

GAC Advice: Tahr Control Operational Plan 2026/2027 mid-point review.

Context

The Game Animal Council (GAC) is the statutory body representing the interests of the hunting sector and working to improve game animal management, including Himalayan tahr. The GAC is represented on the Tahr Plan Implementation and Liaison Group (TPILG), which provides advice to the Department of Conservation (DOC) on its implementation of the Himalayan Thar^(sic) Control Plan (HTCP).

The HTCP is a statutory control plan established under the Wild Animal Control Act 1977, developed in accordance with the Himalayan Thar^(sic) Management Policy 1991, that sets out how DOC manages Himalayan tahr in New Zealand. The HTCP sets conservation objectives for nine defined areas, seven management units, and two exclusion zones, and provisions for prioritisation and methods for control, monitoring, planning and review.

DOC develops a Tahr Control Operational Plan (TCOP) annually that outlines its activities to meet the HTCP objectives. The TCOP does not operationalise the full extent of the HTCP; its scope is limited to control, monitoring, and information sharing.

The 2026/2027 TCOP states that DOC and the GAC will review progress at approximately the mid-point of official aerial control operations inside the feral range and discuss any remaining control efforts.

Purpose

To provide DOC with hunting sector insights and game animal management advice to inform operational priorities, optimise remaining control hours, minimise impacts on hunters, and support targeted, evidence-based tahr management decisions.

Method

The GAC met with DOC on 25 August 2026. DOC presented control hours, tahr removed, and aerial-assisted trophy hunting (AATH) offsets undertaken since July 2026 (Table 1). DOC also provided maps of tahr removal and observations (see Appendix), and outlined remaining control hours, aerial and ground approaches, AATH offsets, and Tahr Foundation (NZTF) planned operations.

Based on the information provided by DOC, the GAC then engaged with hunting sector stakeholders to support the preparation of this advice.

The GAC is happy to provide further information or support DOC on matters relating to tahr management or the contents of this submission.

Table 1 DOC mid-point data for 2026/2027 control and AATH offsets

Management units	Official Control (Planned)	Official Control (Delivered 18/8)		Unit of effort	AATH Planned	AATH Offsets (Delivered 18/8)
		Hours	Tahr			
				Tahr per hour		
MU 1 - South Rakaia/Upper Rangitata	0 - 5				400	197
MU 2 - Whitcombe/Whataroa	15 - 25 (13)	4.1	171	41.7	196	194
MU 3 - Gammack/Two Thumb					684	
MU 4a - Westland Tai Poutini NP	50 - 60	15.7	484	30.8	270	229*
MU 4b - Aoraki Mt Cook NP		5.0*	123	24.6		
MU 5 - Ben Ohau	5 - 10				712	778
MU 6 - Landsborough	30 - 45 (22-34)				400	345*
MU 7 - Wills/Hunter	5 - 15	10.0	168	16.8		
Inside Feral Range (Outside MUs)						*
Outside Feral Range	110 - 120	15.5	56		25	25
Totals:	230 - 260	50.3	1,002		2,687	1,768**

* 15 hours scheduled, may occur prior to mid-point review depending on weather

** includes offsets ISFR OMU adjacent to MU, and is an approximate split between runs done in MU6 and MU4a.

*** work still in progress – anticipated total of ~2,687 offsets

Summary of advice

1. Hunting sector feedback indicates that current management is resulting in disparate outcomes across the landscape, with populations below a sustainable hunter resource in some areas and high tahr abundance remaining in others.

2. The GAC supports DOC undertaking control that is targeted to hotspots, is evidence-based, and focused on agreed priorities, and is coordinated with hunting sector management activities.
3. Improved monitoring is needed to understand population trends at a finer scale, changes in tahr and hunter behaviour because of management approaches and to enable revision of the control approach for achieving population maintenance that supports continued hunter contributions to tahr management.
4. There is a significant opportunity for a joint GAC-DOC case study in the Adams Flat area to investigate when control effort can move to maintenance.
5. The GAC recommends decision-makers incentivise hunters to gather and share observations by considering opportunities to protect and improve hunter access
6. There are opportunities to improve the timing and transparency of operational information through communications and reporting.
7. More broadly, the GAC supports moving future tahr management toward a sustainable, values-based framework that better integrates conservation outcomes, hunting-sector knowledge, recreational access, and private-land interface issues.

Management unit advice

Table 2 below outlines management unit specific information provided by DOC at the mid-point review and resulting GAC advice, including sector feedback.

Table 2 Mid-point review information and GAC feedback by management unit - See Figure 1 data and maps in Appendix

MU	DOC information	GAC Feedback
Outside Feral Range (OSFR)	- Control aerial: 10 hours undertaken in Northern Exclusion Zone, 5 hours undertaken in Mount Hutt area. - AATH: Offsets also completed in Mount Hutt area.	Consider impacts from remaining allocation on: - Other hunting activities, particularly during the roar and rut. - Other recreational users during high use periods. - Animal welfare of kids from mid-November through end of January.
MU7	Control aerial: hours are complete – included control within feral range but outside MU7.	Support the MU7 and wider feral range combined approach. Encourage hunter notification when

MU	DOC information	GAC Feedback
		MU control operations are complete.
MU6	- Control aerial: 8 hours of aerial control planned for Landsborough – investigating the efficiency of the aerial method following reduced aerial targeting over the past few years. This area also has reduced AATH activity due to ballot period closure. - Control ground: repeat of last year's operations, Arbor Rift to Dechen Creek and Mount Hermann. 1-2 planned for Jacobs/Makaawhio, 3-4 planned for Landsborough. Aerial targeting to support ground operations would only be undertaken if high numbers of females were identified in a specific, localised, inaccessible area. - AATH: Offsets primarily undertaken in inside the feral range but outside of MUs (see Appendix AATH map). Also allowed in the high basins of the Jacobs to support NZTF operations. - NZTF: ground operations planned 3x in Jacobs and 1x in Mahitahi. May run additional ground ops in Jacobs, Copland, Callery, Troyte, or Karangarua if there is remaining allocation from 500 tahr removal target in MU4a.	Sector feedback suggests aerial operations target the Southern end of the Solution Range. Control in the Jacobs should complement NZTF operations. Landsborough ground control operations should focus on tahr using the forest areas. Thermals may support presence detection but confirm non-males visually for accuracy and safety. Recommend encouraging remaining AATH in the true left, high basins in the Jacobs to support NZTF operations. Ballot return information required to provide further feedback.
MU5	Control aerial: 5-10 hours of control planned – full coverage of MU looking for hotspots. Reasoning: western side has had no aerial control for the last 4 years and in recent years, AATH rates for Ben Ohau and	Support hotspot identification and associated control. Encourage hunter notification when MU AATH offsets are complete.

MU	DOC information	GAC Feedback
	Naumann range have been high (~ 60-78 tahr per hour removed). AATH: offsets are complete.	
MU4b	Control aerial: 5 hours complete. Remaining 15 hours repeating last year's operations, then the western side of Liebig Range, plus one run through the head of Godley. Not working in the green area on the map (see Appendix). Reasoning: AATH offsets undertaken in combination with adjoining MU3, outside of National Park, accessible area for recreational hunting.	The hunting sector opposes targeting bulls in National Parks (see overall comments below for more detail). Support aerial control being focused in the National Park, and AATH focused outside the National Park within this MU. Recommend completing the aerial control as soon as practically possible due to seasonal shifts in tahr behaviour.
MU4a	- Control aerial: halfway completed. Remaining hours planned for Karangarua and repeat coverage in the Cook and Balfour. These areas complement NZTF operations and increase coverage across National Park. Includes control in the feral range but outside the management unit. - AATH: Offsets have been completed in Karangarua. - NZTF: completed first aerial run on true right of Copland- 129 in the first run, 2 hours. This area has not been targeted in recent years. Next aerial run is likely in the Callery. If the number of tahr removed over 8 hours does not meet the 500 minimum target, ground-based operations may be undertaken (see MU6 notes).	The hunting sector opposes targeting bulls in National Parks (see overall comments below for more detail). Encourage hunter notification when AATH offsets are complete within MU or valley systems. Encourage reassessing focus in following years based on recreational hunting access.
MU3	Lower priority (suitable for AATH, popular rec hunting, access is variable). - Control: No official control scheduled for MU3. - AATH: offsets focused on same areas as the last 3 years – has	The approach for this MU is supported.

MU	DOC information	GAC Feedback
	been trending down but still high - ranged from 65-80 tahr per hour. See previous year's maps. AATH: Offsets remaining due to weather and mechanical requirements – directed to the Sinclair Range, true right of Havelock, Sibbald Range, the Hall, the Liebig Range, MU3-4b but outside National Park, Burnett and Gammack Ranges (Jollie), and 30-50 tahr from South Opuha.	
MU2	Noted the discovery of kiwi at this ballot site by hunters and the year-round DOC kiwi surveying work being undertaken, and consideration of the ballot in light of this work. - Control aerial: 4 hours planned – covering head of Perth and sweeping Scone, Bettison and into the head of the true right of the Whataroa. - Control ground: 13 hours planned for Adams Flat. Potential case study for reducing and maintaining numbers using ground-based options. Noted contention over when control should move to maintenance. DOC wants to see the catch-per-unit-effort curve flatten before moving to maintenance.	Recommend retaining hunter access to ballot site to support continued hunter observational data sharing for indigenous species. Planned area for aerial control is supported. The sector does not support ground control in Adams Flat due to observations of low tahr numbers here. Ballot return information is required to provide further feedback. Opportunity for GAC and DOC to jointly work on a case study for Adams Flat (see overall comments below).
MU1	- Control aerial: 1 hour planned in the upper Rakaia. - AATH: Completed offsets ~25 tahr from top of Potts, 30 from true right of Havelock (Carneys), 138 from head of the Clyde (Sinclair into Frances away from private land boundary). Remaining – True right of Havelock (bulk inside MU1 boundary), some for head of	Aerial, offset and NZTF control approaches supported.

MU	DOC information	GAC Feedback
	Rakaia, may spill over into Frances and McCoy. NZTF: 4 hours planned for ground control in Cattle Creek and Lawrence – dependent on private land access permissions.	

Discussion and recommendations

8. The application of aerial control as planned for the remainder of this operational year is largely supported. However, the sector has raised concerns about reduced tahr populations, and fewer available hotspots where control should be targeted.
9. The GAC recommends revising how control work is allocated in future TCOPs and increasing focus on working with private landholders on cross-boundary challenges and outside feral range objectives.
10. The need for measurable thresholds and clear decision-making processes around when control is or is not required, and when maintenance is sufficient, is becoming more urgent.
11. The Adams Flat case study presents a significant opportunity to begin this discussion; however, hunter satisfaction data is required to support informed consideration and analysis.
12. The GAC recommends a joint GAC/DOC case study on Adams Flat to investigate when control effort can move to maintenance. This also supports delivering on Ministerial expectations and the GAC/DOC partnership in implementing Te Ara ki Mua.
13. The GAC acknowledges the work undertaken by DOC to collate information for the mid-point review.
14. To support high-quality feedback and improve operational efficiencies, the GAC recommends DOC share the control data, maps, and ballot return information at least one week before the mid-point review, and provide a map showing where AATH offsets are directed to clarify spatial coverage of effort and support consideration of potential adjustments to control allocations.
15. It is important that hunters are able to avoid potential impacts during operational periods. This can help reduce conflict between recreational hunters and control activities.

16. The GAC recommends publicly communicating control and offset focus areas at the beginning of the operational year, and confirming completion of control and offsets within management units and valley systems.
17. It is important to reduce impacts on hunting and other recreational activities for work undertaken outside of the tahr feral range. It is also important to provide confidence around DOC's consideration of potential animal welfare impacts for work undertaken outside of standard control periods.
18. The GAC recommends providing more detailed information on operational activities and expected timing for control work outside the feral range.
19. The sector has raised concerns and would like clarity on the status of returning Godley Peaks Station to public land and DOC's plan to integrate the area into tahr management, particularly opportunities for hunter contributions and role in management over the short and long term.
20. Hunters spend large amounts of time observing the environment where they hunt, creating a unique opportunity to collect information from remote areas and support improved game animal management and conservation outcomes.
21. The GAC recommends decision-makers incentivise hunters to gather and share observations by considering opportunities to protect and improve hunter access.
22. The hunting sector opposes targeting bulls in National Parks.
23. Bull tahr are a valuable commodity to New Zealand. Across MU4a&b a total of 275 bulls have been removed since July 2026. Based on helicopter rates, hours per tahr for these MUs (Table 2), and various tourism outfitter rates, this equates to ~\$26,000 of taxpayer funding spent to remove between ~\$2.5 million and \$3.5 million in potential tahr commodity value for NZ tourism-based hunting.
24. Previous GAC advice on tahr management planning has outlined why bull tahr should not be targeted through control. Targeting bull tahr is not necessary to achieve population management outcomes, and consideration should be given to the overall herd's breeding potential, movement behaviours and the importance of bull tahr for hunter recreational enjoyment within the Aoraki Mount Cook and Westland Tai Poutini National Parks.
25. The GAC acknowledges the statutory framework DOC must operate under.
26. The GAC recommends and supports work to move tahr management from current frameworks to a sustainable, values-based management framework under the Game Animal Council Act 2013.

Appendix – Maps of completed control and AATH 2026/2027 provided by DOC at the midpoint review







