



BIOSECURITY ANIMALS

1 ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

1.1.1 The Biosecurity Animals Activity delivers work across programmes to protect both production and biodiversity values including:

- The Possum Control Programme;
- The Rook Control Programme; and
- The Amenity Pests Programme.

1.1.2 The Animals Activity links with a range of national and regional policies and strategies including the Biosecurity Act 1993, National Policy Direction 2015 and [Regional Pest Management Plan \(RPMP\) 2017-37](#).

2 ANNUAL PLAN TARGETS

2.1.1 A summary of the Annual Plan targets and progress to date is in Table 1

Table 1 Progress reporting for the Biosecurity Animals Annual Plan targets for 2020-21.

Performance measure/ contract target	Target	Progress
Possum densities are maintained at/below 10% residual trap catch (RTC) in all existing and new possum control operations. This is to enhance production, biodiversity, disease protection, and amenity values.	<10% RTC	26 of the planned 38 monitors for the 2020-21 year have been completed. The average result for these monitors is 2.9% RTC (+/- 1.2%) with two returning results >10% RTC.
Additional hectares included in the Possum Control Programme	6,217 ha ¹	45,225 new hectares have been completed to date this financial year.
All known rookeries are treated annually to reduce crop losses and damage.	100%	Surveillance and baiting preparation underway

¹ This target is from the current LTP, however due to the covid 19 lockdown in 2020 some new PCOs were not treated and have been included in this year's work programme, and also some new areas had very low possum abundance so were deferred for a year, increasing the total to 81,885 ha of new possum control for 2020-21.

Performance measure/ contract target	Target	Progress
Provide an urban/peri-urban animal pest management service to assist ratepayers with specialist advice and equipment. All enquiries responded to within two working days.	100%	376 enquiries were received during the reporting period. All enquiries were followed up within the agreed timeframes.

3 POSSUM CONTROL PROGRAMME

3.1 Programme overview

- 3.1.1 The Manawatū-Whanganui Region Possum Control Programme aims to maintain the possum population below a target of 10% RTC within the area of the programme, consistent with the Regional Pest Management Plan targets. The possum programme started in 2006, covering 110,000 ha, and has grown to include more land every year. Horizons has initiated control in some areas and in others has taken on new areas where the previous possum control organisation, OSPRI, had initiated work for the control and eradication of bovine Tb. Horizons has, and continues to absorb the areas into its possum control programme following OSPRI ceasing control of particular areas. The Horizons programme is delivered by a combination of council staff (approximately 65%) and external contractors (approximately 35%).
- 3.1.2 In 2020-21 the non-regulatory possum control programme spans a total area of 1,574,465 ha (approximately 70% of the Horizons region). The total possum control area continues to grow annually as Horizons takes over where OSPRI eliminates bovine Tb in areas it has previously controlled, and then ceases further pest control. Within the area of the programme in 2020-21:
- Landowners have opted out of 79,174 ha (5%) of the programme;
 - 6,217 ha not previously controlled by Horizons (ex-OSPRI) is being added to the programme. This target is from the current Long-term Plan, however due to the covid 19 lockdown in 2020 some new PCOs were not treated and have been included in this year’s work programme. Some new areas had very low possum abundance so were deferred for a year, increasing the total to 81,885 ha of new possum control for 2020-21.
 - 865,655 ha (55.2% of the total area) i.e., areas that previously have been under Horizons control are scheduled for maintenance control and will receive bait station fills this yer.
 - 556,701 ha (35.5%) of the programme area is being deferred from control due to low possum numbers indicated by the monitoring programme and the projected population derived from a population modelling app (PosSim) that assists programme management decision-making.
- 3.1.3 The 2020-21 possum control programme comprises 153 **Possum Control Operations (PCOs)**. The monitoring programme measures possum abundance in 25% of the PCOs to inform decision-making about areas for control, and each PCO is

monitored at least once every four years. The growing area of the programme also increases the monitoring programme requirements to ensure each PCO is monitored at least once every four years.

- 3.1.4 Of a possible 153 PCOs, 87 are being treated this year (2020-21) with 66 deferred due to low possum abundance. Of the 87 PCOs being worked, 57 are being completed by Horizons staff and 30 by external contractors.
- 3.1.5 As outlined in the Operational Plan the team is reviewing each PCO being worked this year, analysing results and installing further bait stations where required. The team is also seeking landowners who have previously opted out of the non-regulatory programme, to persuade them to opt in and provide more complete coverage of the region. Following on from last year, the programme enables the team to identify and action second fills of bait stations where high possum abundance is encountered.
- 3.1.6 Landcare Research has been engaged to provide advice about the thresholds of possum abundance linked with the size and type of habitat that could trigger Good Neighbour Rules in Horizons RPMP (2017-37). This will provide guidelines that will assist when assessing landowners with higher possum abundance than their adjoining neighbouring properties, and the level that will trigger a regulatory response. This advice has been received and is being considered by staff, and a summary of the report will be presented to Council at a future date.

3.2 Activity update

- 3.2.1 The Regional Response Team has completed 38 of the 57 PCOs planned for the year with eight more operations underway (Table 2, Map 1). Two complete PCOs planned for the previous financial year, with a total of 1,412 bait stations, were carried forward. More landowners than usual have opted in to the programme this year, including three forestry blocks adding a further 1,200 bait stations.
- 3.2.2 The external contractors continue to make steady progress with 19 of the 30 operational areas now completed.
- 3.2.3 One new PCO (Raetihi Buffer) was completed during the reporting period and work commenced in Retaruke, the last new area. Operational work has been completed in 10 maintenance areas this period – Kirikau, Makino North, Matahiwi, Morikau, Parapara, Turakina Valley, Umutoi, Waikaka South, West Raetihi and Whangamomona.
- 3.2.4 Work is also well underway in five maintenance PCOs – Apiti, Hikumutu, Taumarunui Rollback, Tararua Ground and Waihi Valley.
- 3.2.5 Whakarongo, a maintenance PCO, will now not be treated this year as the contractor is unable to complete the work due to ill health and subsequent retirement. We have attempted to engage one of our other contractors to undertake the work but, due to full work commitments, none have the capacity so the operation will be carried over into next financial year and will be worked by the Regional Response Team.
- 3.2.6 The procurement process to select the contractors for the next three years of PCO work continues. The **registration of interest (ROI)** document was loaded on the Tenderlink

website in February, suppliers submitted their company profiles and were shortlisted to progress to the next stage of **request for proposal (RFP)**. After the evaluations of the RFPs, three contractors were selected to progress through to the contractor workshops. The workshops were to be held in early May with the successful contractors entering into agreements in principle in mid- to late-May.

- 3.2.7 In line with Horizons procurement policy, staff will prepare a paper for Council to consider in relation to the procurement process prior to the final contracts being signed.

Table 2 Progress reporting for the Possum Control Programme against Operational Plan targets to the end of April 2021.

Measure Hectares	Reporting Period				Total	Op Plan Target	% Complete	Comment
	Period 1 July – Sept	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4				
Regional Response Team								
PCOs completed	8	16	14		38	57	67%	
New hectares completed	1,620	11,000	6,217		18,837	41,423	45%	On track
Bait stations	14,158	20,093	18,066		52,317	62,014	84%	On track
External Contractors								
PCOs completed	1	7	11		19	30	63%	On track, except one PCO ²
New hectares completed	12,200	12,100	2,088		26,388	40,462	65%	On track
Bait stations	6,967	12,233	16,195		35,395	49,362	72%	On track
Total PCO Programme								
PCOs completed	9	23	25		57	87	64%	On track
New hectares completed	13,820	23,100	8,305		45,225	81,885	55%	On track, Annual Plan target of 6,217 ha met
Bait stations	21,125	32,326	34,261		87,712	111,376	79%	On track

² One PCO will not be completed due to external contractor losing capacity to deliver control. This PCO will be treated early in the 2021-22 year.

4 MONITORING

4.1 Possum Monitoring

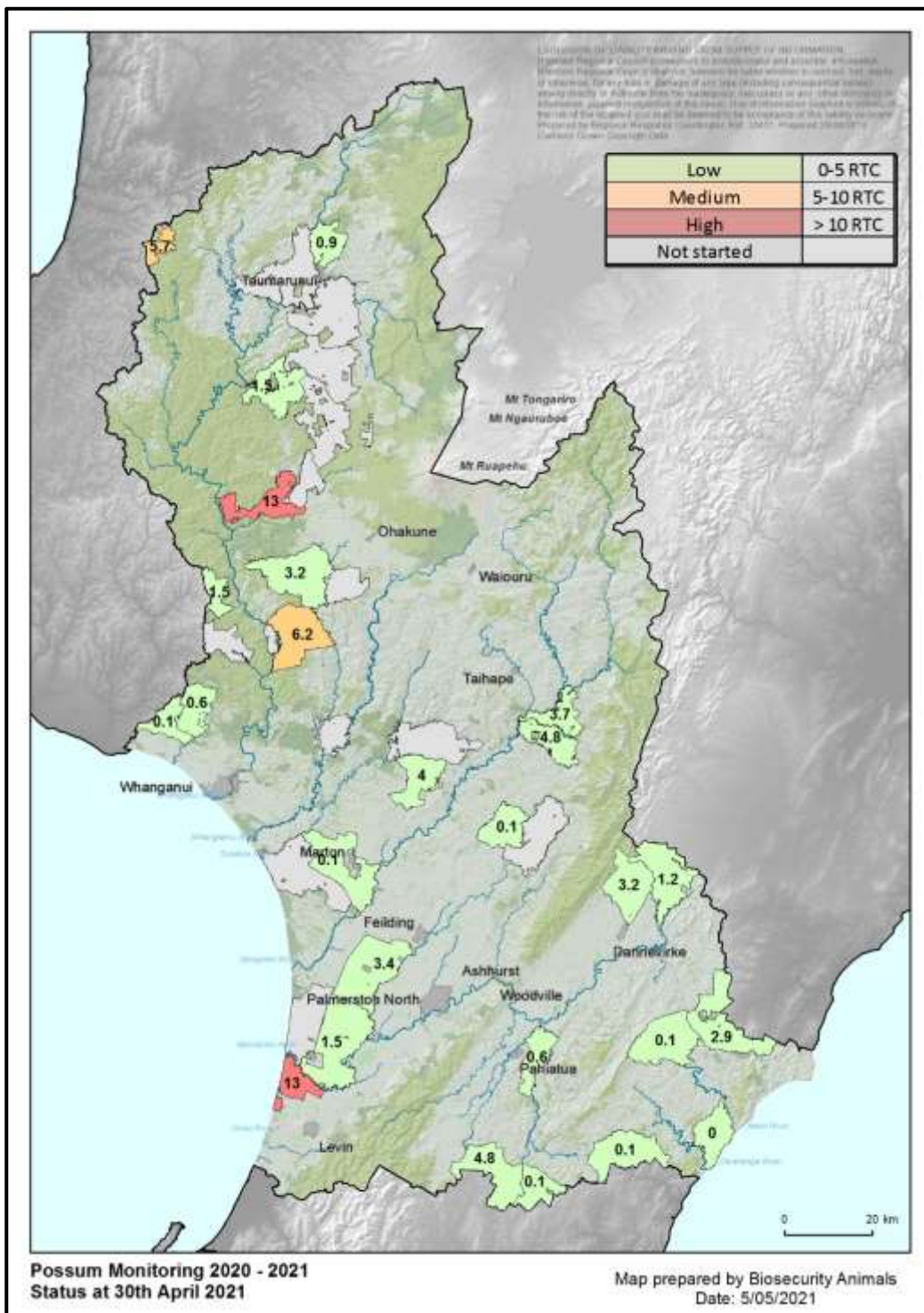
- 4.1.1 This is year three of the Possum Monitoring Programme, which aims to monitor all PCOs during a four-year period to provide an index of possum abundance.
- 4.1.2 The monitoring programme operators put out 250 wax-tags in 25 lines of 10 per PCO and the number of bite marks gives an index of the possum abundance as a percentage. The monitoring lines are randomly selected to remove bias and to provide a robust estimate. The results are presented with a 95% confidence interval i.e., the range of values that provides 95% certainty and contains the true mean of the population.
- 4.1.3 The monitoring is predominately done by an independent contractor who is not involved in any of the control work. Some internal team members monitor the possum control work completed by external contractors.

4.2 Activity Update

- 4.2.1 Six more of the 38 programmed PCO monitors were completed during the reporting period, with the RTC results ranging from 0.6% to 6.2%. The average result over the six monitors was 2.5% - $\pm 1.0\%$.
- 4.2.2 A total of 26 PCO monitors have now been completed this year. Table 3 provides a summary of the RTC results for these monitors. Waitarere and Ruatiti Stage 1 monitors both returned a 13% RTC result, being above the target of 10% RTC (Table 3, Map 2). The next highest result this year was Matahiwi at 6.2% RTC. Waitarere is predominantly a forestry block where public access reduces the control options available. Staff are working with the forest owners to deliver a more comprehensive control operation in July. Ruatiti Stage 1 has untreated farms and bush areas throughout the PCO that are compromising the control on the treated areas. This PCO will be retreated again early in the next cycle as the contractor lacked the capacity to carry out another round of control this year. An effort also will be made to invite more of the owners of untreated land into the PCO programme.
- 4.2.3 Table 4 shows the list of PCO monitors yet to be completed in this financial year.
- 4.2.4 The procurement process to select the contractor for the next three years of PCO monitoring is nearing completion. A workshop was arranged for early May with representatives of the prospective monitoring company. Subject to a successful outcome, an agreement in principle will be signed in the weeks following the workshop. In line with Horizons' procurement policy, staff will prepare a paper for Council to consider in relation to the procurement process prior to the final contracts being signed.

Table 3 Monitors completed to end of April 2021.

PCO	RTC %	CI + %	Completed	Rank
Waitarere	13	3.2	Aug-20	1
Ruatiti Stage One	13	2.3	Oct-20	2
Matahiwi	6.2	1.2	April-21	3
Waitaanga	5.7	1.8	Sep-20	4
Eketahuna South	4.8	3.2	Aug-20	5
Kawhatau	4.8	1.2	Aug-20	6
Huntermville	4.0	1.5	March-21	7
Toe Toe	3.7	1.5	Dec-20	8
Rongotea	3.4	2.6	Jul-20	9
Matamau West	3.2	1.5	Jul-20	10
Raetihi Buffer Two	3.2	2	Nov-20	11
Weber	2.9	1.8	Nov-20	12
Himatangi	1.5	0.9	Jan-21	13
Mangaporau	1.5	0.6	March-21	14
Whakahoro	1.5	1.2	Nov-20	15
Norsewood	1.2	0.9	Feb-21	16
Taringamotu	0.9	1.2	Sep-20	17
East Pahiatua	0.6	0.6	Feb-21	18
Kai Iwi	0.6	0.4	Sep-20	19
East Alfredton	0.1	0.1	Jul-20	20
Waihoki	0.1	0.1	Jul-20	21
Oporae East	0.1	0.1	Aug-20	22
Maxwell	0.1	0.1	Oct-20	23
Marton	0.1	0.1	Oct-20	24
Kimbolton	0.1	0.1	Nov-20	25
Branscombe Coast	0.1	0.1	Jul-20	26
Average	2.9	1.2		



Map 2 Status of possum monitoring

Table 4 Other PCOs scheduled to be monitored in 2020-21.

PCO's To be Monitored 2020-21
Ahu Ahu
Apiti
Coastal Foxton
Coastal Turakina
Hikumutu
Kaitieke
Makino North
Otairi
Pipipi
Raetihi Buffer 1
Retaruke
Taumarunui Rollback

5 ROOK CONTROL PROGRAMME

5.1 Programme overview

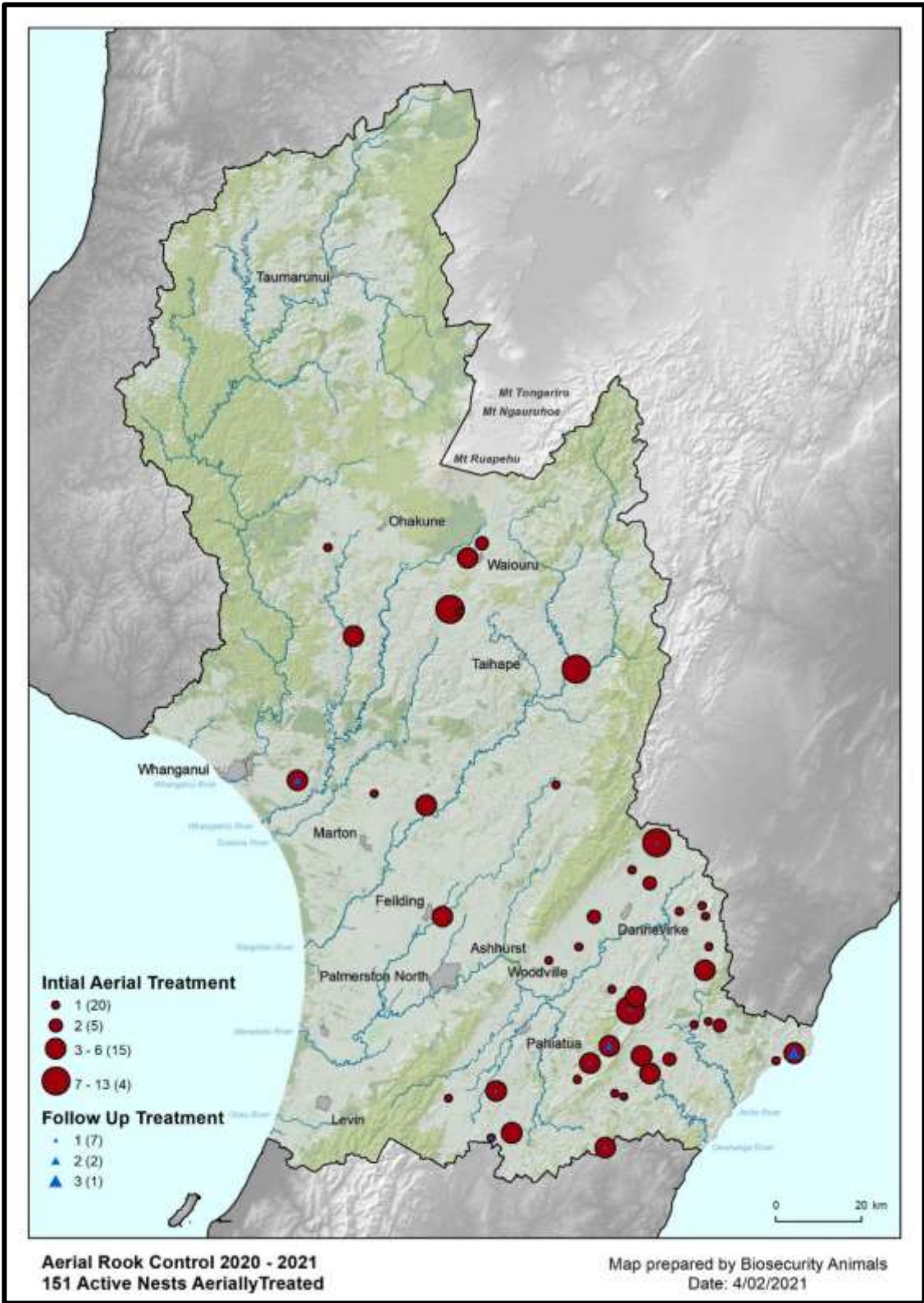
- 5.1.1 Rooks are categorised as an eradication species in Horizons' **Regional Pest Management Programme (RPMP) 2017-37** and the region is surveyed annually for active rookeries. A contractor is engaged to aerially poison nests to control both chicks and adult rooks.

5.2 Activity update

- 5.2.1 Following surveys, aerial control was undertaken in October with a second round of flights to check active nests carried out in November. All active nests were treated with a contact toxin by an operator slung below a helicopter.
- 5.2.2 A total of 136 sites were visited over the region, 56 of which were been actively used.
- 5.2.3 There was an increase in active nests treated this year with 152 active nests spread over 47 active rookeries (Map 3 below) compared to 94 active nests spread over 56 active rookeries in 2019.
- 5.2.4 Four historically inactive rookeries were found to be active again with three having active nests. A total of 18 nests were treated.

Nineteen new rookeries were reported by the public and followed up on. Fourteen had active nests with a total of 51 active nests treated.

- 5.2.5 As part of the Annual Plan process, additional budget was provided for a second check of rookeries. The rechecks were completed approximately 3-4 weeks later with a total of 56 rookeries inspected and 14 treated. There was a large increase of active nests treated this season, due primarily to the increase in rookeries reported by the public, which contributed 51 active nests to the total. Of the total of 152 active nests, 76 of those treated were in either new rookeries, historic rookeries or were picked up during the second flight. This highlights the importance of public awareness, timely prompts through social media platforms for surveillance information and the checking done in the second flight.
- 5.2.6 No ground control has been carried out so far this year. An attempt was made at Waituna West but the pre-feeding wasn't successful due to the availability of other food.



Map 3 Rook control work 2020-2021.

6 AMENITY PEST PROGRAMME

6.1 Programme overview

- 6.1.1 The amenity pest programme provides a pest animal advisory service for ratepayers with pest animal issues. Horizons provides advice and in some cases loans traps and supplies bait to enable landowners to undertake their own control. Enquiries are responded to within two working days of being lodged and usually involve pests such as possums, rabbits, mustelids, rats, and magpies.

6.2 Activity update

- 6.2.1 The amenity pest programme received 376 enquiries during the reporting period with the highest number of enquires relating to rabbits, followed by possums and mustelids (ferrets, stoats and weasels).
- 6.2.2 All enquiries were responded to within the agreed timeframes.

7 REGIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT PLAN (RPMP)

7.1 Programme overview

RABBITS

- 7.1.1 Three years of very mild winters have spared rabbits their normal winter mortality, which can be in the order of 95%. This significantly reduces the base breeding populations going into spring and maintains the overall rabbit populations at a manageable level. However, our recent mild winters have reduced winter mortality and increased base breeding populations.
- 7.1.2 Horizons has been receiving reports of significant rabbit populations, particularly in drier parts of the region, and indications are we can expect another favourable breeding season this year. The RPMP considered adding rabbits into the RPMP, however the analysis at the time showed that the costs outweighed the benefits for ratepayers. Consequently, rabbits were not included in the plan to receive rate-funded control or management, and are considered landowners' responsibility.
- 7.1.3 We currently provide advice to landowners on the management and control of rabbits, along with a three-yearly survey for rabbit calicivirus (aka **Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV)**) and a population monitor to measure trends in rabbit abundance across the region. The RHDV survey will provide information on the levels of immunity to the virus in the rabbit populations i.e., the percentage of the rabbit populations that won't be succumb to the virus.

7.2 Activity update

- 7.2.1 The field collection of rabbit RHDV samples was completed in March with 303 rabbit blood samples being obtained. The samples have been sent to Massey University for assaying, the results are expected to be available in May.
- 7.2.2 In addition to the RHDV sampling, Response Team staff will be undertaking rabbit night counts along the 11 count routes that are spread across the region in late May – early June 2021. The number of rabbits observed along the individual count routes will be compared with the results from past years to determine the trends in rabbit populations.
- 7.2.3 The results will be reported to Council later in the year in the context of the Regional Pest Management Plan strategy for management of rabbits.

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