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2020 Operational Plan Consultation  
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## **Discussion document on proposed Operational Plan for 2020**

### **1. The Game Animal Council**

The Game Animal Council (GAC), established under the Game Animal Council Act 2013, is a statutory organisation with responsibilities for, *inter alia*, representing game animal hunters, and advising on and managing aspects of game animal hunting. Game animals are feral pigs, chamois, tahr, and all species of deer.

### **2. Game animals as a resource for New Zealand**

New Zealand's game animals are an important recreational, social and economic resource. The general public of New Zealand values game animals. Over 150,000 people harvest small game, large game or gamebirds at some time during each year.

All game species in New Zealand are harvested for food, and while deer farming accounts for the vast majority of game meat exports, shot wild game is significant in both export statistics and domestic consumption.

The combination of recreational hunting and aerial recovery expertise developed over the past 50 years allows privately funded control and management of New Zealand's big game populations at no cost to the government.

### **3. Game species as an economic resource**

The deer industry has total export earnings of \$322 million (year ended 2018). New Zealand venison and velvet returns have been at record prices, assisted considerably by the perception internationally of venison as a safe food item. Consumers have traditionally perceived venison to be a hunted product and often do not differentiate between farmed and

hunted sources at the point of purchase or consumption. New Zealand, as country of origin, enjoys an unparalleled reputation for its farming, environmental and animal husbandry practices.

The guided hunting industry has earnings of approximately \$35 to \$40 million annually and has considerable potential for expansion. Internationally, New Zealand is considered to be the world's premier destination for hunted red deer stags and Himalayan tahr and is increasingly recognised for the quality of its other game species. It is considered a safe, stable, unpolluted country, and attracts a discerning, influential hunting clientele.

The total gross sales effect of New Zealanders on recreational hunting has recently been calculated in the order of \$350 million annually. Large game species are a major focus of that hunter spend. Less easy to quantify, but probably of greater significance, is the role hunting plays in the national health statistics as a form of recreation enjoyed by tens of thousands.

#### **4. Valued Introduced Species in New Zealand**

Deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs, are legally Wild Animals under the Wild Animal Control Act or Game Animals under the Game Animal Council Act. Collectively with other species such as trout, salmon, ducks, pheasants, quail etc they are collectively known as valued introduced species. These animals are now part of New Zealand.

#### **5. Role of the GAC**

The GAC continues to support the goal of eradication Tb from New Zealand. The Council has a history of working constructively and cooperatively with many agencies including OSPRI and will continue this approach. The Council's role is more at the strategic level than at place. The Game Animal Council recommends that OSPRI deals directly with local hunting organisations for individual operational design. The GAC will also assist those local organisations with expertise and coordination. The Council is very pleased at the new initiative to engage with the GAC on a regular basis. The GAC will assist OSPRI with future connectivity into the hunting community.

#### **6. Strategic issues**

6.1 Mitigating the effects of Tb control on game animals and our ability to hunt them.

The overriding concern for the GAC is the direct and indirect effects of Tb control operations on game animals and hunting. Direct effects are the killing of the animals themselves. Indirect effects include the loss of hunting opportunity through closures, buffer zones and risk to hunting dogs. Mitigation measures include, ground control methods, time of year, bait size, sowing rate, bait strength and the scaling up, coordination and integration with other operations to reduce the overall frequency of control operations. The most significant mitigation measure is having an effective repellent that prevents or minimises the direct deaths of game animals during Tb control operations.

The Game Animal Council is very concerned that an effective and low-cost repellent is currently not available for deer. It is fortunate that recent studies have concluded that tahr are unaffected by aerial 1080 poison however no research has been carried out on chamois and pigs remain at high risk from 1080 poison. The risk to dogs is a significant problem for the hunting community. The two agencies that will reap the most benefit from the development of such a product should be making a much greater commitment and contribution to developing an effective product. This development cannot be left to third parties alone.

## 6.2 Early engagement

The Game Animal Council has worked closely with the Department of Conservation on the design and implementation of its Battle for our Birds program. The Department engages with the GAC at the time of program design and where and which mitigation measures are required to reduce the effects of an operation on game animal populations plus ongoing monitoring which ultimately decides whether an operation goes ahead. There is transparency and full disclosure of all information. This has given the process a greater degree of credibility and acceptability even when the outcome may not be favourable.

## 6.3 Presence/Absence of TB

Where there is no clear scientific evidence that Tb is or is not present then this needs to be clearly stated. If the justification for an operation is to remove the risk that TB might be present and if it were and were not treated would undermine the success of the eradication program then just state this. We think that all parties agree that the eradication program needs to be successful, even if for different reasons.

#### 6.4 Greater Clarity in Communications

It is important that communications regarding the program clearly enunciate that until it is finalised subsequent to consultation the program is draft and can still be amended. Some of the documentation still appears to be the result of cut and paste and a lack of actual information to justify the operation. The GAC can assist you with this if we are engaged early in the process.

#### 7. Summary

Early engagement with the hunting community in planning and decision making in conjunction with transparency and effective mitigation measures will assist in achieving the eradication of Tb from New Zealand.

If you have any queries relating to this submission, please contact me on 0274885940.



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