

21 March 2025

Whare Kaupapa
Atawhai/Conservation House
18 Manners Street
Te Aro, Wellington
6011
doc.govt.nz
Ref: OIAD-4941

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 21 February 2025, in which you asked for:

Please supply the real science you are using to pest control Stewart Island?

New Zealand is facing a biodiversity crisis, with about 80% of our bird species at risk of extinction. The biggest threat to our wildlife is introduced mammalian predators such as rats, stoats, possums, and feral cats. On Stewart Island feral cats have a particularly significant impact on the island's birdlife and have caused the extinction of several species from the Island. Many species that remain on the island are in sharp decline. A good example is the pukunui / Southern New Zealand dotterel which only breed on Stewart Island. Once common throughout the South Island, the total population of these birds is now estimated at only 101 individuals.

For many years the Department has run a ground-based predator control operation to protect breeding pukunui / Southern New Zealand dotterel from feral cat predation. While this has provided some relief, ground-based methods have not been able to operate at a sufficiently large scale to protect all the breeding habitat. Feral cats are known to travel significant distances to secure their prey, meaning that predator control efforts must take place over much larger areas to ensure success. Pukunui also breed in small numbers, scattered across large areas of the island, making the work logistically and practically challenging. These facts, alongside Stewart Island's rugged and remote location, and impenetrable scrub areas, and the rapidly declining Pukunui population, have informed the Department's decision to urgently investigate a change in predator control approach.

Aerial applied 1080 is the best tool currently available for use across large areas in environments like Stewart Island. This is because it can be applied at a landscape scale quickly, making the most of short weather windows. Bait can be applied evenly within the home range of all target species, despite the challenges that terrain and vegetation can present. This method also removes the need to service and maintain an extended network of tracks, traps, and associated infrastructure.

The Department monitors native species to measure the effectiveness of our predator control. Over 20 years of studies and peer reviewed research demonstrate that one aerial 1080 operation every few years can effectively reduce predator numbers to enable the survival and breeding success of our native species. Below are some publicly available resources on the use of 1080 operations for predator control in New Zealand:

You can read about how 1080 operations have supported our native species' survival on the Department's website at

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/methods-of-control/1080/proof-that-1080-is-protecting-our-species/>

Recently the Predator Free Rakiura group convened a panel of experts (including a toxicologist, freshwater scientist, conservation scientist, etc.) to share information on 1080 and its use with the Stewart Island community. The presentations were recorded and provide a wealth of information on 1080 – how it works, what happens to it in the environment, and its use. You can find the recording here: <https://www.predatorfreerakiura.org.nz/about-us/stories/1080-information-sessions/>

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā



Ben Reddiex
Director National Programmes
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai