

# NZ HUNTING SECTOR BRIEFING ON GAME ANIMAL MANAGEMENT

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## **Summary**

The New Zealand hunting sector has identified the following priorities to support achieving a balanced and sustainable system where game animals (deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs) are effectively managed to reduce their conservation impacts while providing for the benefits they bring to many communities.

1. Support and uphold the implementation of Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 (ANZBS) and continue to resource and implement the Te Ara ki Mua game animal management framework appropriately.
2. Support and resource community-led game animal management and hunter education initiatives.
3. Funding of the Game Animal Council in a long-term sustainable manner as the statutory body representing the hunting sector.
4. Work with the Game Animal Council to identify, designate, establish and resource the first herds of special interest.
5. Support the conservation system legislative review and embed the terms 'valued introduced species' and 'game animal' across legislation to provide certainty that the value of these species is recognised and incorporated into their future management.
6. Support the following reviews to improve game animal management:
  - Review of the tahr management system, including the Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 to align with the goals of the ANZBS.
  - Review of the administration of wild animal recovery operations (WARO) to align with the goals of the ANZBS.
  - Review of public access and facilities on public conservation land to maximise opportunities for community contributions to game animal management.
  - Review of firearms licensing and range use legislation to ensure the tools and training required for game animal management are readily accessible to communities.

These priorities have been formulated based on the context of the broader document outlined below. This document has been provided to external stakeholders as per the GAC statutory function 7(1)(f) *to raise awareness of the views of the hunting sector*.

For further information on these priorities and the document generally, please contact:

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## Introduction

This document outlines key principles and priorities, background context and analysis on game animal management in New Zealand. It incorporates the views of a number of organisations across the New Zealand hunting sector and has been provided to external stakeholders by the GAC in accordance with its statutory function 7(1)(f) *to raise awareness of the views of the hunting sector.*

- Contributing organisations include: Central North Island Sika Foundation, Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, New Zealand Deerstalkers Association (national), New Zealand Pig Hunters Association, New Zealand Professional Hunting Guides Association, The New Zealand Tahr Foundation and Safari Club International (NZ Chapter).

Game animals as defined by the Game Animal Council Act 2013 are deer, tahr, chamois and wild pigs. Wild goats are not a game animal.

The number of game animal hunters in New Zealand is variably estimated to total between 50,000 – 80,000 people. These hunters play a key role in game animal population management, with recreational hunters alone estimated to harvest approximately half a million game animals and wild goats annually.<sup>1</sup>

The full economic impact of hunting in New Zealand has never been calculated, but the guided hunting sector alone is estimated to generate over \$100 million in direct foreign investment annually and directly employs 530 people.<sup>2</sup> Industry sources indicate that a sustainable and consistent approach to game animal management could provide significant growth potential for this and other parts of the commercial hunting industry.

## Context

As set out in the Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 (ANZBS), New Zealand requires well-considered game animal management policy to enable enduring conservation of indigenous biodiversity and provide for the benefits of these valued introduced species.

This document outlines principles and priorities that provide for a sustainable and integrated approach to lift the standard of game animal management, to achieve improved conservation outcomes and support the recreational, commercial and community value of game animals.

These principles and priorities align with incoming international standards. The Convention on Biological Diversity is set to adopt a decision recognising the value of sustainable use in implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the post 2020 global biodiversity framework.

The Challenge:

- *Game animals will forever be in New Zealand; therefore, the question moves beyond are they 'good or bad' and 'should they be here, or not' to 'how do we best manage their impacts and maximise their resource, community and cultural value?'*

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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> The New Zealand Guided Hunting Industry and the Impact of Covid-19, Prepared on behalf of the New Zealand Professional Hunting Guides Association, the New Zealand Association of Game Estates & the New Zealand Taxidermy Association, July 2020.

## **Relevant Legislation**

The following pieces of legislation currently govern the management of game animals in New Zealand and present a complex matrix of competing priorities and definitions:

- Game Animal Council Act 2013
- Animal Welfare Act 1999
- Biosecurity Act 1993
- Conservation Act 1987
- The Arms Act 1983
- National Parks Act 1980
- Wild Animal Control Act 1977
- Reserves Act 1977
- Wildlife Act 1953

Work has recently got underway to review these, which is supported by the New Zealand hunting sector.

## **Te Tiriti ō Waitangi**

For the purposes of developing this briefing, the GAC's Tikanga Whakahaere (operating principles) have been applied to give effect to the principles of Te Tiriti:

- Kotahitanga, Manaakitanga & Whanaungatanga - work together with stakeholders in a mana-enhancing way to achieve common goals.
- Whakapapa – be mindful of the mātauranga, the knowledge, past down from the generations and these help to inform decisions we make.
- Pūkengatanga - acknowledge the skills and expertise of the New Zealand hunting sector and harness these to achieve our goals.
- Kaitiakitanga - practice and promote good stewardship to help achieve the sustainable management of game animals and hunting.

## **Principles for Game Animal Management in New Zealand**

### **An untapped integrative and sustainable solution**

New Zealand needs enduring and integrative solutions to its conservation challenges. These are enabled through the development of 'fit for purpose' legislation, interpreted through policy with clearly defined goals that are feasible and enhance community contributions to conservation initiatives.

Within the conservation system, legislation and policy must be designed to protect unique indigenous species so that they may thrive within resilient biodiverse ecosystems, and to support local communities and economies to ensure that this protection is practically and financially sustainable.

The hunting sector is part of the solution to an array of conservation challenges, but to date, its contributions have been limited by conservation goals that run counter to its values. The recognition of the value of game animals in legislation and policy will unlock novel pathways for developing and implementing enduring and integrative conservation solutions that involve the hunting sector.

Principle: Value-based game animal management should be enabled through legislation and policy to provide integrative and sustainable solutions to conservation challenges.

### **Building social licence and trust**

To date, conservation and game animal management efforts have been plagued by limited and fluctuating financial resourcing and focus-switching by successive governments. When financial resources are limited, government funding for conservation and game animal management initiatives are often reduced and successes undermined or stagnated. Local communities become disillusioned by this instability and then sceptical of the value of current and future conservation and game animal management initiatives. To protect New Zealand's unique biodiversity, consistent and reliable resourcing is required for conservation and game animal management, complemented by government allocations rather than solely reliant on them.

Principle: Sustainable and consistent government funding allocations for conservation and game animal management should be enabled and supported, providing greater certainty to communities.

### **Value extraction for sustainability**

Hunting and conservation are inherently complementary in New Zealand. Healthy habitats are the foundation of a valued hunting resource, and a valued hunting resource is the foundation for hunter participation and contribution to conservation. By recognising this relationship and building upon it, value can be extracted from participation in recreational and commercial hunter pursuits and provide for financial and sustainable mechanisms for achieving conservation outcomes unaffected by fluctuating government resourcing.

Principle: The value that can be sustainably extracted from New Zealand's game animals should be maximised and directed to support and provide for game animal management and conservation initiatives.

### **Partnerships for efficiencies**

Local communities should be at the heart of conservation; they have the in-depth knowledge and connection to local areas required to support the design and implementation of practical solutions to site-specific conservation challenges. Local communities are also the ones directly impacted by conservation initiatives, successes, failures and apathies.

Principle: Community contributions to game animal management should be encouraged, enabled and supported by government agencies.

## **Priorities for Game Animal Management in New Zealand**

Effective game animal management requires dynamic and adaptive policies to support and provide for evolving community values, financial and practical limitations and the realisation of new opportunities. It requires long term planning, implementation and financial certainty.

## Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 (ANZBS)

The ANZBS recognises valued introduced species in New Zealand and sets out to achieve a balance between management for their value and impacts.

*As well as the unique biodiversity found in Aotearoa New Zealand, there are also more recent arrivals. Many species have been introduced to Aotearoa New Zealand over the last 800 years. These include livestock and crops, trees that make up the forestry industry, garden plants, animals and fish that are hunted for sport or food, and many more.*

*Many of these species are critical to our everyday lives and to the primary sector, while others provide recreational and commercial opportunities and avenues for conservation efforts – and some are considered mahinga kai by Māori. These species are considered valued introduced species.*

*However, a number of introduced species can threaten indigenous species, valued introduced species and ecosystems through predation, browsing, disease, competition and habitat degradation. 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.<sup>3</sup>*

Priority: Support and uphold the implementation of the ANZBS.

### Te Ara ki Mua

Te Ara ki Mua is an adaptive management framework for wild goats, deer, wild pigs, tahr and chamois, and gives effect to the ANZBS. It seeks to balance the recreational, cultural and economic benefits to our communities of game animals (deer, chamois, tahr and wild pigs) with their environmental impacts.

While pest goat control is also a priority, the framework recognises there is no one-size-fits-all approach to game animal management. Different game animal populations in different places require different management strategies that need to be grounded in science and involve multiple stakeholders including recreational and commercial hunters, local communities and iwi.

Priority: Te Ara ki Mua represents an opportunity to create enduring and inclusive solutions to the historically divisive issue of game animal management and must continue to be resourced and implemented appropriately.

### Herds of Special Interest (HOSI)

This legislated function within the Game Animal Council Act has never been enacted due to limited resourcing for the GAC since establishment, inadequate political support and the limited powers granted to the GAC within its legislation. A less formal and limited version of the HOSI model is being deployed via community agreements with the Department of Conservation for wapiti in Fiordland and sika in the Central North Island. Both have proven to be successful and popular. However, the

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<sup>3</sup> Te Mana o Te Taiao - Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020, Department of Conservation, August 2020

continuance of informal HOSI versions is not assured and this discourages community efforts to improve, advance or extend game animal management using this mechanism.

HOSI designation seeks to formalise game animal management of hunter-valued herds and their habitats, thereby providing legislative certainty to encourage increased community support and effort and enable continuing improvement to game animal management systems.

The establishment of HOSI requires initial investment of Crown resources. There is provision within the Game Animal Council Act for the GAC *to assess the costs of managing herds of special interest and make recommendations to the Minister on ways to recover those costs.*

HOSI management design and implementation is concomitant to Te Ara ki Mua, not additional, i.e., it achieves Te Ara ki Mua objectives for valued introduced species that are important to hunters.

Priority: Work with the GAC to identify, designate, establish and resource the first herds of special interest.

### **Conservation system legislative review**

There are several pieces of legislation that affect the management of game animals. Many of these are antiquated and overly complicate conservation management by being unfeasible, dismissive of some values and limiting implementation mechanisms. A full review of the conservation system legislation will enable the design of fit-for-purpose legislation to effectively manage game animals for both their impacts and values.

A value-based system requires recognition of values. Currently the terms pest, wild animal, feral animal and game animal are used within the different conservation-based acts. Some of these labels hold negative connotations which remove or dispute the value of the species they refer to. This creates discomfort in the communities that value these species as it indicates a direction of management that does not align with their values. Consolidation and clarity on the meaning and use of the following terms would alleviate this discomfort and provide more certainty in management direction:

- Valued Introduced Species - defined in Te Mana o te Taiao Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 (ANZBS); includes game animals.
  - Game Animals - deer, tahr, chamois and pigs, defined in the Game Animal Council Act 2013.
- Pest Species - goats, wallabies, rabbits, hares, possums, hedgehogs, feral cats, mice, rats and mustelids.

Priority: Support the conservation system legislative review and embed the terms 'valued introduced species' and 'game animal' across legislation.

### **Utilising existing legislation**

While overly complicated, current legislation does contain many of the provisions necessary to effectively manage game animals. However, many of these provisions have never been enacted and therefore, are lacking a clear process for application. For example:

- *The National Parks Act 1980 4(2)(b): except where the Authority otherwise determines, the native plants and animals of the parks shall as far as possible be preserved and the introduced plants and animals shall as far as possible be exterminated.*



The permanent extermination of all introduced species from 3 million ha of national park across the country is unfeasible, attempting to do so is unsustainable, and for game animals, is not unanimously desirable. The provision for exclusion of some species by the New Zealand Conservation Authority, e.g., introduced species where value-based management would support improved and enduring conservation outcomes within national parks, is an option under the National Parks Act. However, this provision has never been utilised (trout and salmon gained exemption when the Act was first developed). Consequently, the process for applying and approving the exclusion of a valued introduced species under this provision has not been developed.

Priority: Support the development of processes for better utilising existing legislation while the system-wide conservation legislative review is being undertaken.

### **Sustainable funding**

Consistent and sustainable funding is critical to game animal management. For too long the management of deer, in particular, has suffered from an all-or-nothing approach, which has led to fluctuating populations and a sense of distrust from the hunting sector and many other stakeholders. With the development of the ANZBS and Te Ara ki Mua, the opportunity exists to institute a long-term management system, however, that relies on consistency of funding into the future.

Priority: Commit to long-term sustainable funding of game animal management initiatives to effectively balance conservation requirements with the values and benefits that game animals hold for many communities.

### **Community-led game animal management**

Successful game animal management requires an ongoing commitment by purpose-focused organisations that hold specialised expertise, mana and community support. In New Zealand, there are numerous organisations of this type who have experience in developing and implementing game animal management and hunter education initiatives. However, the efforts of these organisations have not yet been effectively coordinated to enable sustained collective action over the long-term.

Priority: Support organisations involved in game animal management and hunter education to enable collective action and sustained community-led initiatives across New Zealand.

## **Reviews to enable improved game animal management**

### **Himalayan tahr management**

The Himalayan Thar (sic) Control Plan 1993 at the heart of our tahr management system was progressive 30 years ago. However, it was not adequately implemented and reviewed as required, is now antiquated and no longer provides for a modern management system in the current societal context. A review of the tahr management system, including the Himalayan Thar Control Plan 1993 is necessary to effectively implement Te Ara ki Mua and achieve a sustainable and modern approach to tahr management.

## **Wild Animal Recovery Operations (WARO) system**

Effectively administered WARO is critical to the successful management of game animals in New Zealand. However, it has been widely acknowledged for well over a decade that a comprehensive WARO review is necessary to help align the activity with modern management approaches and policy and reduce conflict with recreational hunters. Such a review will need to include an evaluation of food safety policy and regulations which can unnecessarily increase cost of harvest and processing and undermine the value proposition of game animals, particularly where trade or sale is not involved.

## **Public access and facilities**

Adequate public access and facilities, e.g., huts and tracks, are crucial for effective management of game animal species by recreational hunters. Limited access to hunting areas is one of the key challenges identified by hunters across New Zealand and impacts their ability to help manage game animals.<sup>4</sup> Access is currently steeped in a myriad of unclear rules and regulations, which leads to uncertainty and confusion. The hunting sector recommends:

- Establishing a review of public access and facilities on public conservation land.
- Reviewing the Walking Access Act to ensure that Herenga ā Nuku Aotearoa, the Outdoor Access Commission has the appropriate powers to ensure adequate public access to public conservation land.

## **Firearms legislation, improvements and efficiencies**

Access to firearms is essential for the management of game animals and pest species while access to shooting ranges is necessary to support safe and ethical hunting. Refinement of legislation to support effective and efficient administration of firearm licensing and use is needed.

The New Zealand hunting sector does not support the formation of a firearm registry as this mechanism has been shown to be ineffective for improving public safety overseas and is resource heavy, taking away allocations which better serve New Zealand's interests.

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<sup>4</sup> 67.4% of hunters identified access as the factor that most impacts their hunting, 2022 Game Animal Council Hunter Survey