

## Tahr Control Operational Plan: October 2018 – August 2019 (dated 18 October 2018) version 1.1

This Plan is approved by: Andy Roberts, Operations Director, Eastern South Island (acting under delegated authority from the Minister of Conservation).

This Tahr Control Operational Plan (“the Plan”) is a plan to control tahr, based on consultation between the Department of Conservation (DOC) and all members of the Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group (TPILG). Not all members will agree with all aspects of this Plan.

### Purpose:

The purpose of this Plan is to begin the reduction of the number of tahr on public conservation land in the management units across their range so that natural values are better protected.

This Plan will be one of a series of annual plans in which a phased approach of concerted control effort is taken to, over time, reduce the tahr numbers to get within the parameters of the Himalayan Thar Control Plan (HTCP) 1993.

It identifies:

- where, when and how DOC will do its work;
- the expected efforts and concerted actions of stakeholders to assist reduction of tahr numbers in high priority areas;
- how DOC can support these stakeholders;
- opportunities for hunting stakeholders to organise themselves to co-ordinate their efforts across the feral range to assist in lowering the population.

Principles: (see [Appendix 1](#)).

The Plan is based around five principles:

1. Partnership.
2. Status of the 1993 Plan.
3. A phased and adaptive management approach.
4. Information sharing.
5. Effort required from all parties to reduce numbers in this period

### Phased Management Approach:

The phased management approach will ensure improved implementation of the HTCP 1993.

The phases will include:

- DOC and others undertaking control work;
- DOC monitoring the control work;
- DOC reporting to the TPILG;
- DOC and TPILG reviewing the results in December 2018;
- DOC revising the work set for the January – August 2019 operational phase to achieve the 10,000 reduction target with the TPILG.

Meetings with TPILG are tentatively planned for early December 2018 and July 2019.

This Plan recognises the significant role that the New Zealand Conservation Authority has in receiving annual reports on tahr control. This Plan also recognises the role that the Game Animal Council can play in facilitating input from the hunting sector in reducing the tahr population.

#### Tahr in Exclusion Zones and Outside of Feral Range:

The reason for control work in the Exclusion Zones and outside of the Feral Range is to reduce the likelihood of the range of tahr expanding. DOC will undertake tahr control in these locations as a priority and all tahr will be targeted. This work is regarded as business-as-usual and not part of the tahr population reduction work. This work may take place all year round. This approach has not changed since the HTCP was approved.

#### DOC approach to the control of bull tahr, by DOC, within the feral range:

Within the HTCP management units DOC will prioritise the control of female and juvenile tahr. DOC will not deliberately target identifiable male tahr but notes that some males may inadvertently be taken as part of control operations. This data will be openly reported. DOC expects other stakeholders to provide concerted action to reduce the male tahr population.

For further context refer to **Appendix 2**.

#### Phased approach to control operations (for October 2018 – August 2019):

DOC, Wild Animal Recovery Operators (WARO) and Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunting (AATH) offsets will aim to remove 6,000 tahr (females and juveniles) between October to mid November 2018. DOC will publish data on the DOC website and notify TPILG members, within 10 working days after (the conclusion of) any control operations. Following the Spring period control, DOC will discuss the work programme and the control data at a full meeting with TPILG in early December 2018. After the meeting DOC may reset the work programme to achieve the control figure of 10,000 tahr by 30 August 2019 (which may include control taking place between February and April 2019). Further meetings with TPILG are planned as follows, but final details around dates will be discussed at the December meeting.

Vegetation and population monitoring will take place over Summer – and will be an agenda item for all TPILG meetings. This Plan does not elaborate on the details of the monitoring programme, but this is an ongoing discussion with the TPILG.

A meeting with the TPILG meeting will be held in July 2019 to review DOC and stakeholder control efforts between October 2018 – June 2019. After the meeting DOC may reset the work programme to achieve the control figure of 10,000 tahr by 30 August 2019.

The control effort that contributes to the 10,000 reduction in tahr numbers will come from verifiable control efforts: DOC control, WARO, AATH, and organised recreational hunting groups undertaking organised hunts. Data from this control will be openly shared and part of TPILG discussions.

#### Priority areas, within the tahr feral range, for DOC control effort:

The highest priority areas for tahr control are areas of public conservation land inside the Management Units of the HTCP 1993. The areas are:

- Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park;
- Westland / Tai Poutini National Park;
- Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Area;
- Wilderness Areas;
- high value conservation areas;

18 October 2018

- areas that are difficult to access for recreational hunters;
- areas that feed tahr into exclusion zones:

**Table 1** outlines the priority of Management Units (MU) for tahr control in more detail.

#### National Parks:

The HTCP target for National Parks is zero density. This target complies with section 4(2)(b) National Parks Act which provides that, “except where the NZ Conservation Authority otherwise determines, the native plants and animals of the parks shall as far as possible be preserved and the introduced plants and animals shall as far as possible be exterminated”.

To achieve this requires on-going management activity and effort. There is a need to balance the cost-effectiveness of tahr control in National Parks against other high priority sites including Exclusion Zones.

In this operational period DOC will target female and juvenile tahr that are resident within the Parks, as well as those that move in over time. WARO activity may be authorised in National Parks (as well as other public conservation land) in the form of carcass recovery and/ or live capture to assist in reduction of tahr numbers.

It is expected that recreational hunters and the guided trophy hunters will provide concerted effort to reduce the bull tahr population to help achieve the zero-density target. It is expected there will be a further reduction in tahr numbers and density in the two National Parks from the combined efforts of DOC and hunting stakeholders. The reduction of tahr numbers (by all stakeholders) in the National Parks will be a focus for review by TPILG and DOC.

Any authorisation for concession activities will be consistent with the respective National Park Management Plans.

#### Te Wahipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area:

This area of internationally recognised public conservation land south of the Whataroa River includes National Parks, Reserves and conservation land and has a priority for tahr control.

#### Wilderness Areas: Adams; and Hooker – Landsborough:

These two areas of public conservation land have priority for tahr control. It is proposed to use a mixture of DOC control, balloted recreational hunting, AATH off-sets, and WARO to reduce tahr numbers.

DOC control, WARO and AATH off-sets will focus efforts in the Wilderness Areas in October and November 2018. If required, further control by DOC will be discussed at TPILG meetings. DOC will share tahr control data and AATH off-set data with recreational hunter groups, so they can participate in the control effort through winter ballots.

Recreational hunters will provide hunt-returns to DOC in the agreed timeframes and DOC will share the data on the same basis as the other hunting information. Privacy of hunter information will be respected. This information will be used at TPILG meetings to help plan further control work.

### High Value Conservation Areas:

On other public conservation land there are four high priority ecological management unit sites that require extra tahr control effort. The sites are:

- the Landsborough catchment;
- the upper Ahuriri catchment;
- the true right of the Hopkins catchment;
- the upper Dobson catchment.

Three other ecological management units are of significant priority for recreational and guided trophy hunters to target (see Recreational Hunting section). It is expected that increased recreational and guided trophy hunter effort could be concentrated in these locations, in addition to other favoured locations.

### Areas that are feeders for tahr to move into exclusion zones:

It is important to reduce tahr group size to reduce pressure for tahr to continue to re-colonise the exclusion zones. The key locations to reduce tahr numbers are:

- the upper Rakaia (MU 1) / Whitcombe (MU 2) catchments;
- the southern portions of MU 6 (Landsborough) and MU 7 Wills-Hunter e.g. north and east of the Haast Pass Highway.

The size of the buffer area is yet to be finally determined, and information from this year's effort will be used to define a workable buffer area. An initial approach will be to focus on a catchment basis expected to be approximately 5 km from the MU /EZ boundary. The Rakaia / Whitcombe could be a priority for DOC and for WARO (if tahr numbers are commercially viable). Portions of MU 6 & 7 should be prioritised for DOC or WARO control.

Within these feeder areas DOC and WARO activity will be on areas that present immediate risk of spread of tahr into exclusion zones.

### Difficult to access sites

Initially, DOC control, AATH offsets and WARO activity will be used in sites that are difficult to reach for recreational hunters and guided trophy hunters. These include:

- areas where access is more difficult – e.g. well beyond road-ends; areas isolated by topography;
- areas where access is controlled by other land owners; and/or
- areas of steep topography and higher altitude where ground-based control is less effective.

Information gathered from the Oct – Nov 2018 control period will be used by TPILG to better describe and define these areas.

TPILG members may wish to discuss with DOC locations where DOC may be able to assist with access for concerted action by recreational hunters and the reduction of tahr.

### Tahr WARO activity

WARO activity includes taking tahr for carcasses, taking capes as part of trophy hunting and live capture for stocking approved game parks.

Permits may be issued to ensure that WARO is optimised as a method for reduction of tahr numbers. The priority areas for WARO activity are: National Parks; World Heritage Area; Wilderness Areas

(outside of ballot times); high value conservation areas; difficult to access areas; areas that feed tahr into exclusion zones.

DOC proposes preparing a new tahr WARO permit template:

- to cover priority locations.
- for a fixed term to align with the annual operational plan.
- to close all land areas to WARO from 1 May 2019 to end of June 2019 weeks.
- to recognise the balloted hunting and dates, and this land will be closed during that period of the ballot.
- to require hunters/ operators to provide to DOC tallies within 2 days of hunting and the GPS evidence of numbers of tahr removed within 10 working days of each hunt.
- to provide that DOC will share relevant data from WARO activity on tahr with TPILG and on websites. Commercial confidentiality of the information will be respected.

DOC will actively work with WARO operators through this period and beyond.

### Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunting – off sets

The standard Aerially Assisted Trophy Hunting (AATH) off-sets programme will continue. This year the off-sets will focus on highest priority locations.

- AATH off-sets will be used for DOC approved tahr control (a mix of taking female and juvenile tahr), vegetation monitoring, or judas tahr work. determined by the Operations Manager, Twizel.
- AATH off-sets must be completed in either October and November 2018, or in February - March 2019.
- They must be completed in accordance with DOC instructions.
- All relevant data will be shared with the TPILG. Commercial sensitivity of the information will be respected.
- All use of AATH off-set hours and tahr kills will be reported back to TPILG and covered in NZCA reports.
- The AATH off-set can only be completed by the relevant concessionaire as it is a contractual obligation.

DOC will actively work with AATH operators to achieve the results in a constructive fashion.

### Recreational Hunting

There is significant opportunity for the recreational hunting sector to assist with a reduction in tahr numbers over the period of this plan (to August 2019). Recreational hunters should target adult males as well as the females and juvenile tahr to reduce tahr numbers to levels that are closer to those set in the HTCP 1993.

DOC encourages recreational hunters to reduce tahr numbers in the following priority locations for recreational hunters:

- In parts of all MU's that are less steep and lower in altitude, with easier access, hunting of tahr will be a significant opportunity to recreational and guided trophy hunters.
- All sites in tahr MU's 1, 2, 3. Note - DOC may need to undertake some control in areas that present immediate risk of spread of tahr into exclusion zones.
- Aoraki / Mt Cook and Westland / Tai Poutini National Parks – all tahr, including male tahr (to complement DOC's control).

18 October 2018

- Landsborough / Hooker and Adams Wilderness Areas – all tahr, including male tahr in balloted blocks (to complement DOC's control).
- The three sites based on high ecological values:
  - Price Range and Whataroa catchment (although noting the current research programme with the ZIP project and that may temporarily preclude localised tahr control);
  - the upper Lawrence catchment (Rangitata);
  - Hakatere Conservation Park – (Big Hill Range – Potts Range).

DOC may facilitate access and assist with access for recreational hunters where planned, concerted and documented tahr control that reduces numbers can be demonstrated. This will be further discussed and co-ordinated with TPILG members.

In addition to encouraging recreational hunters to contribute in the high priority areas, DOC encourages any organised hunting that contributes to the overall reduction of tahr numbers as per the HTCP.

When recreational tahr hunting is undertaken in an organised, concerted way, with agreement between the parties involved, those parties will share the information in the same way as for DOC control activity. Privacy of individual hunters will be respected.

For the purposes of this Plan, the numbers of tahr which are taken by recreational hunters who are not part of organised recreational hunting groups (as above) will not be counted as part of the 10,000 target for the October 2018-August 2019 period.

#### Tahr hunting returns:

DOC is looking at how it can best capture returns from people hunting tahr on public conservation land, to better inform TPILG discussions and DOC decision-making. DOC will work closely with the TPILG members to help develop a workable system and approach to tahr hunter return information. This topic will be an item for review in the December 2018 and July 2019 TPILG meetings. DOC would see the Game Animal Council taking a significant lead on this work.

#### DOC funding to directly support stakeholders control efforts:

Commercial and recreational stakeholders raised the topic of DOC supporting their control efforts in the form of funding flights or paying for parts of WARO operations. This requires further detailed analysis by DOC. DOC will report back on progress to date at the December 2018 TPILG meeting on this issue. All information gathered as part of Oct – Nov 2018 operations will help inform that process.

#### Contact:

For further information on the Tahr Control Operational Plan please email the Operations Manager, Twizel: [sajones@doc.govt.nz](mailto:sajones@doc.govt.nz)

Table 1: Tahr Management Units (MU) and priority locations for tahr population reduction (6,000 by mid-November 2018, 10,000 by August 2019), by stakeholder group on public conservation land.

| <b>M.U.</b>                     | <b>Priority for DOC</b>   | <b>Recreational Hunters</b>   | <b>AATH<br/>Off-sets</b>  | <b>WARO</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| MU 1 Rakaia / Rangitata         | Upper Rakaia catchment that feeds into Northern Exclusion Zone.<br><br>Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access.   | Whole of unit;<br><br>upper Lawrence catchment (Rangitata);<br><br>Hakatere Conservation Park – (Big Hill Range – Potts Range). | Whole of unit   | Upper Rakaia catchment that feeds into Northern Exclusion Zone.<br><br>Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access if feasible. |
| MU 2 South Whitcombe / Whataroa | Whitcombe area that feeds into Northern Exclusion Zone.<br><br>Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access.<br><br>Adams Wilderness Area – outside of ballot period.<br><br>Exclude the ZIP trial period (Perth Whataroa) | Whole of unit;<br><br>Price Range and Whataroa catchment;<br><br>Adams Wilderness Area as per ballot.                           | Whole of unit   | Whitcombe area that feeds into Northern Exclusion Zone<br><br>Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access if feasible.          |
| MU 3 Gammack / Two Thumb        | Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access.  | Whole of unit;<br><br>Areas adjacent to Aoraki Mt Cook NP   | Whole of unit<br><br>Areas adjacent to Aoraki Mt Cook National Park | Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access if feasible.  |

| <b>M.U.</b>                          | <b>Priority for DOC</b>   | <b>Recreational Hunters</b>   | <b>AATH<br/>Off-sets</b> | <b>WARO</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|---|
| MU 4 a<br>Westland Tai<br>Poutini NP | National Park – main portion.   | Male tahr as a priority.<br><br>Ballot areas.   |                          | National Park – main portion.   |
| MU 4 b Aoraki<br>Mt Cook NP          | Whole of National Park  | Male tahr as a priority.  |                          | Whole of National Park  |
| MU 5 Ben Ohau                        | Whole MU – highest priority locations are:<br><br>upper Ahuriri<br><br>true right of the Hopkins<br><br>upper Dobson. | Lower priority unit, male tahr as the priority.   | Highest AATH priority    | Whole of unit.<br><br>Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access if feasible.  |
| MU 6<br>Landsborough                 | Whole of unit.<br><br>Exclude ballot areas during ballot period.<br><br>Feeder areas to Southern Exclusion Zone.      | Ballot areas a high priority, rest of unit male tahr as a high priority. Otherwise low priority unit. | Highest AATH priority    | Whole of unit, closed during roar & tahr block ballots.<br><br>Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access if feasible. |
| MU 7 Hunter /<br>Wills               | Whole of unit.<br><br>Feeders areas to Southern Exclusion Zone.   | Lower priority unit, male tahr as the priority.   | Highest AATH priority    | Whole of unit, closed during roar block ballots.<br><br>Locations that recreation hunters are unable to easily access if feasible.        |

Table 2. Proposed Calendar of events:

|   | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | July | August |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|--------|
| DOC control (within MUs)                          |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Control outside of feral range                    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Recreational hunting effort                       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| West Coast ballots                                |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| WARO activity (not all places at all times)       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| AATH activity (not yet authorised after Feb 2019) |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| AATH offsets                                      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Survey population                                 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Review of progress                                |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Tahr Liaison Group meeting                        |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Ngai Tahu (monthly)                               |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| GAC (TBC)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| NZ Conservation Authority annual report           |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Conservation Boards (TBC)                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |
| Federated Farmers / LINZ liaison (TBC)            |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |        |

## Appendix 1: Principles

### Principle One: Partnership

The Department of Conservation (DOC) has an active partnership with Ngāi Tahu under the Principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, strengthened further by the Ngāi Tahu Claims Settlement Act.

The Department will operate in a programme partnership with all stakeholders to work together to achieve the outcome sought.

Regular Tahr Plan Implementation Liaison Group meetings are held to update and share information and support decision-making.

### Principle Two: Status of the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993

The Himalayan Tahr Control Plan (HTCP) 1993 is the guiding statutory document under the Wild Animal Control Act 1977 for managing the tahr population.

### Principle Three: Phased approach to Implementation

The control programme for tahr is to operate under a phased approach at a management unit scale:

- control operations;
- monitor;
- report;
- review;
- revise if necessary.

### Principle Four: Information sharing

Data and information will be shared openly between all parties to achieve the objectives of the plan. The control and monitoring efforts of all parties are recorded and reported.

The DOC website will display all the information collected by all stakeholders.

### Principle Five: Increased effort is required to meet the Plan objectives.

The control effort will be undertaken, based on the following Himalayan Tahr Control Plan objectives.

- A. To provide for recreational, commercial, guided hunting and Departmental control as means of maintaining tahr at, or below, target levels.
- B. Scientific information is the basis for assessing vegetation condition and tahr population to inform management decisions.
- C. To prevent expansion of the breeding range of tahr control activity outside of the feral range of tahr is a priority.
- D. The protection of known, high value, ecological sites which are at risk to tahr impacts with each management unit is a priority.
- E. Tahr will be controlled to a level at, or below, the intervention density set for each management unit within the HTCP.
- F. The most efficient and effective control methods for tahr population reduction will be used, including concerted effort by recreational and commercial stakeholders, and DOC control.

## Appendix Two: Department of Conservation Culling of Male Tahr - Field Guidance

1. Any intervention and/or culling will be focussed on production - *meaning nannies, kids, and indistinguishable juvenile males.*
2. Male tahr more than two years of age become distinguishable from female tahr by bulk and the development of a mane. *If it is obviously a male it will not be culled by DOC staff as a first step but left to recreational hunters to deal with.*
3. If the sex of the tahr is not easily determined by the shooter within the rapid scan time available for a typical aerial culling scenario, then it may be culled.
4. All male tahr left during DOC culling operations will be way-pointed and the information published on the DOC website.