

One step closer to a Predator Free Rakiura

Q&As

WHAT ARE THE TARGET SPECIES FOR PREDATOR FREE RAKIURA?

Predator Free Rakiura is an ambitious and longstanding project to eliminate ship rats, Norway rats, kiore (pacific rat), possums, feral cats and hedgehogs from Rakiura/Stewart Island (175,000ha). Achieving this is a key milestone in the national Predator Free New Zealand by 2050 mission.

Deer are not a target species for Predator Free Rakiura.

WHAT IS PREDATOR ELIMINATION?

Elimination is an emerging term that describes the step between predator **suppression**, where predator populations are maintained at low numbers, and predator **eradication**, where predator populations are completely removed from an area bounded by a fence (like a sanctuary) or by the sea (like an island).

Historically, predator **eradication** has only been achieved on sparsely-inhabited off-shore islands, or in fenced sanctuaries on the mainland. To achieve a predator-free Rakiura, we'll need to **eliminate** target predators from chunks of the island, bit-by-bit, until we have achieved **eradication** across the entire island.

WHAT ABOUT THE WORK ALREADY DONE BY TE PUKA RAKIURA TRUST (TPRT) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION (DOC)?

TPRT was engaged by DOC to build the initial concept of a Predator Free Rakiura into an actionable plan. This has now been completed, with TPRT delivering a draft implementation plan early in 2024. Thanks to that good work, the first operational stage is now being developed and designed, and will likely begin in autumn 2025. A feasibility study was not undertaken by TPRT - however, the first stage of operational work is designed to test, learn, and refine our approach.

This detailed work requires specialist skills and expertise to operate at the scale of Rakiura, which is why Zero Invasive Predators (ZIP) has been engaged to lead the planning and delivery of Predator Free Rakiura.

WHO IS ZIP AND WHY HAVE THEY BEEN ENGAGED TO LEAD THIS PROJECT?

Zero Invasive Predators (ZIP) is a non-profit organisation founded by DOC and the NEXT Foundation. ZIP is skilled at both research and development and the implementation of predator elimination at landscape scale. With a team of 70 people, they currently deliver predator elimination in the Predator Free South Westland and Te Manahuna Aoraki projects.

Achieving a predator-free Rakiura will require specialist skills and expertise. ZIP has a proven track record of developing and delivering predator elimination at this scale, alongside communities at-place. This also means they have established structures and capabilities to manage a project of this size.

Learn more about ZIP here: www.zip.org.nz

HOW WILL THE PROJECT BE GOVERNED?

It is likely that a new non-profit company will be established to provide governance and oversight to the delivery of Predator Free Rakiura. This is a nationally important project, with a substantial budget. Our investors need to be confident that their investment is being managed wisely.

This new company will enable visibility of ZIP's operations for Predator Free Rakiura, separated from their work on other projects.

The composition of the board of this new non-profit company is yet to be confirmed. However, it will likely include representation from iwi and the local community, providing community guidance to help manage the project.

WHERE IS THE FUNDING COMING FROM FOR THIS INITIAL OPERATIONAL STEP?

The Department of Conservation (DOC) and philanthropic supporters have committed to funding the first stage of operational work towards predator elimination on Rakiura.

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF EACH ORGANISATION IN THIS NEXT STAGE?

ZIP will lead planning and operational delivery of the Predator Free Rakiura project, including communications and engagement.

Te Puka Rakiura Trust (TPRT) will lead Ngāi Tahu aspirations work and the development of a long-term biosecurity approach, jointly with Environment Southland and other partners such as residents, businesses and recreational visitors.

The **Department of Conservation** (DOC) will design and establish monitoring to track the biodiversity outcomes of the project.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PREDATOR FREE RAKIURA ENGAGEMENT AND ADVISORY GROUP (EAG) IN THIS NEXT STAGE?

The EAG will remain an important connection point for this project. Regular updates for the group will continue to be distributed by the EAG co-chairs, and regular engagement with the EAG and its members will continue.

ZIP will work with TPRT and the EAG over the next few months to establish clear and accessible channels for the flow of information to and from the EAG, throughout operational design and delivery of the next stage of the project.

Learn more about the EAG here:

www.predatorfreerakiura.org.nz/the-project/the-team/the-engagement-and-advisory-team/

WHAT WILL THE NEXT YEAR INVOLVE?

ZIP is now beginning to build the detail around the initial operational approach, to learn what will be required to scale up the removal of rats, possums, feral cats and hedgehogs across the island. This work will include establishing a small team on Rakiura to ground-truth features of the landscape and understand the logistics involved.

Predator elimination in a project as big as Rakiura will need to be done in stages. The initial step is likely to be a relatively small one, to trial tools and techniques and build confidence in the approach before scaling up across the island. The exact location and size for this initial elimination work is still to be determined, but a block of approximately 10,000 hectares at the southern end of the island is currently being considered. It is likely that operational work to remove predators would get underway in autumn 2025.

A project this large and complex has never been undertaken before, and the operational design and delivery will need regular review and adaptation. We expect that the approach will be refined at each stage in response to the specific challenges and opportunities of the Rakiura environment. In this way, we are confident in developing and delivering a predator-free Rakiura one step at a time.

Guidance from iwi, hunters, the EAG, local Rakiura residents and the wider community will play an important role as we assess and then evolve the operational approach at every stage.

WHY IS AERIAL 1080 INCLUDED AS A TOOL FOR THIS PROJECT?

Aerial 1080 is the best tool we have to achieve predator elimination in a landscape the size and ruggedness of Rakiura.

1080 will be used in conjunction with a range of ground-based tools, like traps and bait stations, and detection tools, like AI cameras. Together, all of these tools will combine to make an effective predator elimination approach that can be tailored to suit Rakiura's needs.

We'll be seeking advice and guidance, including from iwi, the Predator Free Rakiura Engagement and Advisory Group (EAG), hunting and aquaculture interests, and the local community, to design the approach - including the use of elimination tools and techniques.

Ground-based tools, like traps and bait stations, will be used in and around places where people live, including around Oban.

HOW WILL HUNTING BE AFFECTED?

Deer are not a target species for the Predator Free Rakiura project.

DOC and ZIP are working closely with the Rakiura Hunter Camps Charitable Trust, the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association, and the Game Animal Council to understand and minimise disruption to deer hunting opportunities during the delivery of the predator elimination work.

HOW ARE KIORE (PACIFIC RATS) BEING APPROACHED?

Kiore (Pacific rats) are included as a target species for the Predator Free Rakiura project, as well as being recognised by some as a taonga species. ZIP is working with Rakiura whānau whānui, alongside TPRT and DOC, to make sure that their aspirations are expressed in the future management of kiore.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE DETAIL OR ASK QUESTIONS?

Head to www.predatorfreerakiura.org.nz for more information and regular updates.

Contact Predator Free Rakiura with any questions: info@predatorfreerakiura.org.nz
