

The Self-Help Possum Control Programme has been running since 1992 and has expanded to encompass 4374 properties covering 235,000 hectares, mainly on the Taranaki Ring Plain.

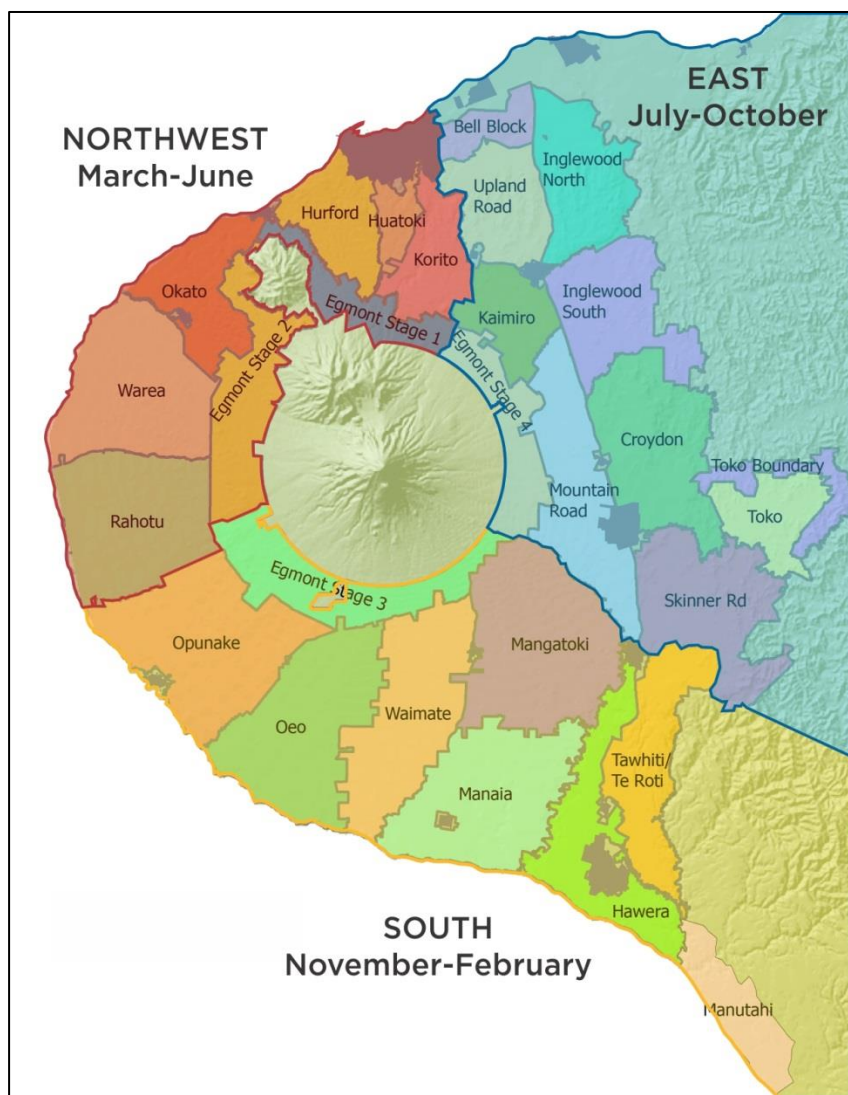
A joint effort between farmers and the Taranaki Regional Council, and underpinned by the Animal Pest Management Strategy for Taranaki, the programme has successfully kept possum numbers low, benefiting both agriculture and indigenous biodiversity.

This leaflet explains why the programme is needed and how it works, and lists some of the best ways for land occupiers to maintain low possum numbers.

## Why control possums?

Possoms are the predominant pest animal in Taranaki. They are a major threat because of the actual or potential harm they do to agricultural production, animal health and indigenous biodiversity. They are pests because they:

- Compete directly with livestock for pasture, reducing the capacity of farmland and reducing farm income.
- Are vectors for bovine tuberculosis. Taranaki is one of only three regions without endemic bovine tuberculosis. Should bovine tuberculosis become endemic in the region, the potential costs to the region's dairy, beef and venison industries would be significant.
- Damage plantation forests, reducing their value by a substantial amount. This largely occurs through damage to the terminal shoots of young seedlings, broken branches and ringbarking of pines when in pollen.
- Cause considerable damage to indigenous biodiversity. Possums' preference for broadleaf and hardwood species has had a serious effect on the composition of much of the region's indigenous forested areas. Possums also eat eggs and chicks and interfere with the breeding of indigenous bird species.
- Cause havoc in domestic gardens. Possums will target fruit trees, roses which are in the budding stage, and many other plants.



## How the programme works

As the map illustrates, the Self-Help Possum Control Programme is organised by area. Each of these was brought into the programme after agreement from at least 75% of land occupiers, covering at least 75% of the area. This makes it binding on all land occupiers.

Generally there has been very strong support for the scheme.

When a new area is established, Council contractors undertake initial control operations to reduce possum numbers to at least a 5% catch rate (for 100 traps, only five possums are caught). Land occupiers are then required to keep the catch rate below 10%. The Council's Environment Officers monitor and facilitate the maintenance work and if necessary the Council will enforce the requirement.

## How to play your part

After initial control is carried out, you are given timeframes within which to carry out maintenance. The Council's Environment Officers can provide advice and technical assistance but you must pay for traps, baits, bait stations and pre-feeds.

You can choose the most appropriate method of control for your circumstances. You can undertake the work yourself, or engage a contractor.

You may need to obtain a Controlled Substance Licence (CSL) if you want to use cyanide and/or phosphorus yourself. These licences can be obtained through the Council. No licence is needed for other poison options such as Philproof Bait Stations and Pestoff baits.

### Bait stations and Pestoff

Bait stations can be used for poisons such as Pestoff, Decal, Feracol blocks and Pindone, which don't require a Controlled Substance Licence.



Bait stations are cost-effective. Once in place, poison costs for a property are often less than \$100 a year, depending on possum numbers and the type of poison. The bait remains available to possums and other pests including rats for a longer period compared with other methods. The regional targets for possum control can be achieved if bait stations are used correctly. Typically, catch rate results are less than 5%.

Ask your Environment Officer if Pestoff is appropriate for your property. It is a second-generation anticoagulant with brodifacoum as the active ingredient, and is available in different formulations for possums and rats. While no licence is needed, it must be used in bait stations and with signage.

Stock must not have access to the bait at any time, as its residues will linger in their tissue. When using Pestoff in low possum density areas, best practice is to:

- Completely fill the bait station. Each station holds 700 grams of bait.
- Refill the bait stations after two weeks, replacing any bait that is soft, crumbly or bleached.
- Remove all bait that is not taken from stations once control has occurred, to eliminate the risk of bait shyness.

### Kill traps

There are many types of kill traps on the market. The Possum Master (shown) is a very effective kill trap. The snared animal dies very quickly by strangulation.



Good Nature A12 traps are also available. These are gas-resetting humane traps that have up to 12 kills before needing to be serviced. The advantage over leg-hold traps is that kill traps don't require daily checking and are easy to set.

### Leg-hold traps

Using leg-hold traps is labour intensive, but very effective when carried out to best-practice methods.

Legally, these traps must be checked within 12 hours of sunrise each day.



### Night shooting

Night shooting is not normally an effective control option, although it may be successful on properties with only one or two rows of trees or hedges. For properties with more extensive habitat, the tools listed above should be considered. You can discuss the options with Council officers.

### Private contractors

The Yellow Pages lists contractors able to carry out control work on behalf of landowners/occupiers. While the cost of using contractors is often higher, they generally offer an effective control solution. Using contractors every two or three years in conjunction with other control is often cost effective.

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