

DOC Tahr Plan based on hazy science could cost jobs

DOC's 2020-2021 Draft Tahr Control Operational Plan as presented to the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group is not founded on adequate science and is a departure from plans previously supported by the hunting sector, says Game Animal Council Chair Don Hammond.

Two years ago, plans were announced that would have devastated the tahr population. This led to a threat of court action by parts of the hunting sector. The Game Animal Council worked to achieve an agreement that saw hunting opportunities protected but the herd reduced.

Since mid-2017 over 18,000 tahr have been removed through official control, commercial and recreational hunting.

The latest draft control plan once again has parts of the hunting sector seeking legal action.

250 hours of helicopter culling has been proposed within the feral range, which is more than three times the scale of the previous operation and far more than was expected.

"DOC has also stated their intention to remove all tahr from Aoraki/Mt Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks, including mature bulls. This will immediately end hunting in those national parks and further discourage Kiwis wishing to enjoy adventures within them," says Hammond.

"Science needs to be the basis of any animal management plan and unfortunately there is very inadequate science regarding current tahr population densities and their impact on native vegetation in different locations. Given this poor level of understanding, the new proposed plan has the potential to decimate the tahr herd."

"This is incredibly sad not only for thousands of recreational Kiwi tahr hunters and other New Zealanders that enjoy seeing tahr in the mountains but also the family-run guiding and commercial hunting businesses that will be affected."

“Those regionally-based businesses are already on their knees due to the COVID-19 lockdown and this may well be the mortal blow that costs a significant number of people their livelihoods.”

The Game Animal Council has also been disappointed at the process used to formulate this Plan.

“Hunting sector members of the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group, most of whom are volunteers, were given the draft only two days prior to the meeting and then asked to provide informed feedback on it. That isn’t possible in such a short timeframe. The sector needs the opportunity to consult properly and provide practical alternatives based on staged population reduction that includes proper scientific monitoring.”

There are certain aspects of tahr management where all stakeholders are on the same page. The Game Animal Council and other hunting sector organisations all agree that tahr existing outside the feral range should be eradicated and we would support this aspect of any control programme.

“The Game Animal Council will, as we have always done, continue to engage constructively and work towards a better solution,” says Hammond. “If this control plan goes ahead it will be really sad outcome for New Zealand, when alternatively, a properly researched and managed tahr herd could be so valuable.”

Contact:

Don Hammond

Phone 0274885940

don.hammond@nzgac.org.nz