

# Priority possum control in the Waikato

## Funding

All land occupiers within the Waikato region pay a targeted biosecurity rate regardless of whether they live in town or in the country. This rate pays for a wide range of pest animal and plant programmes and initiatives, including possum control in identified PPCAs. Possum control has benefits right across the regional community – including healthy forests, stable catchments and more productive farms and home gardens. Where Crown land is involved, the council endeavors to obtain equitable funding from other agencies.

## Performance-based contracts

The council uses professional pest control contractors to carry out all possum control work. The contracts are performance-based and require the contractors to achieve a target of five per cent residual trap catch (RTC) or less for ground control operations, and three per cent RTC or less for aerial control operations. The residual trap-catch (RTC) index is a simple method of determining relative possum abundance. If the required control target is not met, the contractor must undertake additional work to achieve the target. By using performance-based contracts, the council is protecting ratepayer investment and guaranteeing results.

## Possum control and the RPMP

Waikato Regional Council is responsible for protecting and enhancing the Waikato region's environment. One of the activities we undertake to achieve this is selective pest management, implemented through the *Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032* (RPMP). Possum control for community and regional benefits is a key part of the RPMP and is undertaken within priority possum control areas (PPCAs) through the region. This work is enabled under sections 109, 112, 114 and 114A of the Biosecurity Act 1993. Once a PPCA is created under the RPMP, control becomes mandatory within the PPCA.

## Why do we need priority possum control?

Priority possum control helps to achieve one or more of the following outcomes for the region.

- Enhance and protect biodiversity values.
- Maintain the gains made through past possum control operations (for example, OSPRI, Department of Conservation, or previous community possum control schemes) and complement other ongoing control (for example Department of Conservation or community groups).
- Stabilise and improve the health of upper river catchments, by maintaining intact and healthy forest canopies and understories.



# Do you have property in a PPCA? What to expect

## Initial meeting

Prior to any control occurring on your property, you will have a meeting either in person or virtually with the pest control contractor or representative. The timing and method(s) of possum control, as well as any health and safety risks and induction requirements for your property, will be discussed and agreed upon.

The amount and type of possum habitat on your property (for example, trees, bush, river margins or limestone outcrops/caves) will determine the quantity of possum control required and for what duration.

The contractor/representative will discuss the preferred method(s) to be used on your property and how they may affect your day-to-day activities. The proposed method(s) will be agreed upon with you, recorded by the contractor, and then a copy provided to you.

You will be asked to sign either a physical or electronic copy of a Landowner/Occupier Engagement Form. Signing acknowledges that you agree to the method(s) of control, have understood the conditions of these method(s), identified any significant hazards and risks associated with the property and are fully informed.

## Final check before control

On the day before control work commences, the contractor/representative will advise the land occupier specifically where the team will commence control and the way in which the control will be undertaken. When control is completed, the contractor/representative will contact the land occupier again to advise them that control is completed.

## After control

Once the contractor is close to completing control of the PPCA, they will contact the council's project manager and call for a 'performance monitor'. This monitoring is undertaken to determine whether the contractor has met the RTC target. The monitoring contractor is completely independent of the control contractor. Monitoring contractors are not permitted to undertake possum control in our region if they undertake possum monitoring.



The monitoring in the control area is carried out within potential possum habitat, using lines of 10 leg hold traps from computer-generated, random start points.

Not every property will receive monitoring lines – any possums caught are taken as representative across the whole area worked. If the performance monitor returns an RTC higher than the target, the contractor will have to rework the operational area at their own cost, and then call for an additional monitor.

Any additional work and monitoring required is at the cost of the contractor undertaking the possum control.

Once the contractor successfully meets the performance target, they will supply the council with a post operational report. The council (and often also the contractor) will then send a letter out to land occupiers to communicate the result of the control operation.

## Frequently asked questions

### **I do possum control myself. Why do contractors need to do what I'm already doing?**

Possum control contractors are engaged to undertake a high level of possum control through potential habitat over the whole PPCA within a set period of time using effective and efficient method(s). Although you may already be doing control on your own property, contractors are contractually motivated to reduce possum numbers to a very low level quickly and efficiently to meet their performance requirements. They do this using methodology that land occupiers may not have access to. Land occupiers are asked not to undertake their own control during the contractors control timeframe, as this may compromise the outcomes, such as inducing trap, bait shyness or behavior change. Overall, contractor control should be positive for land occupiers as it means that your time is freed up to concentrate on the other work on your property. Outside of the contractor's control, land occupiers are encouraged to undertake their own control, and the council can assist with advice and information on how to best achieve your targets.

### **How much say do I get on the methods of control to be used on my property?**

The contractor will meet with you and discuss the proposed method(s) of control for your property. There may be instances where your preferred method(s) may not be suitable for your property and the contractor will discuss other available options. We try to be as fair and flexible as possible. Some methods of control are more expensive than others and if you are adamant on an alternative method which is more expensive than that one proposed, you will be required to pay the difference.

### **Is it a requirement to have possum control on my property?**

Yes, if your property lies within a PPCA, or is subject to a rule in the Waikato Regional Council RPMP. This control work is undertaken under the Biosecurity Act 1993. Council will endeavour to meet and discuss control options and methods face to face and resolve issues with land occupiers.



### **What health and safety information am I required to give?**

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA) places responsibility on Waikato Regional Council to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of its workers at its workplace. The council's workers include its pest control contractors. The pest control contractors also have the same responsibility under the HSWA in respect of their workers.

Under the HSWA a workplace includes anywhere the council pest control contractors go, or are likely to be, while at work and this includes your property. Please be assured that council pest control contractors visiting your property have been appropriately trained and are equipped with appropriate person protective equipment.

It is your responsibility under HSWA to ensure, as far as it reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of any person (including the council's pest control contractors) is not put at risk from work carried out as part of the conduct of a business or undertaking on your property. You have a duty to inform the council pest control contractors of any work-related hazards on your property and to ensure that you work safely in their presence.

The HSWA does not prevent, or unduly delay, council pest control contractors from carrying out their lawful duties on private property under the Biosecurity Act 1993.

### **Will my livestock be adversely affected?**

No. If ground control is to be undertaken using traps or toxins, these will be placed either out of the reach of stock or deployed where stock do not have access. Toxins will be in specific delivery systems, such as bait stations and/or bait bags. If aerial control is to be used where stock potentially graze, the contractor will discuss a grazing plan with you to ensure that all stock are well away from the area where and when the aerial control will be undertaken.

### **Will my children and/or pets have access to the traps and poisons being used?**

Some toxins and traps are required to be a minimum distance from dwellings, tracks, huts and roads. If control is to be undertaken using toxins, then bait stations will help ensure that access for children and/or pets is avoided. The lures that are used to attract possums will not be attractive to cats and dogs. Also, if control is to be undertaken using trapping, the non-toxic lures used to attract possums will not be attractive to pets. In the situation where something negative was to occur, some toxins have antidotes widely available through vets, such as vitamin K1 for brodifacoum poisoning. As a general precaution you should discourage domestic animals from scavenging possum carcasses in areas where control has taken place. If you do have concerns, feel free to raise them with the contractor when they visit you.