

Predator Free Rakiura

Hunting community update

13 DECEMBER 2024

Predator Free Rakiura is developing an approach to remove predators from an initial 10,000ha block at the southern end of Rakiura. The approach, which proposes the use of aerial toxins, could begin from late autumn 2025 – pending ongoing engagement with key parties, including the local community, and final decisions being made.

DOC and ZIP, on behalf of the Predator Free Rakiura team, are working with representatives from NZ Deerstalkers Association, Game Animal Council, and Rakiura Hunter Camps Charitable Trust to hear matters of concern and test our thinking on opportunities to address these issues.

WHAT HAVE WE HEARD?

There is support for the vision of a Predator Free Rakiura from the hunting sector. Over the course of four meetings to date, we have also heard the following concerns raised:

- Maintaining the experience and opportunity for hunters
- A desire for deer repellent to be used over the entire island, including a need to trial it on white-tail deer
- The predator removal operation having an impact on white tail deer, and the need to monitor deer to assess this
- Concern if sowing occurs over huts
- Questions about the overall feasibility for a Predator Free Rakiura

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN RESPONSE?

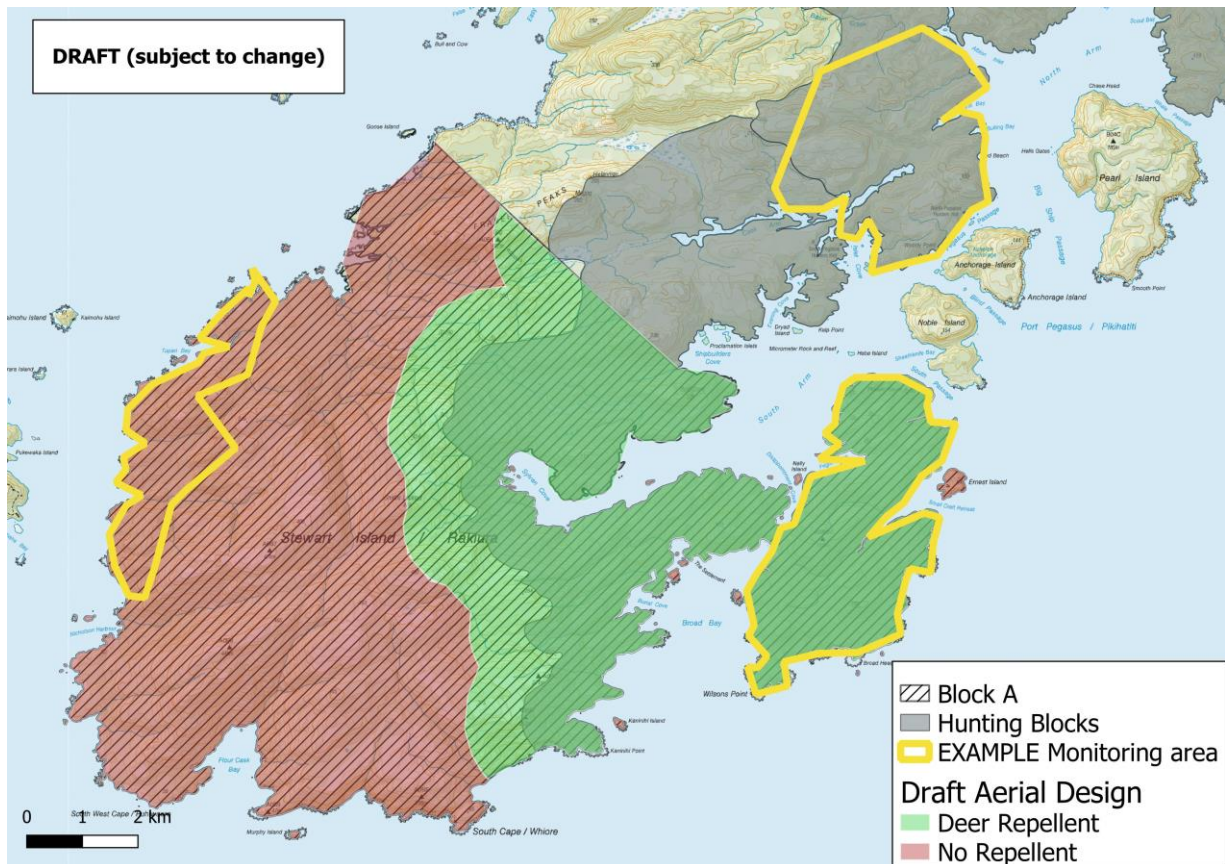
DOC, who oversee the hunting blocks booking system, have confirmed that the hunting blocks are expected to remain available for booking throughout the first operational stage of the project. ZIP is working with DOC to contact these hunting parties directly to coordinate activity and minimise disruption to each other. The ZIP team has begun to ground-truth 'Block A' (see map on next page), including installing some trail cameras and automated lure dispensers to measure the presence and abundance of the target species. Please do not interfere with this equipment if you come across it.

ZIP has engaged Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research to design a trial that will **test the effectiveness of non-toxic deer repellent cereal bait on white tail deer on Rakiura**. This trial, which is expected to begin early in the New Year, will likely involve cameras watching for deer interactions with hand-laid bait. This trial could occur in the Māori Beach and/or North Arm areas, but exact sites are yet to be determined. Manaaki Whenua staff will analyse that camera data to determine how effective the repellent bait is at stopping deer eating it.

In addition to that trial, ZIP is currently **proposing to trial deer repellent** during the predator removal operation in the southern block, for comparison with a non-deer repellent section of that same block.

Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research have been engaged to **design the monitoring plan which would enable any significant impact on the local white tail deer population to be determined**. The trial proposes to use trail cameras to measure deer abundance before and after the operation at three monitoring sites (deer repellent block; non-deer repellent block; and a control block where no baiting occurs at all).





Draft map of Block A, showing potential use of deer repellent and potential design of a monitoring trial for white tail deer

There are no huts within the initial block of the predator free project. As such, no detailed design work is being done on baiting with huts. If the project proceeds into areas where hunting huts are present, ZIP will discuss options with the Rakiura Hunter Camps Charitable Trust that allow all predator habitat to be targeted within the immediate surrounds of any huts.

Predator Free Rakiura is an ambitious and complex project. ZIP is leading a number of smaller projects to build our understanding of what it will take to begin operations in this initial block – including working with key parties to test our thinking and refine the approach. The work listed above addressing the concerns raised by hunter representatives is an example of this ‘engagement-informed’ working style.

All of these smaller projects, and all of our engagement efforts, feed into the **overall assessment of feasibility** – are we ready and able to take this first step? The initial southern block will be our opportunity to get underway

and learn exactly what is required to eradicate predators, in the real context of the island. We acknowledge that, even if we do get started in autumn, there will no doubt be more refinement to do as we respond to on-the-ground results. We don’t have all of the answers yet, but we have a feasible pathway that will help us discover the way to a Predator Free Rakiura.

We are still building the operational plan for this initial block. We will share it with you once it is ready.

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