



24 SEP 2018

Tēnā koe

Proposal for Reducing the Tahr Population

Thank you for your e-mail regarding tahr control. The Department of Conservation is stepping up efforts to control Himalayan tahr across the central South Island because numbers have reached destructive levels.

Tahr graze at high altitudes in the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana where they feed most intensively on tall snow tussock and can kill entire plants. Browsing and tramping by tahr is putting our unique high-altitude vegetation such as Mt Cook buttercup, alpine daisy and other alpine plant species under significant threat. This also increases the risk of soil erosion on thin mountain soils.

New monitoring data gathered over 18 months has highlighted the population needs to be controlled as numbers have grown to triple what is allowed under the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993 (HTCP) for the whole of the tahr range.

In 2015 DOC raised concerns about increasing tahr numbers and the damage they were doing to the indigenous vegetation of alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems. These matters were raised at the time with the Tahr Liaison Group, the group made up of iwi and 11 stakeholder representatives that DOC consults with regarding its implementation of the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan (HTCP). The control plan is a statutory plan and has set a limit of 10,000 tahr as the whole population. This was agreed by all of the stakeholders when the plan was approved by the Minister of Conservation at the time.

The department undertook monitoring of tahr numbers through 2016-17. The report from the monitoring was produced by an independent expert and concluded the tahr population on public conservation land within the tahr's feral range is about 35,600 animals. There is no population estimate for tahr on freehold and Crown pastoral lease land within the range of tahr. The tahr population has grown significantly over the last decade or more.

The department has undertaken tahr control in the past. This has focused on preventing expansion of the tahr range. On average the department, as well as recreational hunting groups and the commercial sector have removed about 4,600 tahr each year. This annual figure has not been enough to prevent the population expanding and causing significant damage.

Once the department received the monitoring report and considered the information it began meetings with various stakeholders which led to a full meeting of the Tahr Liaison Group. The department identified the need to have a greater level of control of tahr so the impacts of their browsing and trampling on vegetation could be mitigated. The purpose of the meeting was to seek input on a proposed approach as to how stakeholders and the Department of Conservation could work together to bring tahr numbers back within the limits set in the Tahr Control Plan so that alpine vegetation isn't damaged further.

DOC will aim to remove 10,000 tahr over the next eight months to help prevent the current population increasing further. These will be removed from public conservation land above 305 metres (1,000 feet). Tahr control will initially focus on the Rakaia and Rangitata catchments as well as the Gammack and Two Thumb ranges where there are large numbers of tahr. Tahr control will also be done in Westland/Tai Poutini and Aoraki Mt Cook National Parks and other conservation land.

Other hunting members of the Tahr Liaison Group have also been asked to target additional animals. I intend to discuss with the hunting, commercial wild animal recovery operators and other members of the Tahr Liaison Group what a suitable target would be for these groups. Discussion will include the extent to which bulls may be targeted. Bulls are not normally targeted in tahr control operations, however the population has now grown to a level where this may be necessary. Regardless, my expectation is that, even after this control work is done, there will still be ample tahr to sustain guided tahr hunting and tourist ventures.

As the tahr population is brought back down towards the limits set in the HTCP, the department will work with stakeholders to set future levels of control per year so the population does not exceed the HTCP limits. The need to preserve our indigenous plants in the alpine zones of the Southern Alps is extremely important and tahr numbers need to be reduced.

You can find further information including maps of targeted areas on DOC's website at <https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/things-to-do/hunting/what-to-hunt/tahr/tahr-culling-operations/>.

Thank you for sharing your concerns about this issue.

Yours sincerely



Hon. Eugenie Sage
Minister of Conservation