

PRE-DRAFT RAKIURA NATIONAL PARK PLAN

INTRODUCED ANIMALS

Rationale

The Department of Conservation's responsibilities for introduced animal control are derived from provisions in the Conservation Act 1987 and the National Parks Act 1980 and the Wild Animal Control Act 1977. The Wildlife Act 1953 also provides for the control of introduced animals and allows for control to be applied to some protected or partially protected species where they are causing damage to land. As a land manager the Department of Conservation has obligations under the Biosecurity Act 1993 for the control of introduced animals. The Southland Regional Pest Management Strategy outlines some of the Department of Conservation's responsibilities under that Act.

The definition of animal in the National Parks Act 1980 includes any mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, fish (including shellfish) or related organism, insect and crustacean.

Control of introduced animals such as possums and rats is undertaken in accordance with the National Parks Act 1980 which states, "the introduced plants and animals shall as far as possible be exterminated".

The General Policy for National Parks 2005 further defines the direction for the management of introduced animals. It reaffirms that eradication, where practicable, containment and reducing the range of established introduced animals should be a priority.

Control of introduced species considered widespread is a significant priority in order to maintain the general welfare of national park indigenous species, habitats and ecosystems, or to maintain scenic and landform values as a priority where necessary. The eradication of new incursions and the eradication of introduced species to areas where they were previously absent is also a priority.

The Department of Conservation liaises closely with the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group when working through a priority-setting exercise for the integrated management of all introduced animals that are found in Rakiura National Park.

The Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group was established in early 2001. The key purpose of this group is to enable a process to identify and discuss with the community (public and interest groups), issues associated with the control of introduced animals on Stewart Island / Rakiura. This group provides recommendations that are considered by the Department of

Conservation as the land manager, in its decision making related to the management of introduced animals on Stewart Island / Rakiura.

Due to the widespread nature of possums, wild cats and rats in Rakiura National Park, prioritising key areas for action is necessary. In liaison with the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group, action is taken at sites to protect ecosystems of the highest priority. Trapping or other suitable methods of control are undertaken when necessary in conjunction with species or habitat preservation activity.

Control of, deer is undertaken in terms of the Wild Animal Control Act 1977. That Act provides for wild animal control plans to be prepared. This management plan provides the policy direction for wild animal control in Rakiura National Park. Currently there are no other wild animals such as pigs, goats, chamois and thar found in Rakiura National Park.

Both Whitetailed deer and Red Deer are present in Rakiura National Park. These are controlled on Ulva Island and on some other offshore islands.

A feral venison industry has existed in the Rakiura National Park. This mainly occurred during the 1970's and the 1980's, though it continues today on an irregular basis. As such, the majority deer removal is currently by way of recreational hunting.

The eradication of deer is not considered feasible within the Rakiura National Park. Currently, in liaison with the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group, a monitoring programme is in place to provide advice on what impact deer are having on vegetation; and specifically to determine what impact deer are having on vegetation compared to the impact of possums. This monitoring programme, in time, may also provide advice on what level of deer population must be obtained to minimise impacts on Rakiura National Park natural values.

[Note - there are gaps in rationale including reference to gamebirds, mustelids and dogs]

Objectives

1. To preserve those areas of high natural biodiversity values in Rakiura National Park most at risk from introduced animals.
2. To control introduced animal numbers to a level that allows for the regeneration of browsed indigenous flora and the recovery of predated fauna.
3. To monitor vegetation condition in priority areas of Rakiura National Park as well as monitoring the result of introduced animal management programmes.

4. To prevent the colonisation by introduced species of new areas within Rakiura National Park and to prevent the establishment of introduced animal species not already present within Rakiura National Park.
5. To support habitat management programmes with specific introduced animal control measures.
6. To identify those areas where eradication of introduced animals is possible, practical and sustainable without re-invasion (or where re-invasion is manageable) and to undertake appropriate operations to eradicate introduced animals.
7. To encourage integration and co-ordination between user groups (including the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group), authorities and agencies. To consider joint working programmes with those that have an interest in the management of introduced animals and / or their impacts, and to develop an awareness of the threats that introduced animals can pose to Rakiura National Park.

Policies

1. Establish and regularly review introduced animal control priorities. Areas of Rakiura National Park should be ranked using nationally developed ranking systems. High ranking areas are likely to be those with unique ecosystems, threatened species, areas of high damage (or high susceptibility to damage), and areas not yet colonised by introduced animals. This should occur in liaison with the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group.
2. Seek funding for introduced animal control in areas of highest ranking. All animal control operations will be carried out in accordance with national and conservancy priorities, plans and guidelines.
3. Review vegetation and introduced animal monitoring programmes to ensure that trends in animal densities and impacts and the effects of control operations are known as far as possible. Adopt the most cost-effective, efficient and sustainable methods of monitoring to obtain representative data for the areas monitored.
4. Encourage community group initiatives for and participation in agreed animal control programmes (such as via the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group). Support for any programmes will be

dependent on a full assessment and will address the following matters (including, but not limited to):

- a) Demonstrating the programme will assist in achieving the biodiversity and/or biosecurity objectives of this plan;
 - b) Demonstrating the programme will assist in conserving and/or restoring the ecosystems of indigenous species within Rakiura National Park;
 - c) Demonstrating the programme does not adversely affect the achievement of implementations 1 and 2 of this section; and
 - d) Demonstrating that the programme will be regularly reviewed to ensure the objectives of the programme are being achieved.
 - e) If over time it is considered that the programme is not meeting the objectives of this management plan then the programme will be reassessed and if appropriate, it will cease.
5. Liaise with, co-ordinate and inform the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group, local authorities, adjacent landowners, commercial and recreational hunters and the general public to achieve effective action against introduced animal problems wherever possible, and raise awareness of the effects that they have.
 6. Aim to control the impact of deer, possums, wild cats and rats within Rakiura National Park to a level where they are not having an adverse effect on native species and vegetation within Rakiura National Park. The priority setting exercise for these species should be in consultation with the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group.
 7. Aim for low densities in deer, possums, wild cats and rat populations on lands administered by the Department of Conservation that are adjacent to Rakiura National Park, where invasion of Rakiura National Park may be a risk.
 8. If it is considered to be feasible and if resourcing is available, seek to eradicate rats, wild-cats and possums from Rakiura National Park.
 9. Priorities for possum control in Rakiura National Park should continue with the current emphasis on the protection of the habitat of threatened species and to protect the high natural values within those places. Possum control should be undertaken following the priority order once a review (see implementation 1)

has taken place. Operational plans should be prepared for each operation as needs arise.

10. Encourage commercial possum skin/fur recovery where this is consistent with the biodiversity and biosecurity objectives of this plan.
11. Commercial recovery operations (Wild Animal Recovery Operations (WARO)) may be authorised through a concession. Where such operations are proposed in areas where joint community control programmes occur, the Department of Conservation should consult with interested parties and use the most appropriate tools for achieving the objectives of the plan. This may result in any WARO applications being declined and / or concessions being restricted or terminated.
12. Priorities for specific deer control measures include:
 - a) Maintaining current deer free areas. The places of importance for this include existing deer-free islands;
 - b) Eradication from other islands where this will enhance outcomes for indigenous ecosystems, habitats and species.
 - c) Avoiding colonisation by deer species presently not found in Rakiura National Park;
 - d) Work with the Stewart Island / Rakiura Pest Liaison Group to identify options for maximising integrated management of introduced animals; and
 - e) Protecting endemic species and/or ecosystems within Rakiura National Park. An assessment is required to determine priority places.
13. Maintain rat-free islands (kiore, ship-rats and norway-rats) and control or, where practicable, eradicate rats from Rakiura National Park.
14. Ensure that mice do not establish in Rakiura National Park.
15. Undertake cat control in areas where cats are having unacceptable effects on populations of threatened species and where practicable seek to eradicate cats from Rakiura National Park.
16. Prevent the establishment of introduced animals into areas where they are not currently present, including introduced species that are already present in Rakiura National Park. This shall not apply to legally authorised liberations of introduced animals, including those for control (e.g. Judas rats), weed biocontrol agents or for scientific purposes.

17. Where illegal or accidental introductions of new species occur, all possible steps will be taken to remove them.
18. Actively pursue new technology or information that leads to an increased capacity to control all introduced animals. Should the technology become available, biological control methods for the control of introduced animals may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Biological control may provide an effective and efficient option for introduced animal control management within Rakiura National Park. The release of bio-control agents in Rakiura National Park will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with section 5A of the National Parks Act 1980 and should be authorised only to control species that cannot be effectively controlled in other ways. Technology that involves genetic modification may provide efficient and effective control options in the future. Any application for such activities will be assessed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with national policy.
19. Undertake all management activity (including animal control, weed control, facilities development and maintenance, visitor management) in a manner compatible with, and wherever practicable integrated with, ecosystem management.
20. Use a range of statutory processes including mechanisms under the Biosecurity Act 1993, and the Resource Management Act 1991 to develop a regulatory framework to reduce the risk of introduced animals spreading to areas where they are presently absent. This will enable a rapid response to invasions in or adjacent to Rakiura National Park.
21. Consult with papatipu rūnanga prior to undertaking animal control operations where the operations involve the use of toxins or if previously unused bio-control agents are to be used, and also with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu where the operation occurs within a Deed of Recognition area.

RECREATIONAL HUNTING OF WILD ANIMALS

Rationale

Recreational hunting is popular on Stewart Island / Rakiura, as much a social event as a hunting expedition. Both Whitetailed deer and Red deer are present throughout most of Rakiura National Park and surrounding conservation lands, though Rakiura is best known as a hunting destination for Whitetailed deer, being the only area administered by the Department of Conservation where Whitetailed deer hunting is sought after.

The Rakiura Hunters Camp Trust (RHCT), was established in 2000. This trust oversees the management of the existing hunting hut system on the island and plays a key role in educating and liaising with the wider hunting community.

Whitetailed deer are the more predominant species of deer on Stewart Island, and are generally known to out compete Red deer although this is partly due to commercial hunting having significantly reduced Red deer numbers in the 1970's and 1980's. Currently, Whitetailed deer are in larger numbers in the coastal areas, but range throughout Rakiura National Park. Red deer are more concentrated on the North-eastern side of Stewart Island / Rakiura, but their population is thought to be spreading west and south.

Recreational hunting of wild animals is controlled by the Wild Animal Control Act 1977 and all hunters must possess a written permit issued by the Department of Conservation to hunt on conservation land.

A hunting-block system consisting of 29 blocks within Rakiura National Park, was established in the 1970's. The boundaries of the block system were redrawn in 1997 to just incorporate the coastal areas. As such, there is also an open hunting zone through the centre of the island. Each hunting party may apply for only one hunting block, which minimises the risks of hunting parties being within the same area. Bookings for blocks can be, and for the most popular blocks are, made a year in advance.

Objectives

1. To encourage the recreational hunting of wild animals within Rakiura National Park.

Implementation

1. Encourage recreational hunting by providing up-to-date information to hunters and hunting groups. To implement this, the Department of Conservation will work closely with hunting groups, including the Rakiura Hunters Camp Trust.

2. Hunting of possums or wild cats using firearms is unlikely to be authorised within Rakiura National Park, except by special permit for experienced hunters with a proven record of effective control and safe firearms practice.
3. Recreational hunting of wild animals (e.g. Whitetailed deer and Red deer) is allowed throughout Rakiura National Park except in Specially Protected Areas; or in other areas where access has been restricted for preservation management purposes.
4. The use of dogs for deer hunting will not be authorised within the Rakiura National Park.
5. The booking of hunting blocks will be determined on a first-in-first-served basis to those that hold a current firearms license.
6. Hunting guides may be authorised to operate in Rakiura National Park, subject to the other provisions of this section, limits in party size as detailed within the Plan and general concession policies.
7. The use of shotguns and rim-fire rifles within Rakiura National Park will not be authorised for recreational hunting except as provided for in 1 and 2 above.
8. Hunting within Rakiura National Park during the hours of darkness will not be authorised except as provided for in 1 above.
9. Encourage, where appropriate, recreational hunters to work collaboratively with the Department of Conservation in gathering information and undertaking conservation programmes within Rakiura National Park.
10. Continue to liaise with the Rakiura Hunters Camp Trust to campaign to raise hunter awareness of the Environmental Care Code and in particular low impact camping and areas surrounding hunting huts, to avoid impacting on other users.