

October 2014

Game Animal Council – Annual Report



Game Animal Council
NEW ZEALAND

It is my pleasure to present this brief, inaugural report for the Game Animal Council.

In late 2013, the Game Animal Council Act was passed through Parliament. This heralded a fundamental shift in attitude to game animals in NZ as discussed in greater detail later in this report.

In early 2014 the Minister appointed 11 people from a wide range of backgrounds to form the inaugural Game Animal Council (GAC). As a result of this relatively recent start, there is limited information or outcomes to report in this first Annual Report. Instead, this report will focus more on the Council's aspirations and plans.

Financial

There is little to report in terms of the financial activity of the Council for the year July 2013 to June 2014.

The Council received an initial allocation of funds of \$100,000, and used \$9730 as at the end of June 2014. All expenses up to June 2014 were allotted for travel expenses to the inaugural Council meeting held in Wellington in May 2014.



While the Act allows (and requires) the Council to raise its own funding, it will be some time before the necessary systems are developed and implemented, including consultation with stakeholders and affected parties and development of regulations to allow collection.

Initial work has focused on a levy on exported trophies which is allowed for in the Act, but at the same time work is also underway looking into other funding streams.

In the meantime, discussions are underway for further initial support to establish the Council and its functions.

ReederSmith Ltd in Rotorua has been appointed as the Council's Accountant and no auditor has been appointed due to the paucity of activity to 30 June 2014. During the 2014/15 year an Auditor will be appointed.

Administration

Due to the location of both the Chair of the Council and a number of members, a shared office has been occupied in Rotorua. The Council's extremely limited finances dictate that all activities are carried out at lowest possible cost.

It is envisaged that the council's office will move the Wellington in the longer term.

A part time Executive Officer has been appointed to assist with the administrative functions of the Council.

The Council has developed a website that can be visited at www.nzgac.org.nz

Strategic Focus

At its first meeting in May Council developed the following Goal and Objectives:

Sustainable management of game animals and hunting for recreation, commerce and conservation.

From this Goal the following six objectives were developed:

- Enhance the quality of game animal herds while remaining consistent with conservation values
- Develop positive relationships between the Game Animal Council and stakeholders
- Promote hunter safety
- Reduce conflict among stakeholders
- Improve the acceptance of hunting as a safe and legitimate activity
- Promote standards for hunting and management of game animals

These are not presented in priority order, but instead reflect the wide range of focus the Council has adopted and also describe the challenge and opportunity in front of us.

Aerial Assisted Trophy Hunting (AATH)

The GAC Act requires the Council to develop a Code of Practice for the Minister's consideration by mid December 2014. At the time of preparing this report, work on this is well advanced. The Council has seen this as an opportunity to engage with a much wider range of stakeholders that are directly represented on the Council and have sought a key industry player (who does not sit on Council) to chair the working group charged with completing this task.

AATH has been something of a contentious issue for some time so it is important the GAC is able to present an enduring solution that is acceptable to the Minister and to stakeholders.

Significance

The passing of the GAC Act is the culmination of a dream held by many if not all hunters in NZ for many years. It has received cross party support from a number of political parties, but has been continually promoted by Minister Dunne who described the eventual appointment of the inaugural Council as somewhat akin to watching your children leave home. 'You have looked after them for many years, but finally they leave home and they must make their own choices'.

What is of particular significance is the importance of hunting and game animals in the lives of so many New Zealanders and for the first time since the 1930s, there is truly an opportunity to manage game animals, not just to control or eradicate them which has been the focus of legislation for the past 80 years.

A range of pressures and perceptions has brought NZ to this point in relation to game animals and the hunting of them. As the nation matures and develops its own identity and culture, so too will it improve its management of the game animal resource that resides here.

Stakeholders

Considerable work lies ahead of the GAC in developing communication with the wide range of stakeholders. This work has begun, especially in relation to issues around funding and AATH as discussed above.

There are however a much broader group of stakeholders who are not affiliated to any organisation or club. These are the backbone of recreational hunting in NZ, they are out there hunting for recreation or to provide food for their families week in and week out. The Council has recognised the importance of being able to communicate with and get input from these groups, and is working on strategies that will allow this to happen.

Department of Conservation (DOC)

Central to the success of the GAC is the relationship with DOC. Under the Act, the GAC cannot be involved on non-public land without the express consent of the landowner. Thus for the GAC to be effective in its goal, the focus is on public conservation land under the management of DOC.

Building the relationship with DOC has been a priority for the Council and to date good progress has been made. Even on issues where the interests of the two groups may not closely align, good progress has been made in seeking areas of common interest. The support of the Department and in particular the Director General and the Director of Community Engagement is acknowledged.

Looking Ahead

The Council has a busy time ahead and a lot to complete. It is therefore essential for it to make decisions about where to invest its energy, particularly given the voluntary nature of the work placed on Council members even though the Council is a Statutory Body.

Priority must be given to completing the tasks assigned in the Act, especially the AATH Code of Practice, funding and to building the relationship with DOC.

In order to continue operating, securing adequate funding streams is essential. It is anticipated these will evolve over time and continue to develop, but the initial steps are the levy on exported trophies and further seed funding.

Once funding and administration systems are in place, building the relationship with stakeholders, developing initial proposals for Herds of Special Interest and the supporting management plans and research for this will follow.

The Council has also embarked on developing various Codes of Conduct, voluntary Registration schemes and hunter training schemes. In all cases these are being worked on in conjunction with already established organisations to ensure there is good use of resources and no duplication of effort.

Concluding Comments

This is an exciting development for the management of game animals and the hunting of them in NZ. For the first time in generations, there is the opportunity to practice sound animal management on these valuable resources.

This will only happen through hard work and dedication. That work ethic and dedication has already been demonstrated by all members of the appointed Council. They have all put in a tremendous amount of unpaid time and effort to ensure the Council has the best possible start. I must provide my heartfelt thanks to them for their efforts and note that they are doing this in the belief that hunting opportunities for future generations of New Zealanders will be enhanced.

I must also thank the Minister and his colleagues for their support, DOC staff for their efforts in getting the Council running and finally our Executive Officer for her work in getting administrative systems in place.

Don Hammond

Chairman

Game Animal Council

October 2014.