



OIA 19-E-0421; DOC-6004335

19 July 2019

Leonie Exel <fyi-request-10584-63b65bb1@requests.fyi.org.nz>

Dear Leonie Exel,

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, dated Friday, 21 June 2019. You asked the following:

“We have noticed this article in the paper and would like to know if DOC has hired a pest controller to control cats in Tokoroa?

https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/113566239/tokoroa-cat-cull-reveals-protection-flaws?fbclid=IwAR1eOrmLMsIj3u_cyzs1xY3QDzHmMLGI1xV88vo8PvZ9ji193IOB6A7VvhI

Has DOC, directly or indirectly, hired or allowed any pest controller to shoot cats with air rifles or guns, in New Zealand, this year?”

Thank you for your email in relation to this article, I appreciate your interest in the matter. In order to answer your questions here is some additional context on the Department of Conservation's (DOCs) predator control work.

Predator control is essential in protecting our native species

Because New Zealand was separated from other land masses for over 80 million years, our wildlife evolved in isolation from many land-based mammalian species and are consequently often unable to effectively protect themselves from predation. This puts our biodiversity at risk to introduced mammalian predators so control of these species is an essential part of DOC's work to ensure the survival of our taonga species.

Feral cats impact our wildlife

Feral cats have a significant impact on our wildlife, on birds, bats, lizards, wētā and other insects. Several populations of protected species are under threat or have been locally exterminated due to feral cat predation, for example: the black stilt/kakī, wrybill, and black-fronted terns on braided riverbeds, Grand and Otago skinks in central Otago, and on offshore islands, kākāpō, saddleback/tieke and tītī. More recently, evidence is showing that cats can also spread disease which can impact both on our land-based and aquatic species (e.g. Hector's and Māui dolphins).

To protect these species DOC undertakes feral cat control in priority locations, sometimes in conjunction with pest control for other species (e.g., rabbits, rats). DOC has a legislative mandate to control feral cats on public conservation land (PCL) and the range of methods used to control feral cats includes poisoning, trapping and shooting. Where feral cats are lethally controlled, DOC uses efficient and humane best-practice methods which comply with the Animal Welfare Act 1999. In most cases, shooting of feral cats is used as a humane way to kill feral cats that have been caught in traps, especially with the increased use of humane live-capture traps.

DOC recognises that many people like to keep cats as pets, and supports responsible cat ownership, advocating for cat owners to help reduce the impact of domestic cats on wildlife. As such, when undertaking feral cat control DOC takes precautions to ensure that domestic cats are not impacted such as ensuring a captured cat is not a pet and warning the public about any upcoming control operations.

Our response

Your specific questions and our responses are listed below:

- 1) Has DOC hired a pest controller to control cats in Tokoroa?

No, DOC has not hired a pest controller to control cats in Tokoroa, nor is DOC aware of who did undertake the cat control as mentioned in the Stuff article.

- 2) Has DOC, directly or indirectly, hired or allowed any pest controller to shoot cats with air rifles or guns, in New Zealand, this year?

The primary method for feral cat control is trapping. Shooting is then used to euthanise a feral cat once it has been trapped.

This activity is undertaken by DOC staff using a 22 calibre rimfire as per DOC's best practice for euthanising pest species and in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 1999. DOC staff briefly trialled air rifles for this task but it was found that using a .22 calibre rimfire was more effective and humane.

In the cases where contractors undertake this work on behalf of DOC, they must have authorisation to do so and are required to comply with DOC's best-practice, animal welfare and health and safety procedures as described above. This includes only using a .22 calibre rimfire for that task.

Pest control is always part of an approved operational plan which is guided by a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for planning pest control operations. This SOP guides the selection of methods based on species and site, as well as a communications plan for notifying and working with relevant stakeholders and impacted parties prior to the operation.

Most operations are undertaken on PCL. If not directly on PCL, the work is only undertaken with express permission from landowners and with appropriate notification as per the SOP. In most instances these are remote/rural situations, so well away from private dwellings or urban areas.

DOC takes several precautions to ensure that non-target animals are not impacted by the operation. The first being that operations are typically in remote locations. Where feral cat control is undertaken near where domestic cats are known to exist DOC takes further precautions to ensure domestic cats are not impacted by the activity. These include working with partners to undertake annual domestic cat surveys, consultation and notification with local communities, using humane live-capture traps, regular checking of traps, advocating for pet cats to wear collars and be microchipped, and keeping cats inside at night. The increased use of live-capture traps allows the captured animal to be checked to ensure it is in fact the target pest species and non-targets can be returned to owners or treated as needed.

For further information on DOC's feral cat control, please visit our website:
<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/animal-pests/feral-cats/>

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Department's website. I trust this answers your query, however, if you wish to discuss this with the Department, please contact Laura Boren, Issues Manager, National Operations by email lboren@doc.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Reddiex
Director National Operations, Issues and Programmes

