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Rangitahi/Molesworth review team
Department of Conservation



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Submission on Rangitahi Molesworth Recreation Reserve Conservation Management Plan Review

New Zealand Game Animal Council

The New Zealand Game Animal Council (GAC), established under the Game Animal Council Act 2013, is a statutory agency with responsibilities for, *inter alia*, advising and making recommendations in relation to game animals to the Minister of Conservation, raising awareness of the views of the hunting sector, and advising on and managing aspects of game animals and hunting.

Game animals are defined under the Game Animal Council Act 2013 as wild pigs, chamois, tahr, and all species of deer. Game animals are also recognised as valued introduced species in Te Mana o te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020.

New Zealand Hunting Sector

Hunters play a key role in the management of wild animals and conservation and it is estimated that recreational hunters alone are responsible for harvesting approximately half a million game animals and pest goats each year.¹ This management is important to maintain the health of game herds and the environment.

Outdoor recreation is an important part of New Zealand life and culture. Access to public conservation lands is crucial to ensure that New Zealanders are able to easily reach the wild areas they value for their recreational pursuits.

The value of recreation is recognised in legislation, including the National Parks Act 1980 and the Conservation Act 1987. Both these Acts require the fostering of recreational activities, such as hunting on public conservation land.

Rangitahi Molesworth Recreation Reserve

1. The GAC welcomes the decision to review the management plan for Rangitahi Molesworth. It is pleased to make this submission on issues it believes need to be

¹ GN Kerr & W Abell (2014) Big game hunting in New Zealand: per capita effort, harvest and expenditure in 2011–2012, *New Zealand Journal of Zoology*, 41:2, 124-138, DOI: 10.1080/03014223.2013.870586

addressed when considering a new management plan to ensure the area can continue to be enjoyed by New Zealanders.

2. The GAC views Rangitahi Molesworth as a highly-valued recreational and conservation area with a unique history. This submission concentrates on key themes which reflect the GAC's statutory mandate, any future management plan's potential impact on the hunting sector and the effective management of game animals.

Access

3. Access is one of the major obstacles to New Zealanders being able to enjoy the outdoors. While access to Rangitahi Molesworth has improved over the years, the GAC believes it can be further enhanced.
4. Recreational hunters believe the present system is still weighted more toward farm operations rather than recreation. One example is the seasonal restriction on where stock is, with requests that this needs to be reviewed or better justified.
5. The idea of walk-in access to hunting blocks is appreciated by many hunters as it preserves the wilderness aesthetic of the area and ensures there is adequate recreational harvest of game animals without over-harvest from commercial operations (i.e., aerial Wild Animal Recovery Operations). There is a balance to achieve between having vehicle access and maintaining wilderness aesthetics. Restricted access (through a ballot process) is still considered the best approach.
6. Where there is the possibility of vehicle access this should be allowed and not be unreasonably restricted. The Game Animal Council wishes to see the following key principles recognised and provided for in the Rangitahi Molesworth:
 - Hunting accessways to public conservation land should be established, maintained, or enhanced, and they need to be in a form suitable for hunters carrying firearms and accompanied by dogs (where dogs are permitted on the land the access is provided for).
 - Access provisions for vehicles to public conservation land are made certain and enduring; and that these vehicle accessways are maintained or enhanced.
7. The permit system for allocating hunting blocks receives mixed reviews. Hunters believe that while the system's overall concept is good, there are areas which could be improved, including a well-articulated rationale for the system, an explanation of how it works and transparency on how blocks are allocated for the roar period. The GAC suggests a process of constant review be introduced and is happy to provide the Department with specific advice on this.
8. The GAC also notes that explanations of how to access individual hunting blocks are difficult to find or non-existent. It suggests that a specific document be developed covering each block. It should be posted in an easily-identifiable place on the DOC website. The GAC is again happy to help develop this material.

Farming and Climate Change

9. The GAC believes that given the long history of farming on Rangitahi Molesworth, this activity should be allowed to continue in balance with the recreational and conservation values that the region offers.
10. As discussed earlier in the submission, farming activity should be access friendly and ensure that recreation is allowed without undue impediment.
11. Farming operations should also be, as much as possible, in sympathy with the environment. An example of this is ensuring all river and stream crossings do not impede fish passage.
12. Any management plan must take into account climate change.

Game Animal Management

13. Hunting is an integral part of New Zealand's outdoor culture and plays an important role in providing recreation, food gathering opportunities, commercial ventures and positive conservation outcomes for many communities.
14. The GAC notes that *Te Mana o te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020* recognises game animals as valued introduced species and states – *Reaching a balance to ensure that valued introduced species continue to provide the benefits they are valued for, while also ensuring that indigenous biodiversity thrives, is a key challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand.*
15. The GAC believes balanced game animal management on Rangitahi Molesworth is generally best achieved through facilitating and providing suitable access for private recreational hunting. This should be reflected in future management plans.
 - There may be cases in the future where additional deer and pig management is necessary. The GAC is available to help facilitate or support game animal management projects that take into account the conservation, recreation and cultural values of the area, and additionally may provide income to commercial entities.
16. The GAC believes with the fine-tuning discussed earlier, the hunting block and permit system now operating on Rangitahi Molesworth provides a sound basis for proper management of game animal populations at little or no cost to the taxpayer.
17. The GAC notes the controversy following the mass mortality of deer following aerial 1080 operations on Rangitahi Molesworth in 2018-19, which resulted in greater efforts to reduce the risk of such poisoning. These collaborative efforts are acknowledged and welcomed.

18. The GAC asks, as a statutory organisation with responsibilities to do with game animals and hunting, that it be included in any future discussions involving the future of game animal populations and hunting on Rangitahi Molesworth.
19. The landscape of Rangitahi Molesworth and special qualities of the deer herd and chamois in the Rangatahi Molesworth are well suited to designation as a Herd of Special Interest under the Game Animal Council Act in the future.

Mahinga Kai

20. The GAC supports the concept of mahinga kai, viewing it as embodying traditional cultural values, reflecting the health of the ecosystems it is sourced from and protecting these valuable resources to ensure people can put food on the table.
21. The GAC's governing board also includes Māori representatives who provide te ao Māori expertise and advice on topics such as mahinga kai.
22. The GAC views Rangitahi Molesworth as a valuable mahinga kai resource for the communities which surround the region. It asks that any management plan takes mahinga kai into account and ensures it is properly protected so that free-range food can be harvested.

Contact

The Game Animal Council does not intend to make its submissions in person. If you have any queries relating to this submission, please contact me on 021 688 531 or at tim.gale@nzgac.org.nz.

Yours sincerely,



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