

The Game Animal Council Briefing Paper to the Minister of Conservation November 2017

Mission Statement: “Sustainable management of game animals and hunting for recreation, commerce and conservation”.

(Game animals include: wild deer, tahr, chamois & pigs)



Recommendation

The Game Animal Council invites the Minister of Conservation to meet as soon as possible to discuss its on-going work programme and how it will be funded.

Key points

1. The Game Animal Council is a statutory body that reports directly to the Minister of Conservation.
2. The Council was formed in 2013 to represent the interests of all game animal hunters and to improve hunter safety and contribution to conservation values.
3. To enable the Game Animal Council to deliver on its mission, a 5 Year Strategic Plan, work programme and budget have been prepared.
4. Improved management of New Zealand’s game animals will result in enhanced protection of our unique natural areas and a better recreational hunting experience.
5. To enable the Game Animal Council to fulfil its statutory mandate, stable funding is required – **we would like to discuss our work programme and funding options with the Minister.**

What is the Game Animal Council?

6. The Game Animal Council is a statutory body established under the Game Animal Council Act 2013. It has a broad range of functions including providing advice to the Minister of Conservation, on matters relating to the management of game animals.
7. Members are appointed by the Minister for a term of up to 3 years. The most recent appointments were made in May 2017. A further round of appointments will be due at the end of 2018.
8. The history of game animals, hunting and the environment is plagued with conflict and ad-hoc regimes. The Game Animal Council has been recognised as an opportunity to properly manage our game animals and coordinate our recreational hunting efforts to ensure New Zealand’s unique situation with respect to game animals and conservation can be finally realised.

Functions of the Game Animal Council

9. The Game Animal Council’s functions include:
 - providing advice to the Minister of Conservation on game animals and hunting issues;
 - providing information and education to the hunting sector;
 - promoting safety and developing Codes of Practice and certification for the hunting sector;
 - to conduct research, including research on game animals;
 - establishing and managing herds of special interest;
 - reducing conflict and hunter safety are key to its success.

Achievements to date

10. The Game Animal Council, despite limited resourcing, has achieved a significant amount since its establishment three years ago. An overview of achievement includes:
- recognised and trusted by stakeholders as the key agency for all matters related to hunting and management of game animals, including being recognised as the key point of contact for government agencies and media where hunting and/or firearms are involved;
 - developed a five-year strategic plan;
 - developed the AATH (Aerial Assisted Trophy Hunting) code of practice;
 - progressed levy funding proposal;
 - developed HOSI (Herds of Special Interest) criteria and management plan template (three herds currently under development);
 - provided input and submissions on a multitude of statutory processes including relevant strategies, policies and plans;
 - initiated and participated in a pilot project to enhance conservation outcomes through strategic management of recreational and commercial aerial hunting in the Ruahine Forest Park;
 - promoted the discussion of alternative Wild Animal Recovery Operation (WARO) management systems designed to enhance long term conservation outcomes, and will participate in the upcoming WARO review;
 - worked closely with the Department of Conservation to identify priorities for mitigation in Battle for our Birds aerial 1080 operations;
 - coordinated development of a 'statement of principles' related to animal welfare and hunting;
 - clarified and published guidance on legalities of firearms carriage and use in aircraft
 - Provided input into firearms legislation;
 - attended public shows and events;
 - demonstrated the conservation benefits derived through managing animals for hunting and conservation benefits. For example, the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation:
 - ✓ Total Deer Killed = 11500 and increasing.
 - ✓ Total Money contributed for deer control = over \$300,000
 - ✓ Total Money contributed in cash or kind for stoat control program = circa \$400,000
 - ✓ Total days of labour for stoat trapping = 1152, all by volunteers in a wilderness area
 - ✓ Total trap nights = over 2 million
 - ✓ Total stoats and rats killed = approx. 1500 stoats and 1200 rats
 - ✓ Total Whio reared and released back into the Wapiti area = 10

Strategic plan summary

11. The Game Animal Council has set out a work programme with eight themes:
- 1) Enhance the quality of game animal herds while remaining consistent with conservation values.
 - 2) Develop positive relationships through effective communication.
 - 3) Promote hunter safety.
 - 4) Reduce conflict among people with different interests in game animal management.
 - 5) Improve acceptance of hunting as a safe, legitimate activity.
 - 6) Promote standards for hunting and management of game animals.
 - 7) Manage the Council effectively, including having a stable funding base.
 - 8) Promote the interests of the game animal sector – legislation, policy and planning.

The outcome of this plan is that:

- The Game Animal Council is the national game animal management organisation undertaking management of people and animals to the benefit of all stakeholders, working closely with Department of Conservation.
- It works cooperatively both within the hunting sector and, as importantly, with those outside hunting circles.
- In being effective, the GAC is openly communicative and democratic, with a sound structure and governance, backed by appropriate legislation and is in part self-funding.
- It is accountable to its stakeholders; is respected for its balanced advocacy based on good science and research, and gives authoritative advice.
- Recreational hunters are adequately trained in safe hunting practices, understand the role of hunting, and their responsibilities, together with the conservation of indigenous species. They have good information on where to hunt and how to hunt successfully.
- Recreational hunters are complemented by a sustainable commercial harvest of game animals. Hunting Guides and Game Estates provide clients with safe, quality hunting experiences.

Hunter contribution & opportunity

12. An estimated 50,000 people are active big game hunters, they kill approximately per year: 135,000 deer, 132,000 other big game animals and over 230,000 feral goats. This is a significant and important contribution to conservation that far exceeds kills by commercial interests (10,000 to 30,000).
13. The opportunity that recreational hunters provide for better management of game animals is significant. The current situation is largely uncoordinated, but if new hunters were recruited, well trained, motivated and resourced to maintain and increase the overall harvest of game animals there are also greater conservation outcomes to be achieved.
14. Complementing recreational hunting with sustainable commercial harvest will result in even better outcomes. **The Game Animal Council provides the vehicle to better manage our game animals to ensure our Mission statement of: “Sustainable management of game animals and hunting for recreation, commerce and conservation” is achieved, whilst also improving the New Zealand hunting experience.**