

Briefing to the incoming Minister for Hunting and Fishing

November 2023



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
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Purpose

1. The purpose of this briefing is to support you in your portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Hunting and Fishing. It provides you with a summary of hunting and fishing issues as we see them, key roles and responsibilities, and some of the current strategic issues and priorities.

Your priorities

2. We understand that your priorities include:
 - progressing herds of special interest under the Game Animal Council Act 2013, and providing a greater role for the Game Animal Council over game animals and hunting promotion
 - reviewing the application of the biosecurity regime to wild animals
 - ensuring the protection of managed access to public land for hunting and fishing
 - supporting mahinga kai and Māori food gathering
 - developing further national management plans for wild animals
 - creating partnerships between the Department of Conservation (DOC) and volunteer clubs to maintain and manage backcountry huts
 - strengthening the work of Fish & Game New Zealand, and the representation of hunting and fishing sectors in conservation governance
 - reviewing the Wild Animal Recovery Operations and Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunting systems.
3. This briefing covers these areas in more detail where they relate to the DOC's legislation and responsibilities. Further advice can be provided to you on request (see section on 'Government priorities', page 22). In the coming weeks, we can work with you to determine your work programme in order to progress your priorities for this portfolio.

Scope of the portfolio

DOC can support you in clarifying the scope of your portfolio

4. As this is a new portfolio, early work to clarify the scope of responsibilities and inter-relationships with other portfolios, especially the Conservation portfolio, will be required. Officials from DOC are ready to support you to achieve this, as well as to deliver your priorities and fulfil your responsibilities.
5. DOC has prepared the briefing for this portfolio (as opposed to another agency), as the Government's priorities as we understand them relate to roles and functions held by DOC.

DOC's hunting and fishing responsibilities cover wild animals, sports fish, game birds and whitebait

6. Our assumption is that your portfolio will cover DOC's hunting and fishing responsibilities, which include legislation and policy in relation to:
 - 'wild animals' (deer, tahr, chamois, feral goats and feral pigs)
 - 'sports fish' (trout, salmon and three other introduced fish) and 'game birds' (eg pheasants and some ducks)
 - whitebait and some aspects of freshwater fisheries.
7. DOC does not lead management of hunting and fishing for other species, notably eels, marine fish, rabbits and hares, possums and wallabies (other than where the activity is on land that is administered by DOC or affected by other regulatory controls DOC is responsible for, such as the creation of marine reserves). DOC does, however, have wider policy interests in the work to contain and manage these species.

DOC has two broad functions relevant to this portfolio – species management and land management

8. DOC's functions that relate to hunting and fishing can be categorised in two ways.
 - Species management – functions relating to the species that are hunted or fished regardless of the location of the animals.¹
 - Land management and visitor services – functions related to the management of public conservation land and recreation on that land, including controls on the use of firearms, the control of introduced species and the provision of recreation opportunities.
9. Both introduced and indigenous² species are hunted and fished. Some hunted or fished species pose a significant threat to conservation and primary production values, which means that hunting and fishing are valuable forms of control. Other hunted or fished species are threatened or form critical parts of natural ecosystems, which means that hunting and fishing need to be managed to maintain species' populations.

¹ While much hunting and fishing activity is on public conservation land, hunting (including commercial hunting) and fishing also occur on other public and private land.

² Plants and animals that occur naturally in New Zealand and have evolved or arrived without any assistance from humans.

Wild animal management (deer, tahr, chamois, feral goats and feral pigs)

DOC leads the wild animal management system and works closely with the diverse range of interests

10. DOC collaborates extensively with groups across the wild animal³ management system, including hunters, environmental groups, landowners and councils. The development of Te Ara Ki Mua – a collaborative effort to reduce environmental impacts from wild deer, pigs, goats, tahr and chamois – is an example of how DOC plays a key leadership role within the wild animal management system (see paragraph 33).
11. DOC's collaborative approach has built a clear understanding of stakeholder and Māori perspectives and is also important given the tensions between the recreational value of wild animals and the impacts they can have on biodiversity. More information on DOC's work with these groups is described below (paragraphs 32–35).
12. You may wish to use the first stage of your term as Minister to meet with a wide range of groups (including recreational and commercial hunting groups, iwi organisations, farming and forestry organisations, recreation and conservation groups, and the New Zealand Conservation Authority Chair) to hear their views. DOC officials can support you with these engagements.

Wild animal hunters have a range of perspectives and representative organisations

13. Hunting is a valued activity in New Zealand, and people hunt deer, goats and pigs for food, business and recreation. Over 30,000 hunters obtain permits each year to hunt on public conservation land, and the total number of hunters is significantly higher than this.
14. While hunting occurs nationwide, the target species vary between locations. For example, white-tailed deer are only found around Whakatipu Waimāori/Lake Wakatipu and on Rakiura/Stewart Island, Wapiti deer are only found in Fiordland, and tahr are found in the central South Island (see Figure 1).
15. Hunters have different interests and perspectives depending on their objectives.
 - Subsistence hunters focus on the animals available close to where they live. Their primary interest is to efficiently access good quality meat without needing to travel long distances. For example, a number of hapū have a strong interest in harvesting wild animals (eg pigs in Northland, deer on the East Coast), and any restrictions on hunting (eg introduction of licence systems or ballots) are likely to be of concern to them.
 - Recreational hunters hunt as a pastime. They may be interested in trophy heads or meat, or both. They may be willing to travel significant distances to access attractive hunting experiences (either to a different landscape or to hunt a different species such as tahr).
 - Tourism operations that support trophy hunting (including aerially assisted trophy hunting [AATH]) are seeking trophy heads. AATH is a small volume but high-value tourism industry, targeting overseas trophy hunters, primarily of tahr and chamois. New Zealand has a market advantage in being able to offer access to species not available in other countries (eg tahr) and with fewer restrictions on hunting than in some other countries (eg there is no need to win a ballot or shoot only one animal).

³ Deer, tahr, chamois, feral goats and feral pigs are 'wild animals', managed under the Wild Animal Control Act 1977.

- Commercial meat hunters (generally referred to as wild animal recovery operations [WARO] operators) often operate using helicopters and target animals that can be efficiently harvested and fetch a good price. In the past, commercial meat hunting has been extremely effective in regulating wild animal numbers in large areas of New Zealand's remote backcountry. More recently, the industry has been affected by food safety rules and international markets for wild game meat. WARO are becoming an increasingly important tool for private landowners (farming and forestry sectors) wanting to undertake wild animal control for the least direct cost to them. DOC has been working to ensure that regulatory controls on WARO operators under conservation legislation are appropriate and efficiently administered. A report on this work is due before the end of 2023.

16. Hunters are represented by a range of organisations, including the New Zealand Game Animal Council (a statutory body), New Zealand Deerstalkers Association, New Zealand Professional Hunting Guides Association, New Zealand Association of Game Estates, Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, New Zealand Tahr Foundation, Sika Foundation, Safari Club International (New Zealand Chapter) and New Zealand Pig Hunting Association. There are also many place-based groups throughout New Zealand in particular regions.

Wild animals have significant impacts on biodiversity, and DOC's statutory role includes efforts to avoid their damaging effects

17. Wild animals are a significant threat to biodiversity and potentially to forest stability. The cumulative impacts of wild animals on New Zealand's forests, landscapes and biodiversity are increasingly being recognised, with wild animals emerging as one of the major threats to biodiversity and in particular to the resilience of forests to climate change. Deer, tahr, chamois, feral goats and feral pigs can cause changes to ecosystems and can eliminate some plant species (see Figure 2), which can have flow-on effects on threatened animal species and recreational values.



Figure 1: Key deer herd locations



Figure 2: An enclosure plot showing the difference in vegetation where browsers are excluded

18. DOC's role (as set out in the Wild Animal Control Act 1977) is to achieve a concerted effort to avoid the damaging effects of these animals on vegetation, soils, waters and wildlife; coordinate hunting effort; and regulate recreational and commercial hunting. In practice, this means that DOC:
 - controls populations of wild goats, deer, pigs and tahr at priority DOC-managed conservation sites (eg in 2022/23 deer and goat control covered over 1.4 million hectares collectively)
 - takes a leadership role across all land to ensure concerted action against the damaging effects of wild animals on vegetation, soils, waters and wildlife.
19. The impacts wild animals can have on the environment mean that environmental groups (Forest and Bird, in particular) are significantly invested in the effectiveness of the wild animal management system.
20. Public conservation land is a major store of carbon. DOC is working with others to understand the pressure wild animals are creating on the carbon stored in forests and opportunities to adjust wild animal management to maximise the carbon stored.
21. Maximising the health of forests is also likely to help deliver greater resilience to the impacts of climate change-driven extreme weather, flood and fire. In some areas, restoring the health of forests on public conservation land has the potential to help protect communities and rural businesses from erosion and flooding.

Wild animals can also have negative impacts on private land interests and Māori cultural values

22. Wild animals can be a significant threat to primary production if not appropriately controlled. Much hunting occurs on private land with the encouragement of landowners, who want to reduce the impacts of wild animals. Wild animals can damage plantation forestry, compete with domestic animals for pasture and spread disease (eg bovine tuberculosis [TB]).
23. Private landowners often need to spend significant sums on control and fencing – a professional hunter can cost from \$60 to \$100 per hour; effective wild animal control in shrubland and forest can cost up to \$35 per hectare; and replacing a sheep fence with a deer fence to prevent deer and goats can cost up to \$35,000 per kilometre. Farmers and forestry owners are key stakeholders because of these impacts.

24. Recently, Federated Farmers, the New Zealand Institute of Forestry, and Forest and Bird jointly wrote to major political parties asking for targeted funding to bring about a reset in wild browsing pest numbers.
25. Wild animals are also a threat to important cultural values and Māori land in some locations. For example, the health of forests on Māori land, and iwi farming and forestry interests can be negatively affected by introduced species.
26. Regional councils and other biosecurity agencies (eg OSPRI) have responsibilities to manage biosecurity risks in their regions. Those risks may be created or exacerbated by wild animals (eg feral pigs can spread TB and the pathogen causing kauri disease; feral goats are a threat to farming; wild animals may contribute to soil compaction and erosion). Hunted and fished species may also be threatened (eg a possible new disease is affecting the lamprey fishery; introduced predators affect game birds).
27. There continue to be illegal movements of wild animals, which not only threaten biodiversity outside the current range of the animals but can also move TB and other animal diseases. Early detection and immediate eradication is the most effective response to illegal releases.

Wild animals have become more widespread and abundant in recent years

28. Monitoring shows that ungulates (eg deer, goats) now occupy 82% of sites on public conservation land, an increase from 64% in 2013 (Figure 3). Increases have been more pronounced in the North Island than in the South Island. A key reason for this is a reduction in commercial helicopter recovery of wild animals due to a reduction in demand for venison from international markets.
29. There is general agreement within both biodiversity and hunting organisations that wild animal numbers have been increasing and are far too high in some locations, and reducing numbers is a high priority biodiversity action. There is also general agreement that introduced species should not be allowed to spread into new areas.
30. The increase in impacts from wild animals is largely because of inconsistent investment in control over the past 20 years across all land managers. Budget 2022 increased investment into deer management and goat control by \$30 million over 4 years. The new funding has made it possible for DOC to take a stronger leadership role and improve coordination, clarify priority areas for investment, undertake more control operations, and gather knowledge to ensure that management is making the desired difference.

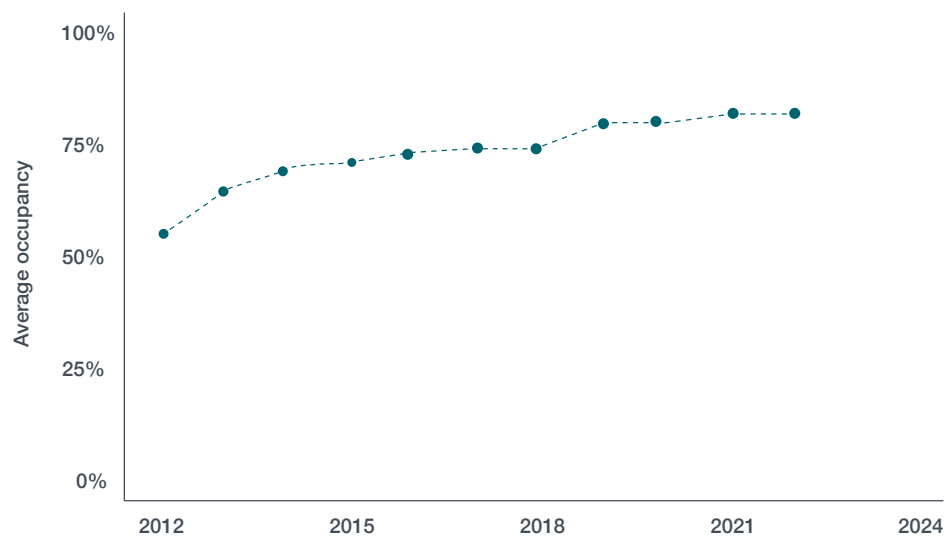


Figure 3: Increase in the proportion of public conservation land sites with deer, goats, sheep, tahr and chamois present, 2012–2022

The concerns of hunters include poor animal condition, access and the impacts of predator control

31. The concerns within the recreational hunting sector vary between hunter type and over time. Some key recent concerns include:
- the feeling that animal numbers are too high, which is resulting in noticeable damage to vegetation and animals that are in poor condition; in some locations, deer numbers are so high that subsistence hunters do not consider them worth targeting because their condition is so poor – for example, in Ruahine Forest Park, WARO operators are reporting red deer in poor condition and are therefore not motivated to work there as carcasses are not considered big enough to be commercially viable
 - the ability to access hunting opportunities on private land, cross private land to access public conservation land, and access hunting on public conservation land itself (eg where an area is temporarily closed to hunting due to predator control operations), as well as having infrastructure that makes access easier, such as backcountry tracks and huts
 - actions by DOC and others to manage impacts on biodiversity that are perceived to threaten future hunting – this includes the effects of 1080 control (for rat, possum and stoat control) on deer numbers and/or the ability to take meat from those areas, and wild animal control operations (eg the tahr control programme)
 - issues relating to the way hunting is undertaken or perceived – some hunters are concerned that their activity is not valued or is actively opposed by some parts of society
 - the perception by some that tourist hunters are engaged in ‘unsporting’ activities (eg using helicopters to chase animals), as well as frequent concerns between different types of hunters about competition for animals
 - frustration with DOC systems and processes, including variation in how hunting is managed between regions.

DOC leads collaborative work with hunters, Māori and landowners to manage wild animals

32. Collective action is critical to address the concerns of hunters, landowners and Māori, as well as to achieve better outcomes for the environment. DOC is already working with hunting groups, Māori, environmental groups, landowners and councils on these issues. These groups can all contribute to improving wild animal management and make a difference for nature and primary production. A snapshot of DOC’s wild animals management programme is provided in Appendix 1.
33. Examples of where DOC is working with others to manage wild animals include the following.
- *Te Ara Ki Mua – a framework developed by DOC for adaptive management of wild goats, deer, wild pigs, tahr and chamois.* It was informed by a significant period of consultation and will be implemented in partnership with Māori interests and the Game Animal Council.
 - *The Wild Animals Management National Coordination Group – a forum set up by DOC to prioritise and coordinate actions for effective wild animal management.* It includes a diverse range of organisations, including the conservation sector, hunting sector, Māori organisations, primary industry groups and research institutions.
 - *Leading work on tahr management through the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group.* The Liaison Group includes representatives of hunting groups, the Game Animal Council, Forest and Bird, the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA) and Conservation Boards, Federated Mountain Clubs, and other groups with interests in tahr management.
 - *Identifying priority areas for wild animal management in partnership with the sector.* DOC currently undertakes deer management and goat control on about 1.4 million hectares of public conservation land, but does not have enough funding to cover all 8.7 million

hectares of public conservation land. To guide future investment, DOC has developed a system that identifies further priority sites for management. For each site, information has been collected on a number of variables, from biodiversity to investment and stakeholder values. For many areas where wild animal management needs to occur, collaboration with stakeholders, including adjoining landowners, is important to enable desired outcomes to be achieved and maintained.

- *Partnering with the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association and Sika Foundation for wild animal control.* DOC works closely with the hunting sector to put a spotlight on wild animals that are getting less attention from the hunting community. For instance, to promote the need for greater goat control, DOC has partnered with the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association to run a national wild goat hunting competition; and the Sika Foundation, a hunter-led, conservation-focused non-profit, received nearly \$700,000 of Jobs for Nature funding to develop a site-specific management programme for sika deer.
- *Partnering with landowners and communities.* DOC also works closely with landowners and communities to manage wild animals in their areas. For example, DOC provided logistical support to a Marlborough Sounds Restoration Trust project to reset feral ungulates from high and damaging levels to manageable levels – and the project was funded largely by landowners.
- *Managing aerially assisted trophy hunting (AATH).* DOC has been seeking to use AATH permit conditions to address ‘time and place’ conflicts between AATH operators, recreational hunters and conservation groups. AATH provides a direct and tangible conservation benefit: for each wild animal trophy taken on public conservation land, the operator must undertake an ‘environmental offset’ by controlling female/juvenile tahr.

There are more opportunities to improve biodiversity outcomes through hunting

34. In the right circumstances, enabling the hunting sector can avoid public expenditure, save landowners money and deliver benefits to the sector itself. For example, DOC is working with the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association Nelson to organise a hunt that aims to reduce the effects of deer browsing (by reducing the deer population) on indigenous plants and animals in Nelson Lakes National Park. Work like this could be expanded, improving access to public conservation land and providing conservation benefits.
35. There are also opportunities to use the data obtained by hunting communities to inform DOC’s wider biodiversity work. Collecting and sharing data on animals taken, vegetation recovery and the success of different control techniques can help make wild animal control more effective.

You may be responsible for the Game Animal Council, which represents the interests of the hunting sector

36. The Game Animal Council Act established an independent statutory body (the Game Animal Council) to carry out a range of functions relating to ‘game animals’ (wild animals other than feral goats).
37. The Game Animal Council’s work involves advising Ministers, informing and educating the sector, promoting hunter safety, and conducting game animal research.
38. You may be the responsible Minister for the Council. If so, DOC will advise you on your letter of expectations to the Council and on its accountability documents, as well as any significant governance or performance risks as they arise.
39. All members of the Council are Ministerial appointments. The term of four Council members expires in mid-2024. If you are the responsible Minister, DOC will provide you with advice on the process for and appointment of members of the Council.

40. The Game Animal Council is likely to seek to meet with you, which would be an opportunity for you to receive advice from them and discuss their work programme. If you are the responsible Minister, you could share your views with the Council but could not direct their work programme. However, you could determine (with the Minister of Conservation) what activities will be funded from Vote Conservation (government funding appropriated for conservation purposes, administered by DOC) and what outcomes you would expect them to achieve with those funds.
41. Sustainable funding has been a concern since the Council's establishment in 2013. It was initially envisaged that the Council would be predominantly funded through a Game Trophy Export Levy. However, the development of a levy was not progressed. Consequently, the Council has been funded almost solely through Vote Conservation.
42. The Council's baseline funding in the 2023/24 financial year is \$800,000. Yearly increases (until 2025/26) were provided for in Budget 2022, with the Council's annual baseline funding reaching a new level of \$1.2 million from 2025/26. In addition, the Council has received Jobs for Nature funding of \$212,000 over 3 years (ending in June 2024) for the development of an online hunter education programme. This increased funding is accompanied by a greater need to demonstrate accountability and stewardship.

Sports fish and game bird management

About 178,000 freshwater sports fishing and game bird hunting licences are sold each year

43. About 140,000 freshwater sports fishing⁴ licences and 38,000 game bird⁵ hunting licences are sold each year. Figure 4 shows key sports fishing lakes and rivers across the country.
44. The number of sports fishing licence holders is gradually declining. While most anglers still have access to good fishing opportunities, in some cases the decline may be due to reduced habitat quality and recreational access. Changing recreational preferences could be a key factor.
45. The number of game bird licence holders is also declining, likely due to changing hunting demographics and recreational preferences, and reduced recreational access rather than reduced gamebird populations.

Sports fish and game birds are managed by Fish & Game New Zealand

46. Sports fish and game birds are managed under the Conservation Act by 12 regional fish and game councils and the New Zealand Fish and Game Council (known collectively as Fish & Game New Zealand). The exceptions to this are the Taupō trout fishery, where DOC carries out those functions for sports fish (discussed further below), and the Chatham Islands, where DOC manages the recreational hunting of birds.
47. The Fish & Game system is self-funded via sports fishing and game bird hunting licence fees. Regional fish and game councils are elected by sports fishing and game bird hunting licence holders, and the New Zealand Fish and Game Council (NZ Council) comprises one appointee from each regional council. Fish and game councils have a statutory function to act in the interests of those licence holders.
48. The NZ Council has a statutory function to advise the Minister on matters relating to sports fish and game birds.
49. DOC has a good understanding of the work Fish & Game does on sports fish and game bird hunting. We work closely with the NZ Council on annual sports fish and game bird hunting licence and season notices and have worked together on other issues, such as improving governance practices and advice to the Minister of Conservation on game preserves, management plans and guiding licensing. DOC is also a source of independent advice on Fish & Game matters.
50. The NZ Council is likely to seek to meet with you. If you are the responsible Minister, this would allow you an opportunity to outline your expectations in relation to the NZ Council's work and how you are kept briefed on issues and risks that arise.

DOC manages sports fish in the Taupō trout fishery

Unlike other regions where these functions are managed by Fish & Game, DOC manages sports fish in the Taupō trout fishery (Taupō Fishing District) as if it was a fish and game council. These arrangements were put in place as part of an agreement with local iwi, partly as recognition of the historic loss of their native fishery.

⁴ Sports fish include trout, salmon, other salmonids and three other species (perch, tench and rudd, collectively called 'coarse' fish) of introduced freshwater fish of interest to anglers.

⁵ Game birds are those listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Act 1953 and include some types of ducks, black swan, pheasant, partridge, pūkeko and quail.



Figure 4: Key sports fishing lakes and rivers and angler days per year. *Source: Fish & Game data*

DOC and Fish & Game agree that there should be no further expansion of sports fish into areas not yet occupied

51. Sports fish can impact native fisheries through predation and competition, although the relative importance of sports fish as a factor in the decline of native fish species is disputed.
52. DOC and Fish & Game agree that there should be no further expansion of sports fish; however, illegal releases of fish are still occurring. In some cases, structures are used to ensure that introduced fish cannot migrate into important native fish habitat (particularly habitat of rare species in Otago).
53. There is no consensus on when, whether or how the eradication of populations would be appropriate to allow the recovery of native species and ecosystems, particularly within wildlife sanctuaries and in habitats of rare species that are vulnerable to predation by salmonids or other sports fish.

Pest fish and habitat quality are key concerns for Fish & Game

54. A number of introduced pest fish (eg koi carp, gambusia) and aquatic weeds (eg oxygen weed) pose a risk to both native and sports fish populations.
55. DOC is a lead agency for pest fish management (alongside the Ministry for Primary Industries [MPI] and regional councils as biosecurity agencies). Key objectives of the overall programme are to prevent further introductions of potential pest species into New Zealand (and the release of aquarium species into the wild), eradicate species where that is feasible, prevent range expansion and reduce impacts at site.
56. At times, there have been tensions between DOC and/or regional councils and Fish and Game Councils where pest fish eradication, surveillance or fish monitoring would have some temporary impact on sports fish. In other cases, Fish & Game have been supportive of pest fish eradication.
57. Fish & Game is concerned about the state of a number of sports fisheries due to changes in habitat (water extraction, water pollution and disturbance of spawning). Fish & Game has been active in seeking improved water management, including by applying for Water Conservation Orders (issued pursuant to the Resource Management Act 1991 [RMA] to protect specific outstanding waterbodies). This has led to conflicts with other parties that need access to water, notably farmers.
58. The RMA provides for protection of the habitat of trout and salmon. Fish & Game made submissions to retain this provision as part of the RMA review in the previous term of government.
59. Fish & Game is concerned that DOC is not actively advocating for sports fish interests in RMA processes. Given Fish & Game has a funding stream for sports fishery advocacy, DOC has focused its limited resources to prioritise advocacy for other freshwater biodiversity and protected area values (for which no separate funding stream exists). Ongoing review of the priorities and scale of DOC's advocacy in RMA processes is required to manage within existing resources.

Landowners have interests in game bird hunting and freshwater fishing

60. Recreational game bird hunting can provide a service to landowners by keeping populations of birds, especially waterfowl and pūkeko, at levels that avoid adverse impacts on farming and other activities. Conflict can arise where landowners want to see bird populations reduced but hunters want to retain a higher population.
61. Some landowners create their own game bird hunting resource for the sport of pheasant shooting. The farming areas involved are called 'upland game preserves'.

62. While trout do not affect farming directly, there have been significant disagreements between Fish & Game councils and farming groups regarding the effects of farming on water quantity and quality and trout spawning, and in relation to landowners restricting access to fishing guides and their clients.
63. Fish & Game has been concerned about private landowners preventing or charging for access across their land. Some proposals for addressing that concern (eg closing an affected fishery if a landowner wishes to allow only specific licence holders on their land) have been declined by the Minister of Conservation. DOC has been encouraging Fish & Game to work with the Outdoor Access Commission to address specific access issues, without seeking to negatively affect private property rights.
64. Landowner groups such as Federated Farmers have concerns about game bird impacts (pasture use and fouling, crop damage) and sometimes disagree with Fish & Game advocacy in relation to fresh water.

Fish & Game governance was reviewed in 2021

65. An independent governance review was completed in 2021 and made a range of recommendations for reform. It highlighted governance issues within some fish and game councils.
66. The new National Chair and Chief Executive are implementing changes to improve governance practice to address some past issues, including building an integrity framework and empowering staff. DOC continues to be supportive of Fish & Game in progressing these changes, which will likely go some way in strengthening governance. DOC also considers that working closely with Fish & Game is beneficial for biodiversity and hunting and fishing outcomes, including improving recreational opportunities.
67. There may be further opportunities to drive efficiencies through legislative amendment. For instance, governance is too complex, and the independent governance review concluded that the number of fish and game councils could be roughly halved. This may result in administrative cost savings, which might be redeployed to front-line field officers or paid appointees for more diverse representation. DOC can provide further advice on more extensive reform options the timing/priority of this work alongside other priorities.
68. If you are the responsible Minister and anticipate making any statement about changes to the Fish & Game management regime in a meeting with a group other than Fish & Game, DOC can work with your office to ensure that you obtain a briefing from the New Zealand Fish and Game Council before the meeting.

You may be responsible for decisions on the management of sports fish and game birds with support from Fish & Game and DOC

69. The angling and hunting of sports fish and game are controlled through seasons, bag limits and other mechanisms. If you are the responsible Minister, you make some of the decisions on these matters in response to recommendations from Fish & Game, and with advice from DOC. The Ministerial functions are set out in the Conservation and Wildlife Acts.
70. The fish and game councils are also required to provide annual reports on their work to Parliament. The responsible Minister also approves their statutory 10-year sports fish and game management plans. In relation to other matters, including their advocacy work, the councils are largely autonomous, and the Minister has very limited ability to direct them.
71. Notices setting out sports fishing and game bird hunting conditions and the setting of licence fees to pay for management are issued annually, and the Minister is responsible for approving these.

Native freshwater fisheries and whitebait management

Native freshwater fisheries include whitebait, eels, kōura/freshwater crayfish and lamprey

72. Most recreational and commercial fishing of native species in New Zealand is focused on marine fish, but a number of freshwater fish are also important. These include whitebait, eels, kōura and lamprey. Many of these species have been identified as being at risk or threatened with extinction.
73. Whitebait are the juveniles of six native fish species. Adults of whitebait species live and spawn in fresh water, and the newly hatched fish swim out to sea before returning at about 6 months old in 'whitebait runs'. They are fished as they enter fresh waters.
74. The eel fishery has two species – shortfin eel and longfin eel. Both live in fresh water until they are ready to breed, when they swim out to sea and spawn (probably near Tonga), and then die. The juveniles swim back to New Zealand and then up rivers to their adult habitat. Eels are the top predators in our natural freshwater ecosystems, so fishing can have significant effects and is generally not allowed in protected areas such as national parks. Commercial eeling, the loss of lowland wetlands and the loss of access to waterbodies due to dams are considered major influences on endemic longfin eel populations.
75. The lamprey fishery is of significance to iwi. These fish live mostly at sea but spawn in fresh water, and the juveniles spend their early life as sedentary filter feeders in streams.
76. The kōura fishery is largely a cultural and recreational fishery but there has been some interest in commercial farming of this species.

The legislative frameworks for native freshwater fisheries are complex and cross agencies

77. In relation to native fish, DOC's responsibilities sit in the Conservation Act, but overlap strongly with the Fisheries Act 1996 powers of MPI. Between them, the two Acts and associated regulations manage fishing, fish passage, the disturbance of spawning sites and a number of other matters relating to fishing.
78. The relationship between the Conservation and Fisheries Acts for native freshwater fish management is complex, and further complicated by aquaculture and Biosecurity Act requirements. Whitebaiting is managed under conservation regulations. Commercial eel fishing is managed by MPI under the quota management system, and recreationally under the Amateur Fishing Regulations. However, DOC can prevent commercial eeling in certain types of public conservation land and waters. Such protected areas could contribute significant numbers of spawning adults to help sustain the fishery, which is understood to be a single stock nationally.
79. Clarity around the roles of respective Ministers over these areas will be necessary as part of defining the new Hunting and Fishing portfolio.
80. DOC recommends that advice on freshwater fisheries matters (other than sports fisheries and whitebaiting regulations) be prepared jointly with MPI and discussed with the Minister of Fisheries. Freshwater fisheries are of strong interest to most iwi, which is a matter you may have responsibilities for alongside the Minister of Fisheries.

Recent changes to the whitebait regulations have been phased in

81. The whitebait fishing regulations were reviewed in 2021 (for the first time since 1994) to make them more nationally consistent, with fewer provisions specific to the West Coast, a shorter fishing season, more opportunities for closed fishing areas and some additional restrictions on fishing. These new provisions are now fully implemented for the 2023 fishing season.

82. DOC's freshwater fishery regulations have never applied to Māori fishing rights. This means that customary freshwater fishing may therefore include the right to fish outside the whitebaiting season or use gear that is not authorised under the regulations. Māori whitebait fishing rights have always existed but have become more obvious due to the recent regulation changes, leading to increased community tensions in some areas, which can be difficult to manage. Working with tangata whenua can assist in aligning fishery management.
83. Some local rūnanga, iwi or hapū manage customary whitebait fishing in their rohe (area). Fishers relying on customary fishing rights would be expected to have some evidence that they hold those rights.

Whitebait fisheries management is strongly focused on compliance

84. The bulk of DOC's whitebait fishery management effort is focused on ensuring compliance with the fishing regulations during the fishing season, including through education.
85. There has been recent work undertaken to increase understanding of the biology of whitebait species and key drivers of population health. Known threats to the whitebait fishery are the loss of spawning sites, loss of fish passage (due to structures such as culverts and weirs), loss of productivity due to fish not having access to quality flood plain habitat during high flows, loss of wetlands and streams to infilling and piping, and loss of instream habitat quality. Large gaps remain in our understanding of what whitebaiting is occurring, the health of whitebait fisheries and the reasons for declines in whitebait runs.
86. The 2019 reform of freshwater fisheries provisions in the Conservation Act provided better tools for managing some of these issues, while the resource management system is critical for managing others.
87. Unlike the sports fish system, which is self-funded via sports fishing and game bird hunting licence fees, there is no funding stream for whitebait management. Most improvements to the whitebait fishery and its habitat are delivered through voluntary work by communities and landowners, and regulatory measures under the RMA. Key recent work includes the promotion of best practice by the Fish Passage Advisory Group (including the publication of guidelines), new freshwater management national direction and numerous local restoration programmes.
88. In 2021, Cabinet directed DOC to provide additional information on future management options after the completion of the current (2023) whitebaiting season. This work for the Cabinet report-back is in preparation. Any significant work would require a consideration of funding options, which could include seeking additional Crown funding.

The legislative and decision-making frameworks for hunting and fishing

Decision making on hunting and fishing is subject to a range of intersecting legislative requirements

89. Hunting and fishing matters that sit within the conservation system are:
- all matters relating to the Wild Animal Control Act 1977, which covers deer, tahr, chamois, feral goats and feral pigs; this Act manages control of those animals, recreational hunting, wild animal recovery operations, aerially assisted trophy hunting, safari parks and deer farming
 - specific functions under the Game Animal Council Act 2013
 - administration of the Wildlife Act 1953, which contains the provisions relating to catching or killing other wildlife, and the control of wildlife species causing damage
 - oversight of the sports fishing system managed by fish and game councils under the Conservation Act 1987 and management of the Taupō trout fishery by DOC
 - the management of some aspects of freshwater fisheries, including whitebaiting – other management functions sit within the Fisheries Act 1996
 - recreational activities in protected areas DOC administers, including ensuring that firearms are used safely and appropriately, and access is available.
90. A summary of key legislation relevant to the portfolio is provided in Appendix 2.
91. Management decisions must comply with the Conservation and National Parks General Policies, conservation management strategies, and conservation management plans (including sports fish and game management plans). These regulatory instruments are set by different decision-makers and under strict statutory processes, which include consultation and public notification.
92. Ministers determine any Conservation General Policies, the NZCA sets the National Parks General Policy, and conservation management strategies and plans are approved by the NZCA after having regard to any recommendations from the Minister. This complex regulatory framework provides a number of checks and balances designed to ensure that expertise and stakeholder engagement is brought to bear in implementing the law and managing conservation areas and natural and historic resources. It also provides a hierarchy and cascade of controls that limit policy options, means that change can be slow and places a high administrative burden on the regulatory system.
93. A wider government review of this framework may be desirable in the medium term.

DOC has initiated a review of the Wildlife Act 1953

94. Currently, the Wildlife Act 1953 deals with hunting and fishing in a limited way and primarily regulates the hunting of game birds. Fish & Game is the statutory body for managing, maintaining and enhancing sports fish and game birds and advocating for their habitats, and the Wildlife Act contains a number of provisions that empower Fish & Game to perform certain functions in relation to game birds.
95. DOC has been conducting a review of the Wildlife Act over 2022 and 2023, which has included significant engagement with statutory bodies, Māori and key stakeholders to identify the key issues with the legislation and aspirations for future species management legislation.

96. In July 2023, the previous Government agreed to repeal and replace the Wildlife Act to address the key issues identified, including:
- the lack of appropriate tools to adequately protect indigenous species
 - barriers to the fulfilment of some of our obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi
 - the lack of coherency with other conservation and natural resource legislation and regulatory tools.
97. Development of policy options for a new legislative framework is underway with input from an independent advisory group, the Strategic Oversight Group (SOG). Members of the SOG bring diverse skills and expertise in tourism, science, game animal management and governance, te ao Māori (the Māori world view), conservation, law, and environmental policy. A key area the SOG are providing advice on is a framework for managing indigenous and introduced species.
98. If the review continues under the new Government, Ministerial direction will be sought on the policy options developed in April/May 2023, s9(2)(f)(iv)

Your portfolio is closely linked to the Conservation portfolio

99. Key areas of the Conservation portfolio you may have an interest in include:
- the management of visitor assets (eg backcountry huts) and tracks
 - pest control supporting biodiversity or land status
 - kauri disease management (feral pigs are a potential vector)
 - the current review of the Wildlife Act (discussed above).
100. You will also be interested in other Ministers' portfolios, including matters relating to biosecurity, fisheries and firearms legislation and policy.
101. It will be important for you to work closely with the Minister of Conservation on key decisions to ensure effective alignment. Hunting and fishing legislation is heavily integrated with the Conservation Act. The Minister of Conservation also holds responsibility for a series of related matters, such as predator control and the use of firearms on protected land, which have important links to hunting and fishing.
102. Close working between the portfolios will support (where possible) 'win-win' outcomes that benefit hunting and fishing, biosecurity, biodiversity, and recreation.
103. A further focus of the portfolio is likely to be on the governance of hunting/fishing matters. Many of the statutory functions for hunting and fishing sit with non-government entities, notably fish and game councils and the Game Animal Council. There is a recognised need for improved governance of fish and game councils and further work is needed in this area, as discussed above. Because these bodies are set up under conservation legislation, the responsible Minister is accountable for their performance and the effects their decisions have on other parties.

Some Ministerial decision-making responsibilities are usually delegated

104. Once your delegations are confirmed, you will be asked to determine what decisions you wish to delegate to the Director-General of Conservation. Several statutory Ministerial responsibilities are routinely delegated to the Director-General, with further delegations from the Director-General to DOC staff (eg decisions on some 'concessions' and permits that regulate activities and business on public conservation land). This ensures that decisions are made at the lowest appropriate level for efficiency and effectiveness and supports timely decision making.
105. If the Director-General considers that a delegated matter is of sufficient national interest or importance, the Minister will be asked whether it should be referred to them for decision, regardless of any standing delegation.

Vote Conservation funding for wild and game animal management

106. Depending on how the Hunting and Fishing portfolio is structured, you may be the responsible Minister for appropriations in Vote Conservation or a new Vote Hunting and Fishing. DOC is likely to be the department responsible for administering the Vote or these appropriations. As mentioned in paragraph 4, we can support you to clarify the scope of your portfolio, including associated Budget funding.
107. As the responsible Minister, you will receive advice from DOC over the course of the financial year, explaining your role in and decisions needed on:
 - October and March Baseline Updates
 - Estimates and Supplementary Estimates
 - Late In-Principle Expense Transfers (IPET) in June
 - Select Committee Estimates Examination material
 - the Budget process.
108. Game Animal Council funding is covered above in paragraph 42. Fish and game councils are self-funding, as described in paragraph 47.

Current funding for wild animal management

109. Budget 2022 increased investment in deer management and goat control by \$30 million over 4 years. This comprises \$5.27 million for 2022/23, \$9.33 million for 2023/24, \$7.47 million for 2024/25 and \$7.93 million in 2025/26.
110. National expenditure on deer management and goat control for 2023/24 is currently being collated, but historically DOC has invested approximately \$3.7 million in goat control and approximately \$600,000 in deer management. For 2023/24, \$1.24 million is also to be invested in tahr management (including control and monitoring) and \$520,000 in pig management associated with kauri disease (approximately \$120,000 is from Vote Biosecurity but will be delivered by DOC).

Financial sustainability challenges

111. DOC is undertaking an in-depth review of its expenditure (the Financial Sustainability Review) to inform decisions we can take now and to provide advice to Ministers on choices about future conservation outcomes and investment to shift onto a more sustainable financial path.
112. The Financial Sustainability work was initially driven by a Treasury-led baseline review as part of Budget 2022. However, the tighter fiscal environment and wider focus on efficiency, effectiveness and savings make this work more pertinent.
113. The review is being delivered in two phases over 2023 and 2024. Phase 1 is complete and took a deeper look at DOC's current expenditure, performance and cost drivers, as well as potential options for further exploration in Phase 2. The review has confirmed that the current size and scale of DOC is unaffordable on current baselines, and significantly more (and more cost-effective) conservation work is needed to meet current responsibilities and government objectives. In this context, the Government will have to make more explicit choices about the relative priorities and activities of DOC across its biodiversity, heritage, land manager and recreation roles as part of future investment and Budget decisions.
114. DOC is already making changes to its operating model to improve efficiency, effectiveness and productivity, and work is underway to develop advice on savings options that may be requested.

Government priorities

115. We understand that you may wish to progress the priorities outlined below. This briefing provides initial context and we can provide more detailed follow-up advice on request.

Designating herds of special interest (HOSI)

116. Populations of wild animals on public conservation land (but not private land) can potentially be managed as HOSI. Section 16 of the Game Animal Council Act sets out the statutory process for designating HOSI. The first step is to make a HOSI management plan to provide clarity on how a herd would be managed, including how that would affect different hunter interest groups and others.
117. Once designated, HOSI animals will then cease to be subject to the Wild Animal Control Act, and instead be managed under the Game Animal Council Act by the Minister, who may delegate some functions to the Game Animal Council. Management must be in accordance with the HOSI management plan.
118. There are currently no HOSI. This means that there is no tried-and-tested approach to developing a management plan. However, DOC and the Game Animal Council are developing templates and structured guidance for designating herds. DOC will have this completed by late January / early February.
119. The hunting sector has signalled interest in three potential HOSI candidates: sika deer in central North Island, tahr, and Wapiti in Fiordland National Park. There are issues that will need to be carefully considered. For instance, establishing a HOSI in a national park would present challenges when devising a management plan, including interactions with National Parks Act 1980 provisions.
120. Furthermore, issues such as tensions between the various hunting interest groups and how herd management would be funded would need to be addressed. DOC can provide further advice on progressing HOSI candidate herds.
121. s(9)(2)(g)(i)

Role of the Game Animal Council

122. We understand that you may wish to consider giving the Game Animal Council more direct control over game animals and a role to actively promote New Zealand as a world-class hunting destination.
123. All statutory decisions relating to game animals are currently the responsibility of the Minister but some decisions relating to HOSI can be delegated to the Game Animal Council. The functions of the Game Animal Council are set out in the Game Animal Council Act. Expanding or altering them would require legislative change.
124. If the Game Animal Council was given functions that had effects on private interests, other adjustments to the legislation might also be needed, including potentially changes to the membership of the Council and the extent of control Ministers have over their decisions.
125. The promotion of New Zealand as a hunting destination by the Game Animal Council is not currently a formal statutory function, but the Council could work with Tourism New Zealand, which has responsibilities for international tourism. The Minister responsible for tourism will have an interest in this. We can provide further advice as to how this could work, any limits on the Game Animal Council's role here and how this could be funded.

Biosecurity Act application to game animals and sports fish

126. A species is a 'pest' if it has been designated as such under a pest management plan under the Biosecurity Act 1993 and is a 'pest' only in those locations to which the plan applies. Any changes to the Biosecurity Act (which is administered by the MPI) and/or how it interacts with the Wild Animal Control Act would require important matters to be carefully worked through, including potential unintended consequences for:
- the primary sector; for example, managing feral wild animals under the Biosecurity Act can be important for controlling TB vectors, reducing parasite loads in livestock and reducing damage to forestry plantings
 - regions by reducing the ability of regional councils to allocate funding to wild animal control.
127. DOC can work with MPI to provide advice to joint Ministers on these matters if you wish to know more.

Establishing national animal management plans

128. National management plans for game animals (which are different from HOSI management plans) implement objectives and policies for the management of the species concerned – for example, the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993.
129. The different hunting groups often have contrasting plan objectives for game animal management, and where hunters agree, other conservation non-governmental organisations (eg Forest and Bird) may oppose.
130. All parties agree that animal numbers need to be reduced in places, but do not agree on a long-term strategy.
131. DOC is achieving some progress by getting multi-group agreement for individual game animal control programmes. You could choose to work through these groups or advance new national management plans. DOC can provide advice on the merits and drawbacks of both options.

Public access for hunting and fishing

132. A key issue for recreational hunters and fishers is being able to access public conservation land and fisheries through private or other public land (eg unformed legal roads). This includes certain restrictions such as those on the use of helicopters in 'wilderness areas'.
133. DOC seeks to ensure practical public access to public conservation land, including across private land, and works with all parties to enable this where possible. However, DOC cannot guarantee access in some cases, or meet all associated access costs everywhere.
134. Sometimes, there can be practical barriers to access particular areas (such as the requirement to move through private property for which no permission has been given). DOC can provide advice on some of these localised matters, including context and any options to rectify where they might exist.
135. The Outdoor Access Commission has responsibility for seeking to resolve issues relating to public access, and you may wish to meet with the Commission to identify how the Game Animal Council and Fish & Game can best work with them to resolve issues affecting hunters and fishers where this does not involve public conservation land.

Huts supporting hunting and fishing

136. We understand that you wish to create a Huts of Recreational Importance Partnership between DOC and volunteer clubs to maintain and manage New Zealand's backcountry huts.

137. It is widely acknowledged that a number of DOC's 967 backcountry huts are aging and have maintenance issues. This issue is not confined to backcountry huts but is a wider issue for DOC's visitor network generally.
138. The use of many backcountry huts is very low and does not justify significant allocation of limited resources under the current approach to prioritisation. The most recent conservation survey (2022/23) indicated just 6% of those surveyed considered themselves active users most likely to use backcountry huts.
139. DOC has a comprehensive work programme underway that is aimed at developing options for the future sustainability of the whole visitor network (huts, tracks and other infrastructure). Consideration of the needs of visitors and user groups is central to this work.
140. DOC would welcome a discussion on options to manage backcountry huts with third parties and agrees there is potential, although new or reprioritised funding would have to be found to significantly lift the resources available for maintenance. DOC already provides some funding to support volunteers in maintaining some huts and tracks in the backcountry through the Backcountry Trust.
141. DOC is also working on improving cost recovery for the use of DOC assets, including huts. Funds generated here can be re-invested back into the network to improve visitor experiences, including for recreational user groups.

Additional support for Fish & Game

142. The fish and game councils are funded from sports fishing and game bird hunting licence fees, which the responsible Minister sets after considering advice from the councils.
143. A key current issue for Fish & Game is its governance arrangements, which are essential to ensure that the licence fee income is appropriately managed and used to deliver the priority services desired by licence holders. The fish and game councils are working to address issues identified in the independent review of governance and may seek legislation changes as a result of this work.
144. Protection of trout and salmon habitat is provided for in resource management legislation, and Fish & Game will want this retained in any future resource management system. DOC can provide advice on any changes in the resource management system as and when required.

Licensing for recreational fishing and hunting

145. As mentioned earlier, the fishing of marine species (and freshwater fish that have migrated to sea) is a matter for the Minister of Fisheries and MPI. DOC is not aware of any proposals for licensing of marine recreational fishing.
146. The current freshwater sports fishing and recreational game bird hunting licensing system managed by Fish & Game provides almost all fish and game council funding. A few highly sought-after trout fisheries must be booked before fishing to manage angling pressure and angler expectations.
147. No licences are required when hunting wild animals. However, a hunting permit is needed from DOC to hunt on public conservation land. This is required under legislation (landowner consent to use a firearm), for health and safety reasons, and to transfer ownership of the wild animal (upon death) from the Crown to the hunter.
148. In some locations or on land of certain status, there are other restrictions on hunting, or opportunities to hunt may be subject to ballot systems (with associated fees). Hunters and fishers also need permission from any private landowner to cross their land or use firearms on or from their land.

149. Different groups have different perspectives on the balance between benefits and impacts. For example, while most Fish & Game licence holders appear to support Fish & Game management of sports fishing and game bird hunting, others have questioned the value delivered for the cost.
150. There are no current proposals to change controls on hunting and fishing by introducing or removing licences and similar requirements s9(2)(f)(iv)

Representation of hunting and fishing sectors on the NZCA and Conservation Boards

151. We understand that you wish to consider how hunting and fishing interests are represented on the NZCA and Conservation Boards.
152. The NZCA and Conservation Boards are statutory bodies appointed by the Minister of Conservation. The NZCA has some 'permanent members', in that the Minister appoints the members on the advice of particular bodies. Boards have no permanent members, apart from some provided as part of Treaty settlement arrangements. DOC supports the Minister with appointments, and you may wish to work with the Minister of Conservation in relation to appointments.
153. Any formal change in Authority or Conservation Board membership requirements would need legislative amendment, which would likely lead to calls from some stakeholders for a wider review of the role and function of those bodies.
154. There are also other, faster options available for greater representation of hunting and fishing interests to support the progress of your work. DOC can provide further advice on these options.

Reviewing WARO and AATH

155. Work to improve the WARO and AATH systems is already underway.
156. DOC is currently identifying whether there are ways in which the impacts and benefits of AATH can be better managed. Further advice can be provided to you once that work is complete.
157. In relation to WARO, DOC is undertaking work to ensure that regulatory controls on operators under conservation legislation are appropriate and efficiently administered. DOC recently undertook a 'system analysis' of WARO. Key stakeholders from within and outside the industry were interviewed and participated in a workshop in order to identify where such efficiencies or improvements could be made. The report from that work is due this year.
158. The management of WARO and AATH is also regularly adjusted when concessions are applied for, with changes informed by broader analysis.

Supporting mahinga kai and Māori food gathering

159. We understand that you wish to strengthen support for mahinga kai and Māori food gathering. The regime in place for wild animals generally does not impede subsistence hunting; however, any new management approach would need to consider the effect it might have on local subsistence hunting, including by Māori.
160. The sports fishing regime does restrict food gathering (because a licence is needed, and there are closed seasons and bag limits). There is also the potential for sports fish to impact native fish species that are important to Māori. This matter has been addressed in some Treaty arrangements (eg for Lake Taupō/Taupōmoana). Any potential adjustment to the Fish & Game system requires careful consideration and discussions with the fish and game councils and licence holders.

161. Fishing rules for native species generally do not apply to customary harvest, and iwi have been consulted on recent changes to whitebaiting regulations and other changes. A key interest for iwi is to restore the productivity of those fisheries, particularly through the restoration of habitat and the appropriate regulation of activities that can damage waterbodies. DOC has many partnerships in place addressing those issues.

Immediate priorities and key upcoming decisions

162. This section provides a snapshot of key dates and immediate priorities for the portfolio based on current information. Officials will brief you on all these topics when you require further information.
163. The following items are currently on the policy work programme or are decisions you may have to make within your first 100 days (depending on what delegations you are responsible for). Once the scope of the portfolio has been finalised and you have discussed your priorities for the work programme with officials, including manifesto commitments, additional items will be scheduled.

Potential key decisions and priorities (depending on Ministerial delegations)

TOPIC	DESCRIPTION	DRIVER	TIMING
Advice on your priorities	DOC proposes to send you a briefing with initial advice on advancing your priorities.	Your priorities	November/December 2023
Delegations	Determine what decisions you wish to delegate to the Director-General. Several statutory Ministerial responsibilities are routinely delegated to the Director-General, with further delegations from the Director-General to DOC staff (eg decisions on some concessions). DOC will brief you on delegations in the coming weeks.	Statutory responsibilities	November/December 2023
Report on WARO regulatory controls and the permitting process	DOC has been working to ensure that regulatory controls on WARO operators under conservation legislation are appropriate and efficiently administered. A report on this work is due before the end of 2023. Separately, DOC will also provide you with advice relating to the current processing round of bulk WARO permits	Regulatory stewardship	December 2023
Game licences, fees and forms notice	A statutory notice setting the fees for game bird hunting licences.	Statutory responsibilities	January 2024
Wildlife Act review	A Cabinet report-back on policy options for new species legislation to replace the Wildlife Act is programmed.	Cabinet report-back	You will be briefed in early 2024 on the review process and policy options; report back to Cabinet in Q1 of 2024
Open season for game notice	A statutory notice setting the game bird hunting season duration, bag limits and other hunting conditions.	Statutory responsibilities	February 2024
Report on AATH management	DOC is currently identifying whether there are ways in which AATH effects (positive and negative) on protected areas, other recreational uses and wild animal control can be better managed. The report on this is due in 2024.	Regulatory stewardship	April 2024
Future management options for whitebait	DOC is preparing a Cabinet report-back that will provide information on future management options after the completion of the current (2023) whitebaiting season.	Cabinet report-back	Q2 2024

Key people at DOC

164. Led by Director-General Penny Nelson, the Senior Leadership Team, along with the support team in your office and relevant managers and subject matter experts, will be the main DOC officials you interact with on a week-to-week basis.

165. The Senior Leadership Team's details are as follows:



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166. Key officials for this portfolio will also include:



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Appendix 1: Snapshot of the Wild Animals Management Programme

A snapshot of the

Wild Animals Management Programme

Highlights of 2022/23
and the outlook for 2023/24



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

Introduction

The Department of Conservation's (DOC's) Wild Animals Management Programme (the Programme) manages populations of wild goats, deer, pigs, and tahr at priority sites to protect native plants and habitats and prevent the spread of wild animals into new areas.

DOC is working towards achieving the goals of Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (ANZBS). ANZBS sets a vision for biodiversity in Aotearoa New Zealand from 2020 to 2050. Objective 11 in the strategy is to ensure “biological threats and pressures are reduced through management”. It describes three goals for reducing the impact of introduced wild animals or ‘browsers’.

In June 2022, Te Ara ki Mua was launched, a national framework to improve the management of deer, tahr, chamois, goats, and pigs. In partnership with whānau, hapū, and iwi, DOC and the New Zealand Game Animal Council will implement this framework. It is designed to support everyone involved (from landowners to central government) to work collectively to achieve the ANZBS goals. The framework describes actions to reduce the impact of wild animals while balancing different cultural and recreational values.

DOC is responsible for managing wild animals on public conservation land and has a leadership role in the wild animal management sector.

This document provides a summary of DOC's Programme achievements over the 2022/23 financial year and plans for the 2023/24 year.

Wild deer, goats, pigs, and tahr: Why management matters

Wild goats, deer, pigs, and tahr eat and damage native plants and habitats – in many places, they threaten how ecosystems function. They can change the type and number of plants present, change soil composition, and prevent forest regeneration. Managing wild animals to reverse these effects will help protect native plants and habitats and increase forests' health and resilience in dealing with climate change.

DOC monitors sites on public conservation land across the country for the faecal pellets (droppings) of deer, goats, sheep, tahr, and chamois. This provides our teams with an indicator of wild animal numbers. From 2013 to 2022, the number of faecal pellets almost doubled, indicating growth in wild animal populations.



Forest damage by wild goats. *Photo: Daniel Van der Lubbe, DOC.*

Highlights of 2022/23

It has been a big year for the Programme. Budget 2022 saw a \$30-million increase in investment in deer management and goat control over the next four years.

Increasing capacity and capability to deliver

The extra investment from Budget 2022 allowed the Programme to build internal capacity and capability to enhance delivery. DOC expanded the existing programme with an additional \$5.2 million for the 2022/23 financial year.

This year, the Programme has:

- established a national programme team to increase efficiencies, work at a larger scale, and deliver on the extra investment
- set up a centralised procurement process for professional ground hunters
- made improvements to operational best practice and set up a wild goat best practice network group
- improved the Safe Aerial Hunter System and rolled out a new aerial hunting training course.

In addition, the Programme developed a tool to help DOC make better decisions about where to manage wild animals. There are more places with wild animals than we can afford to actively work in, so it's crucial we are clear about where we should focus our efforts and why. To assist with this, we've created a tool that considers things like the environment, the types of animals present, and the threats those animals pose. It also considers practical information, like how easy it is to do the work, how much the work will cost, and who else is working there. This tool will help us decide where to prioritise our efforts when managing wild animals. We will be improving this tool over time.

Management and control operations

This year, DOC's Regional Operation teams substantially increased their operational delivery work.

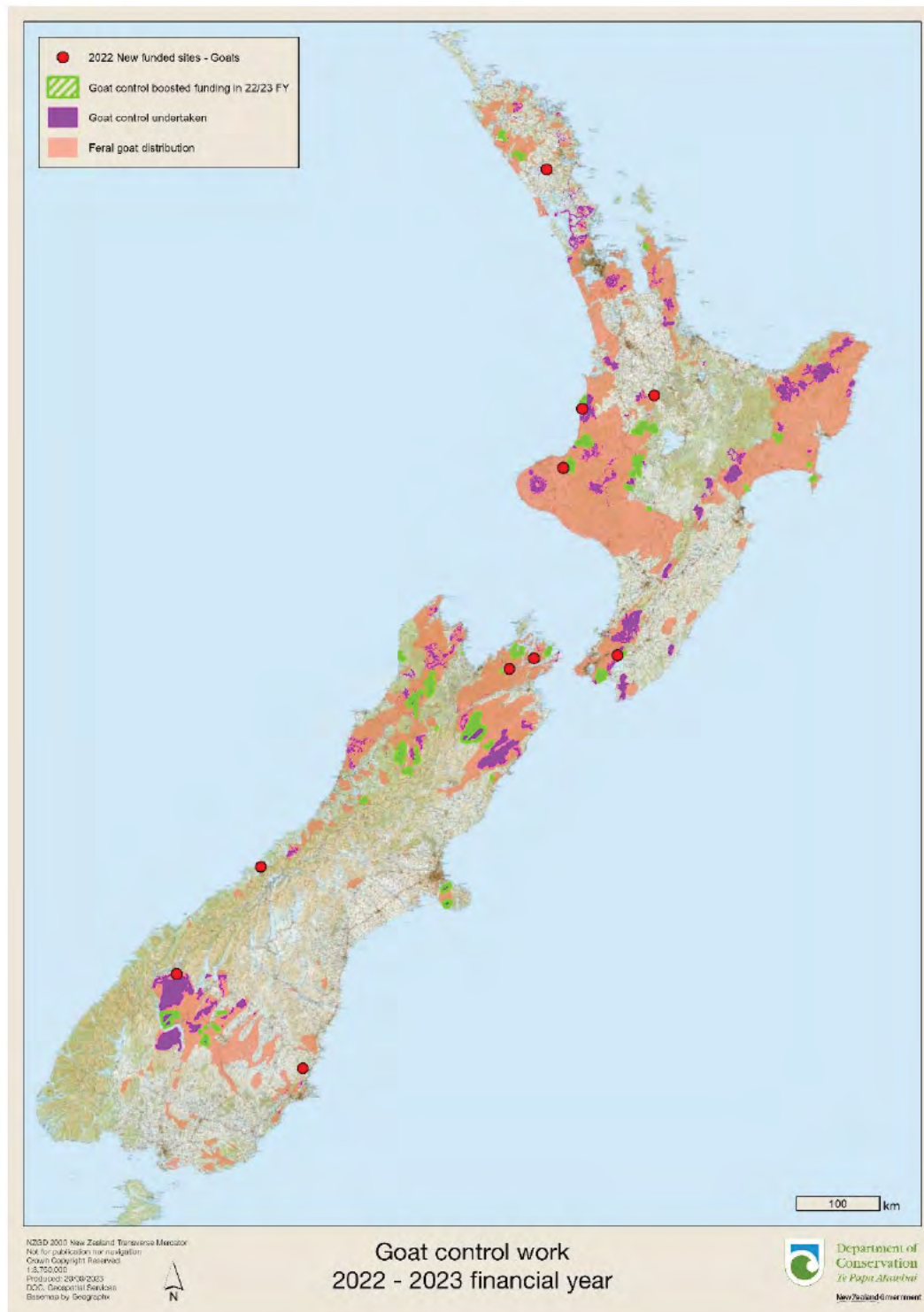
Wild deer and goats are present throughout New Zealand, becoming more widespread and abundant and having an impact on ecosystems across the country.

In 2022/23, deer management and goat control had a significant boost, with a particular focus on goat control. Investment increased by \$2.7 million. We delivered an additional 196,000 hectares of goat control and an additional 48,000 hectares of deer control over the year.

As well as control operations, other operational work has included: conducting compliance checks on deer farms, undertaking surveys to detect pockets of wild deer in Northland, and carrying out eradication checks.

For example, this year with the extra investment, the Programme was able to run an intensive check to determine the success of removing goats from the Crooked Mary / Lake Christabel block in the western South Island. No traces of goats were found. Thanks to the successful removal operations over several years, funding and efforts can now move from ongoing control at this site to goat control at other priority conservation sites.

In 2022/23, the Programme controlled wild goat populations at the sites shown on the map below.



Tahr control programme

The Programme developed an annual operational plan to control tahr and achieve the objectives of the Himalayan Thar Management Policy 1991 and Himalayan Thar (tahr) Control Plan 1993.

The tahr control operational plan for 2022/23 was successfully delivered. DOC's official control operations removed over 6,300 tahr from July 2022 to June 2023, including over 900 through ground-based hunting in the Hooker-Landsborough and Adams Wilderness Areas. Recreational hunting from known sources (eg, West Coast tahr ballots) removed over 1,300 additional animals; the unreported recreational contribution was likely to be significantly more.

2022/23 was also a big year for tahr monitoring. We completed a three-year process to remeasure historic tussock plots to assess browse impact. Additionally, we piloted a new tahr browse impact assessment method and initiated surveys to update estimates on the tahr population within management units. Results/analyses from all three projects are expected during 2023/24.

Bradshaw Deer Control Programme, Fiordland: Protecting alpine ecosystems

Managing deer in the Bradshaw region of Fiordland National Park helps protect the deer-free Secretary Island and the Murchison Mountains, home of the takahē. This is important as we need to protect takahē food species from deer browsing.



© James Reardon

Takahē in the Murchison Mountains, Fiordland National Park. *Photo: JamesReardon.org.*

Historically, alpine plant communities sensitive to deer browse have been protected by commercial venison recovery operators removing deer. This was until the industry experienced a downturn between 2019 and 2023.

A target of more than 600 deer was set to help protect the alpine vegetation, informed by an alpine deer browse monitoring programme. In the 2022 season, 751 deer were successfully removed from a combination of commercial venison recovery (319 removed) and DOC-led non-commercial control (442 removed).

Coordination and collaboration

Wild animals move across both public and private land. Increasing coordination between iwi/hapū, landowners, agencies, and hunters has been a key focus for the Programme to effectively manage wild animals.

The Programme has:

- established a national coordination group (The group is a forum to prioritise and coordinate actions for effective wild animal management. There is a diverse range of organisations involved, including the conservation sector, hunting sector, Māori organisations, primary industry groups, as well as research institutions.)
- worked with Northland Regional Council to support a deer-free Northland vision and plan an eradication for Russell Forest
- contributed funding to support a Jobs for Nature project with Sika Foundation to manage deer in the Kaimanawa Remote Experience Zone, which is approximately 15,000 hectares. In 2022, as part of the Sika Foundation's Adaptive Deer Management Plan, a total of 338 animals were removed, using a combination of facilitated recreational hunter access and professional ground and aerial hunting. In early 2023, monitoring began on seedling growth and faecal pellet counts to help understand changes in deer abundance. Deer management operations will continue in 2023/24, and we will continue monitoring to

understand how the forest is recovering in response to these efforts.



Canopy collapse in Kaimanawa Forest due to a range of natural factors. Deer likely play a role in preventing canopy trees from regenerating. *Photo: Sika Foundation.*



Trail cam footage of sika deer in Kaimanawa Forest. Deer can prevent forest regeneration. *Photo: Sika Foundation.*

Outlook for 2023/24

Wild animal management is complex and resource intensive, and different sites have different needs.

Management and control operations

The Programme priorities for the upcoming year will be to maintain (or achieve) wild-animal-free areas, prevent wild animals spreading into new areas, and enhance and expand existing operations.

The Programme aims to expand deer management and goat control work where possible. Plans for 2023/24 include:

- intensifying goat control and expanding into new areas
- continuing and expanding deer management in Kaimanawa Forest in partnership with the Sika Foundation
- continuing and expanding deer management in Fiordland
- implementing the 2023/24 tahr control operational plan.

A key focus will be on continuing to manage and protect deer-free areas, including a significant focus on Northland, along with islands in Fiordland and the Marlborough Sounds.

Prioritising work comes with tough choices, for example, keeping areas deer and goat free comes at the expense of carrying out work in other places to manage numbers.

Coordination and collaboration

- Draft a Deer Management Plan for Ruahine Forest Park with the community.
- Work with regional councils to develop plans for wild animal management across private and public land.
- Work with the Game Animal Council to better align recreational and commercial hunting with conservation objectives.
- Run a national wild goat hunting competition in partnership with the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association.
- Continue to work with Tiakina Kauri of Biosecurity New Zealand to support pig management in kauri lands - pigs are thought to be the main wild animal vector of kauri dieback.



Wild Deer Free Northland

The Programme will continue working with Northland Regional Council to achieve a wild-deer-free Northland. This will include sika eradication in Russell Forest and compliance work on deer farms.

To complement Wild Deer Free Northland, operations will also aim to limit wild goats to safeguard native plants from both deer and goat damage.

Northland is home to several unique native plant species, including the pictured native *hibiscus diversifolius* - a threatened plant of the Northland region that is highly palatable to introduced wild animals. Managing wild animals can help safeguard native plants like this one.

Native hibiscus diversifolius in flower, Te Pahi, Far North. Credit: Peter James de Lange.



DOC staff, with their dogs, on a wild goat eradication check. *Photo: Owen Kilgour, DOC.*

Increasing capacity and capability to deliver

The Programme will continue to build our internal capacity and capability to work at a larger scale and deliver on the extra investment.

In 2023/24, we plan to:

- continue with monitoring design work to assess the links between deer and goat control, abundance, and ecological outcomes (This knowledge will be critical for future investment and effective management.)
 - increase communications and share the story of DOC's wild animal management work to help raise awareness of the issue, opportunities, and encourage collective action
- run workshops with DOC's professional hunting contractors to understand challenges

they face and ensure the hunting sector has the necessary tools and support for the job

- scope a review on policies and legislation related to wild animal management to understand how such policies can be best applied across agencies
- begin upgrading the hunting permit system
- finalise the independent system analysis on wild animal recovery operations to better understand potential issues and improvements
- initiate a similar analysis for aerially assisted trophy hunting
- investigate the benefits of standardising our ammunition supply and centralising our procurement
- implement a new policy for detecting wild animals using trained dogs to maintain consistent and reliable standards.

Appendix 2: Legislation related to the portfolio

Conservation Act 1987, National Parks Act 1980, Reserves Act 1977, Wildlife Act 1953

These statutes manage almost all of New Zealand's protected areas, including conservation parks, ecological areas, marginal strips, stewardship land, national parks, many types of reserves and wildlife sanctuaries. Many reserves are managed by local authorities, reserve boards, iwi or other organisations, and they include recreation reserves, reserves for specific government purposes (eg many public halls, council buildings, lighthouses and other public facilities are on reserve land) and historic reserves. Each protected area is managed for a specific purpose, which will affect how introduced and native animals, and hunting and fishing activities are managed on that land.

Conservation Act 1987

This Act sets out DOC's functions, and (in the First Schedule) sets out all the enactments DOC administers. Section 4 of the Act requires DOC to interpret and administer those enactments so as to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. The Act contains the concession provisions that apply to commercial activities on any land administered by DOC, including commercial hunting and hunting and fishing guiding businesses, and management planning processes that apply to all DOC's work. The NZCA and Conservation Boards are set up under the Act, and have a role in management planning and are the decision-maker for some matters relating to hunting and fishing (eg whether introduced species in national parks need to be eradicated).

Fish and game councils are set up under the Act, and the controls relating to sports fisheries are set out in the Act or regulations under the Act. The Act and regulations also control whitebaiting and include many of the other controls relating to indigenous freshwater fisheries and pest fish (alongside the Fisheries Act).

Wildlife Act 1953

This Act manages 'wildlife'. All birds, all terrestrial mammals (other than wild animals managed under the Wild Animal Control Act), and all reptiles and amphibians are automatically considered wildlife if they enter New Zealand (eg sea snakes) or naturalise here. Specific marine species and invertebrates can also be declared to be wildlife by Order in Council, but freshwater fish and plants cannot.

Wildlife is automatically fully protected, unless it is placed in a schedule to the Act that makes it partially protected or unprotected. One of those schedules establishes a class of wildlife referred to as 'game birds', which can be hunted in accordance with rules set by the fish and game councils under the Act.

Most introduced mammals have been declared to be unprotected, so can be hunted at any time unless other legislation restricts hunting. There are also partially protected species subject to customary harvest (eg tītī). Where management under the Fisheries Act is considered to be inappropriate, the Wildlife Act has been used to provide full protection, and that has been done for corals, two groper species and some sharks.

Wild Animal Control Act 1977

The Wild Animal Control Act was established to coordinate the control of a number of introduced mammals – deer, feral goats, tahr, chamois, feral pigs, wallabies and possums. The latter two species were removed from the Act in 2012. All wild animals are declared to be the property of the Crown, and can only be hunted, moved and held in accordance with the Act. DOC can enter private land to carry out control. The Minister has a wide range of powers under the Act, including to make plans and policies and regulate deer farming and safari parks.

Game Animal Council Act 2013

This Act established the Game Animal Council and sets out its functions, which include a range of advisory, research and promotion functions. 'Game animals' are wild animals other than feral goats. The Act also provides the Minister with powers to manage herds in certain circumstances but does not directly alter the management of game animals unless those powers are used.

