit control equipment has been in storage for some time it will need inspection, servicing and running to evaluate true operational condition. Some assets require substantial overhaul and refitting to get into a safe and reliable working

condition. As most of the refurbishment work will be general engineering it is not envisaged there will be difficulties in finding suitable suppliers locally.

## OPTIONS

- [72] Considering the above factors, three options have been identified to assist Council with their decision making.
- [73] **Option One - dispose** of all assets via tender and let the market determine the supply of contracted services for rabbit control.
- [74] This is the easiest option for Council to adopt, however it does not acknowledge the strongly held views of the community expressed via the survey results that the assets should be retained for regional use. The tender could have weightings in favour of Otago based operators, but there would still be no guarantees that gear would remain in the region.
- [75] **Option Two – rationalise and retain assets**, upgrade that remaining equipment to ensure that it is in safe and good working condition and available for use within Otago.
- [76] This will make the specialist equipment available to authorised operators/contractors that meet ORC standards of service delivery, to undertake rabbit control for community groups, landowner syndicates, Landcare groups, or for ORC enforcement requirements. The starting assumption would be that equipment hire is available on a commercial basis with costs of operation, depreciation and maintenance being recovered.
- [77] This option creates health and safety risks and liabilities for ORC in the role of equipment supplier.
- [78] Option Three – **rationalise and lease assets**, upgrade remaining equipment and enter into long term lease agreement with a preferred contractor, prepared to undertake regional rabbit control as a result of increased rabbit management action (i.e. inspections/enforcement and small block/community facilitation) by Council.
- [79] This way the assets would be retained by Council but are actively utilised for rabbit control via a service agreement with Council. This option would require a tender or registration of interest process to select a preferred contractor with the credentials and capitalisation to enter into a long-term agreement (e.g. 3-5 years initially). Staff or an agent would not be required under this option, as equipment and/or depot management would become the responsibility of the contractor.
- [80] As with Option 2, this option creates health and safety risks and liabilities for ORC in the role of equipment supplier.

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Policy Considerations

- [81] This paper describes how ORC is giving effect to the policy decisions it has previously made in respect of pest management.

### **Financial Considerations**

- [82] Resource requirements for delivery of ORC's Biosecurity function are being assessed during preparation of the Draft 2021/31 Long Term Plan.
- [83] Depending on the preferred option above, additional costs would be required to retain and repurpose carrot control assets for use by contractors.

### **Significance and Engagement**

- [84] This paper does not trigger ORC's policy on significance and engagement.

### **Legislative Considerations**

#### *Biosecurity Act 1993*

- [85] The Biosecurity Act 1993 (BSA, or the Act), and national and regional pest management plans promulgated under the Act, are the principal means by which pest management is undertaken at both national and regional scales.
- [86] Under Section 12B (2) of the Act, ORC is required to demonstrate biosecurity leadership in the region and develop policies (e.g. via the RPMP) that reflects regional community aspirations. Regarding rabbits, the prime role of council is ensuring that communities understand the importance of rabbit control and develop responses to support the adverse effects associated with rabbits as pests. The Council can help various stakeholders, who directly undertake pest control, to work cooperatively and has powers to monitor and regulate progress made in managing rabbit populations.
- [87] As per Section 13 of the BSA, ORC has the authority to exclude, manage or eradicate pests in accordance with its RPMP. The Council's direct or indirect actions (e.g. acting as a management agency; assessing, managing or eradicating pests; or taking other, specified steps to implement the plan) must not go beyond the responsibilities set out in the RPMP.
- [88] Regarding compliance, as per sections 122 and 128/129 of the Biosecurity Act, Council can serve a notice of direction, and if a landowner/occupier defaults on the notice Council has the means to act on that default (i.e. undertake the work directly) and recover costs.

### **Risk Considerations**

- [89] As noted above, ORC acting as supplier or hirer of rabbit control assets creates health and safety liabilities for ORC.

### **NEXT STEPS**

- [90] If Council decides to retain and repurpose carrot control assets staff will prepare a business case, including funding and management options, as part of the forthcoming Long-Term Plan 2021-2031 development process.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Appendix 1 RPMP Panel Decision [7.1.1 - 3 pages]

2. Appendix 2 Example Sub Division Resource Consent Pest Management Plan [7.1.2 - 5 pages]





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## Decision Report

### On the Otago Regional Pest Management Plan and Biosecurity Strategy

Under Section 75 of the Biosecurity Act 1993

**25 September 2019**

view that a 10-year period is appropriate for the RLMP with the proviso that it can be reviewed at any stage upon request by either party.

- [146] We recommend the inclusion of a GNR to require the elimination of wild Russell lupin within 10 metres of a property boundary where the occupier of the adjoining property is taking reasonable steps to eliminate wild Russell lupin within 10 metres of that boundary.

### **Feral Rabbits**

- [147] Approximately 15 submissions were received regarding feral rabbits. These submissions ranged from support for the proposed programme to changing the programme, seeking more coordinated and collaborative control, requesting an exemption, seeking to address current control issues and minor amendment to make the rules clearer.
- [148] ORC currently spends approximately \$350,000 per annum on rabbit monitoring and inspection. This includes setting out how monitoring and surveillance is done, working with rural land occupiers to support them in achieving compliance; and occupiers throughout Otago (including urban and semi-urban land occupiers) with advice regarding control. ORC's website contains information on the different methods for managing rabbits. However, the responsibility of management sits with the land occupier. The ORC no longer provides operation services associated with rabbit control. The control of rabbits is occupier-led; this is the management approach nationally and has been in place in Otago since 1995. No amendments to the Plan are recommended other than minor amendments to simplify the rules.
- [149] We heard from the Maniototo Pest Management Inc at the hearing (P329.3) who seek a variation to the requirement to meet the McLean Scale 3 in favour of McLean Scale 4 as a trigger point to non-compliance action. We sought further information from staff in Minute 3 in this regard. Having considered the submitter's request and the further information provided by staff, we accept the staff recommendation that is more appropriate that the submitter formally applies to the ORC for an exemption under s78 of the Act rather than amending the Plan in response to the submitter's request for a variation.
- [150] We heard from QLDC (P263) and the Wakatipu Wilding Conifer Group (P121) and note the staff closing response that indicated that while the costs of an additional programme to include rules for feral rabbits in urban areas outweighed the benefits,

there are other ways to manage feral rabbit control in urban and peri-urban areas outside this review process. We sought further information from staff in this regard in Minute 6. Having considered the further information provided by staff, we are satisfied that there are a number of additional tools available providing additional support to landowners, particularly in urban and 'peri-urban' areas, to address these issues that sit outside the plan review process. These include additional website information, regional and district plans, contestable funds for rabbit proof fencing and facilitation services.

- [151] We further note that Rule 6.4.6.1 as drafted is intended to apply region-wide in all areas and is consistent with other regional councils included ECAN and ES.

### **Rooks**

- [152] Several submitters sought that Rooks be removed from the Plan or that the eradication programme be amended to a sustained control programme. Rooks are known to damage crops and pasture and ORC's rook programme has decreased rook population numbers in Otago from 3500 rooks in 1989 to less than 40 in 2018. Based on the evidence available to us, we accept the staff recommendation that rooks be retained in the Plan as an eradication pest.

### **Bennett's wallaby**

- [153] Six submissions were received regarding Bennett's wallaby. No amendments to the proposed Bennett's wallaby eradication programme were sought. Submissions either supported the Bennett's wallaby programme, sought to ensure ORC was resourced to ensure Bennett's wallabies can be eradicated, or sought acknowledgement regarding the difficulties with occupier control.
- [154] ORC works closely with Environment Canterbury on wallaby control and supports property occupiers in destroying wallabies if these are sighted but not destroyed by the property occupiers themselves.
- [155] We heard from Federated Farmers (P182) and note that in the staff closing response it was clarified that the Proposal does not contain any rules relating to restricting the use of firearms for wallaby control.

**Appendix 1: Example of ORC submission on the need for pest management planning for sub-division resource consent (Northlake)**

Summary of ORC Submission

**7.2.3 Otago Regional Council**

Mr Donaldson addressed matters raised in the Otago Regional Council (ORC) submission with respect to pests (rabbits) and the ORC's current position on this matter. Mr Donaldson observed that the Central Otago and Lakes Districts have a long-standing problem with rabbits as a pest species, one which continues to this day. Under the Biosecurity Act the ORC is mandated to lead the regulating of pest control in Otago. The ORC's strategic pest planning tool is the Pest Management Strategy for Otago 2009 (the Pest Strategy).

Mr Donaldson emphasised that the Otago community has an important role in working with the ORC to bring rabbit populations to a manageable level. While the Pest Strategy is often

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cited as being solely an appropriate instrument for enforcing pest management; it is important that the Crown, local authorities and landowners are proactive, taking all opportunities to support and reflect the needs of pest management initiatives when considering the use and development of land.

Mr Donaldson noted that the section 42A report responded to the ORC submission, commenting that urban development will effectively drive away rabbits and that rabbit fencing (as promoted in the submission) is not required. Mr Donaldson noted that while it is true that development may discourage rabbits during construction activity, rabbits will simply retreat to the areas bordering the development as well as returning to the site at night as freshly disturbed soil is attractive for burrowing. Based on the ORC's experience rabbits will return to live around the landscaped areas of residential properties. Mr Donaldson confirmed that of more concern to the ORC is that without fencing it is quite possible that poisoned rabbits from the neighbouring sites (such as the Plantation Forest and Hikuwai Conservation Area) may well find their way into the development. Domestic pets hunting poisoned rabbits may also be at risk.

Mr Donaldson noted that this situation creates the possibility of reverse sensitivity where residents may oppose future poisoning activity the ORC undertakes. Mr Donaldson considered that should consent for the development be granted it is important that the opportunity be taken to separate the boundary, before development begins, from the adjoining land. Accordingly the ORC seeks that rabbit proof fencing be placed between the site of PC 45 and adjoining land.

The Commission notes in the context of this submission that rabbit proof fencing exists at the boundary of the PC 45 land with the Hikuwai Conservation Area to the east.

**Relevant Extract of Decision**

The Commission has given consideration to the issue of pest management (in respect of rabbits) as discussed by Mr Donaldson at the hearing. A rabbit proof fence already exists along the boundary with the Hikuwai Conservation Area. The Commission is satisfied that given the control which is currently available through the Pest Management Strategy 2009 that it would be inappropriate to include any specific provisions with respect to pest management in PC 45.

**Rabbit Rules from the 2009 Pest Management Strategy**

**5. Pest Animals**

**5.1 Introduction**

Forms of management required for animal pests include, total control, which is the prompt eradication of a species, progressive control, which allows a period of time for eradication to be achieved, and containment control, which allows a pest to be present within defined areas.

The three forms of management required by the rules for pest animals under this Strategy, relate to the specific nature of those pests. These are:

- Total control required everywhere in Otago;
- Progressive control required over a period of time; and
- Containment required in identified areas.

The rules set in this chapter impose requirements on land occupiers as follows:

- Rabbits and hares: containment control, by requiring rabbits and hares to be controlled at or below the Maximum Allowable Limits set in the Strategy.
- Wallaby: total control, with the intention to prevent wallaby from establishing in Otago.

Land occupiers have various obligations related to the control of these animals on their land. These obligations are set out in the following sections.

With regard to rooks, the Council undertakes progressive control, with the intention to significantly reduce rooks in number, and ultimately eradicate them from Otago. Land occupiers are requested to report rook sightings to the Council.

**5.2 Feral Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) and Hares (*Lepus europaeus*)**

**5.2.1 Description and adverse effects**

Primary productivity may be lost if rabbits are not controlled, and neighbours can have costs imposed on them when a land occupier neglects rabbit control.

Uncontrolled rabbit grazing causes grasslands and shrub land to be replaced with low, herbaceous and mat-forming vegetation, affecting pastoral production and biodiversity. In general, rabbits compete for grass with other farm animals and cause land degradation. Loss of vegetation reduces soil organic matter, and soils with low organic matter have reduced water-holding capacity and permeability, and therefore reduced soil fertility. Rabbit grazing can also cause soil erosion and stream bank erosion, which can in turn affect water quality. Rabbits may affect native invertebrates and birds by causing changes to habitat, and altering predator-prey relationships.

Rabbit populations have varying levels of immunity to Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD). RHD epidemics will result in some population control, however, the level and timing of such epidemics cannot be relied upon, therefore other forms of control are required to ensure populations do not increase. Other control techniques include the use of poisons, shooting and fumigation. Best results from control come from well-planned programmes that are undertaken with consideration to rabbit barriers such as rabbit-proof fences or rivers. In many cases programmes that coordinate the joint efforts of land occupiers situated between such barriers will be required.



## Pest Animals

The Modified McLean scale (given in Appendix 1) is used to assess rabbit infestation, giving maximum allowable limits (MALs) on a scale of 1 to 8, and is the agreed methodology for assessing rabbit infestation by all agencies involved in rabbit control in New Zealand.

Currently, rabbit control on properties across Otago is generally able to retain MAL 3, although parts of Central Otago are particularly rabbit-prone. This was recognised and allowed for by the Pest Management Strategy for Otago (2001) with MAL 4 or 5 in those rabbit-prone areas. Despite this higher limit, it was common to have rabbits present at levels higher than MAL before control programmes were fully implemented, creating issues of rabbits spreading to neighbouring properties with effective rabbit control. For this Strategy, MAL 3 has been selected for the entire Otago region. MAL 3 for Central Otago may be difficult to achieve on some properties, and effective transitional control programmes will need to be put in place as soon as possible to ensure MAL 3 is reached by 1 October 2012.

Hares are not such a significant pest within Otago in their own right, but they are addressed together with rabbits, because their superficial similarity prevents them being usefully distinguished for management purposes.

### 5.2.2 Objectives

- (i) On land where the maximum allowable limit (MAL) of 3 on the modified McLean Scale is not exceeded, the maintenance of combined rabbit and hare infestations at levels below MAL 3.
- (ii) On land where MAL 3 is exceeded, the reduction of combined rabbit and hare infestations to MAL 3 or less, by 1 October 2012, or earlier.

### 5.2.3 Means of achieving the objectives

- Rules require rabbit and hare control actions so that MAL 3 is not exceeded. Where MAL 3 is exceeded, a control programme is required to ensure progressive reduction in rabbit and hare infestations.
- The Council will require the use of compatible or joint control programmes for adjoining properties, where rabbit and hare infestations exceed MAL 3.

- Where adjoining properties have different levels of combined rabbit and hare infestations (with any one property exceeding MAL 3), the Council will take compliance action to ensure prompt implementation of effective control programmes, giving priority to achieving MAL 3 on each property.
- The principal means of achieving the objective of MAL 3 across Otago is to require occupiers to use effective control techniques, and to develop approved control programmes.
- The Council can assist in the development of control programmes.

### 5.2.4 Feral rabbit and hare rule

- (i) On land where under the Pest Management Strategy for Otago (2001), the maximum allowable level for rabbits and hares was greater than 3 on the modified McLean Scale (shown in Figure 4) and where the level on that land exceeds 3 on the modified McLean Scale on 1 August 2009, then the occupier must have an approved control programme to ensure a reduction in combined rabbit and hare infestation to a level of 3 or less on the modified McLean Scale by 1 October 2012, or such longer time as the Otago Regional Council may, in its discretion, approve.
- (ii) On all other land (not being land in 5.2.4(i)), occupiers must ensure that rabbit and hare numbers are maintained at or less than a level of 3 on the modified McLean Scale. If rabbit and hare numbers exceed the maximum allowable level of 3 on the modified McLean Scale, the occupier must have an approved control programme to ensure reduction of combined rabbit and hare infestations to a level of 3 or less on the modified McLean Scale by 1 October 2012.

Pest Animals

- (iii) Where an approved control programme is required:
- (a) The occupier must submit a written control programme to the Otago Regional Council for approval.
  - (b) The written control programme must be submitted within two months of a written requirement being made by the Otago Regional Council.
  - (c) The written control programme must contain an objective to reduce combined rabbit and hare infestations to a level of 3 or less on the modified McLean Scale and include a description of:
    - (i) Methods to be used to achieve the objective; and
    - (ii) Areas to be treated with those methods; and
    - (iii) The timetable for the use of those methods.
  - (d) The Otago Regional Council will grant approval of a written control programme, if it is satisfied that the programme is reasonably capable of achieving the objective, having regard to:
    - (i) The nature and characteristics of the land that exceeds a maximum allowable level of 3 on the modified McLean Scale.
    - (ii) The nature and use of surrounding land.
    - (iii) The potential for rabbit and hare dispersion.
    - (iv) The risks to the environment and land protection from rabbit and hare infestation.
    - (v) The practicality of available control methods on the land.
  - (e) Control programmes for adjoining properties must be compatible or jointly undertaken where a lack of rabbit barriers exist.
- (iv) An occupier must implement an approved control programme for the occupier's land.

Any breach of Rule 5.2.4(iii)(b) or 5.2.4(iv) is an offence under Section 154(r) of the Biosecurity Act 1993 and may result in default work under Section 128 of the Act. This means that if occupiers do not have an approved control programme, or fail to implement their approved control programme, the Otago Regional Council may at its discretion undertake such rabbit and hare control work as necessary and recover costs from the occupier.

The sale, breeding, release and commercial display of these organisms is restricted by Sections 52 and 53 of the Biosecurity Act 1993.

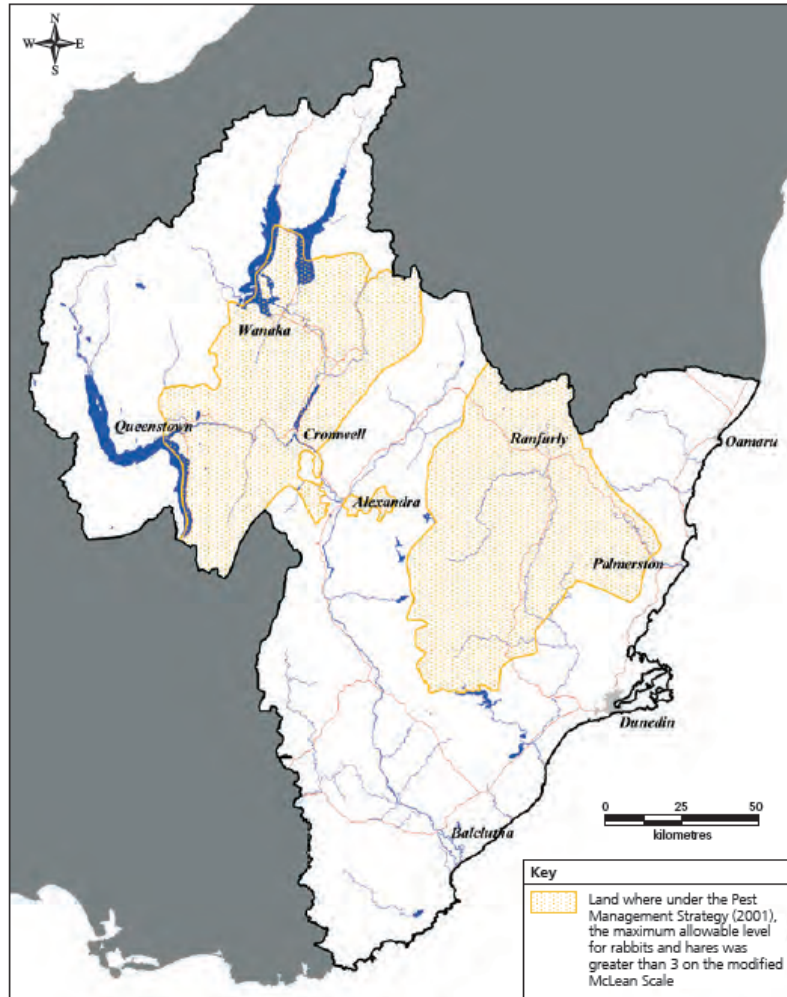
**5.2.5 Methods for monitoring achievement of objectives**

The Council will monitor the effect of the Strategy through:

- Establishment and maintenance of a complaints register.
- Assessment of rabbit and hare numbers using the modified McLean Scale.
- Use of 'night counts' to establish population trends.
- Monitoring of the implementation of control programmes, and annual review of control programmes.

Pest Animals

Figure 4: Land where under the Pest Management Strategy for Otago (2001), the maximum allowable level for rabbits and hares was greater than 3 on the modified McLean Scale





### 8.1. Catchment Support Advisory Group Report Back

**Prepared for:** Implementation Committee  
**Report No.** OPS1021  
**Activity:** Environmental - Rural Water Quality  
**Author:** Andrea Howard, Manager Biosecurity and Rural Liaison  
**Endorsed by:** Gavin Palmer, General Manager Operations  
**Date:** 14 October 2020

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#### PURPOSE

- [1] To report back on the activities and recommendations made by the Council established Catchment Support Advisory Group.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- [2] A Catchment Support Advisory Group was established to provide advice on the best way for Council to support the ongoing work of Catchment Groups in their quest to maintain and improve water quality in the region.
- [3] The Advisory Group has met four times since July 2020. During this time, the Group developed a set of working principles and an approach to allocate the funding (\$200,000) set aside in this year's budget to support local groups to improve water quality.
- [4] The Advisory Group recommended that Council funding was used to establish an overarching organisation that would help Catchment Groups through employing staff to provide facilitation, administrative and project support. The entity would also work to establish new Catchment Groups where there was an environmental need, and good community engagement.
- [5] The new entity, tentatively called "Otago Catchment Communities", would be an incorporated society and would provide strategic oversight and practical support to ensure the sustainability of a network of Catchment Groups across Otago.

#### RECOMMENDATION

*That the Council:*

- 1) **Receives** this report.
- 2) **Notes** the previously approved allocation of \$200,000 in the 2020/2021 financial year to fund the development of an umbrella entity and to support co-ordination and administrative roles that facilitate 'on the ground' action to improve water quality in the region's waterbodies.
- 3) **Notes** that the Catchment Support Advisory Group has completed its work and has now disbanded.

- 4) **Notes** that Council will be asked to nominate representatives for the new Otago Catchment Communities governance board.
- 5) **Endorses** establishing a Memorandum of Understanding between the Otago Regional Council and the umbrella entity, once formed, detailing ongoing partnership and collaboration roles and responsibilities.
- 6) **Notes** that, once formed, a funding agreement will be established with the umbrella entity detailing payments, deliverables and reporting requirements.
- 7) **Notes** that a longer-term budget for supporting the region's Catchment Groups will be presented as part of the forthcoming Long-Term Plan 2021-2031 development process.

## BACKGROUND

- [6] In late January 2020, a paper was considered by Council outlining options to support community-based, water quality focused, Catchment Groups<sup>1</sup>. Council resolved to "develop a series of increased support options for consideration during the Long Term Plan process".
- [7] Catchment Groups are typically formed around a geographical feature (river, lake, town) and involve community members working together to achieve long-term environmental outcomes, such as improved water quality or ecosystem health. Catchment Groups play a fundamental role in bringing communities together to talk about issues and develop 'on the ground' solutions. Research<sup>2</sup> shows that these groups capitalise on local knowledge, are highly motivated and when projects are self-initiated, individuals within such groups are more likely to commit to longer-term stewardship of their local environment.
- [8] Council made the decision to allocate \$200,000 of funding in the 2020/2021 year to Catchment Groups, in addition to current levels of in-kind staff support and previously committed funding of \$30,000 to the Pomahaka Water Care and North Otago Sustainable Land Management Groups.
- [9] Following the January 29<sup>th</sup> meeting, a Catchment Support Advisory Group was established by Council. This Group focused on developing a more detailed plan to support Catchment Groups, allocation of available funding and considered how to support the longer-term sustainability of community driven groups.
- [10] The Catchment Support Advisory Group was led by Councillors Scott and Hobbs and met monthly between July and September. Membership included representatives from:
  - Five catchment groups – spanning Mt Aspiring, Lake Hayes, West Otago, South Otago, East Otago and North Otago areas;
  - NZ Landcare Trust; and
  - Otago Regional Council staff (Regulatory, Operations, Strategy, Policy and Science).

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<sup>1</sup> Future Support for Catchment Groups, Report No. GOV1886, 29 January 2020.

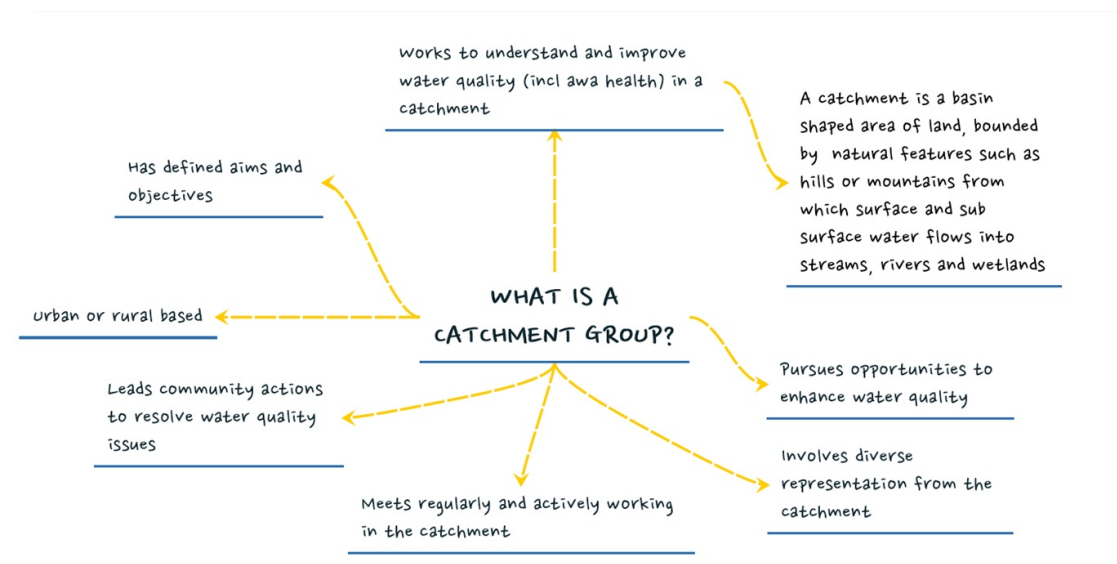
<sup>2</sup> Jones, Christopher & Kirk, Nick. (2018). Shared visions: Can community conservation projects' outcomes inform on their likely contributions to national biodiversity goals? New Zealand Journal of Ecology. 42. 10.20417/nzjcol.42.14.

## DISCUSSION

[11] The Catchment Support Advisory Group created the following principles to guide its work:

- The need to recognise diversity between all catchment groups (in terms of their stage of development and the environment issues being addressed).
- The importance of providing opportunities to capitalise on local knowledge and aspiration.
- The need to be flexible in approach.
- The desire to develop systems and processes that foster and facilitate community self-management, ownership and responsibility.
- The recognition that behavioural and environmental change takes time to achieve.
- The desire to create a sustainable support system that is strategic and facilitates short term action as well as enduring benefits.
- The importance of encouraging efficient and effective use of knowledge and resources across all groups.

[12] For the purposes of ORC funding, the Catchment Support Advisory Group developed a set of criteria to define a Catchment Group (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Parameters of Catchment Groups**

[13] Drawing on existing conceptual thinking undertaken for a central government funding bid, the Advisory Group determined that \$200,000 allocated by the ORC will be used to establish an umbrella organisation to support groups across Otago. Specifically, the umbrella entity will:

- Provide organisational support for catchment groups and volunteers.
- Assist individual groups with identifying funding sources and writing applications.
- Provide administration support to help create and run groups.
- Provide communication support to help design, write & distribute information.
- Facilitate access to experts, information & technology.

- Establish enduring funding pipelines to support changing needs.
  - Act as a conduit between government, regional authorities, and stakeholders.
- [14] Tentatively called 'Otago Catchment Communities', the umbrella organisation will ensure the survival of existing groups and proactively establish new groups where there was a need and community support existed to create a group.
- [15] Support will cover advice on starting up and 'on the ground' actions through newly employed coordinators across the region. Catchment Groups will also be provided with shared administrative support to minimise the burden on community volunteers. A small amount of project funding will also be available for local initiatives such as water quality monitoring, riparian planting and the development of integrated catchment plans.
- [16] In order to set up the new model, the first tranche of funding (up to \$16,000) will go towards employing project administration and seeking legal advice to create the incorporated society and new governance structure.
- [17] Once the new entity is established the remaining funding will be used to employ local coordinators and fund administrative support for Catchment Groups. Staff would be employed by the new entity but funded by the ORC. It is hoped that the new entity will also receive central government funding.
- [18] In due course, a formal funding agreement will be created, alongside a Memorandum of Understanding detailing the working principles and ongoing partnership requirements (including representation on new entity) between the new entity and ORC.
- [19] Catchment Group representatives on the Catchment Support Advisory Group also presented a longer-term budget estimate and this will be incorporated into Council's forthcoming Long-Term Plan 2021-2031 development process.
- [20] An interim Otago Catchment Communities Establishment Group has been set up to manage the process of creating an incorporated society. Councillors and staff will continue to support this group during its establishment phase. Council will also be represented on the newly formed governance board.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Policy Considerations**

- [21] Not applicable.

### **Financial Considerations**

- [22] Longer-term funding to support Catchment Groups has been scoped and will be included in the Long-Term Plan 2021-2031 development process.

### **Significance and Engagement**

- [23] Not applicable.

**Legislative Considerations**

[24] Not applicable.

**Risk Considerations**

[25] Not applicable.

**NEXT STEPS**

[26] Council staff will continue to provide support to assist Otago Catchment Communities during its establishment phase.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Nil