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Committee Catchment Management
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Report on the status of the preliminary findings and recommendations on Canada Geese

1. Purpose

To report on the status of the Department of Conservation (DoC) management review for Canada Geese and the potential impact of this for Greater Wellington.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

DoC has undertaken a review of the level of protection for some New Zealand wildlife under the Wildlife Act 1953. Although involving a range of species, this review was largely intended to review the status of the Canada goose, a species which impacts on pastoral farming in many regions of New Zealand. Canada geese are currently listed on Schedule 1 of the Act, a status which provides a level of protection as a game bird and prohibits options for control, including the prevention of their management under a Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS).

In September 2008 DoC released a report detailing the preliminary findings and recommendations of the review. The review recommends moving Canada geese from Schedule 1 to Schedule 3 of the Wildlife Act for the Wairarapa, as part of the Wellington Fish and Game region. This proposed change is intended to allow geese to be managed in ways that balance the objectives of all affected parties. Species listed on Schedule 3 of the Wildlife Act remain protected but may be hunted or killed subject to conditions declared by the Minister of Conservation. These conditions can be used to designate management agencies and prescribe management regimes.

4. Comment

The localised impact of Canada Geese can be considerable, with hundreds of birds feeding, trampling and defecating onto pasture. A number of farmers in the region are impacted by Canada Geese, with much of the damage localised to areas in the South Wairarapa. There have also been seasonal problems at Stronvar and Blairlogie situated east of Masterton. The population is spreading further afield, with geese present in Horowhenua, Kapiti and Porirua. Under the DoC recommendation, Canada Geese will remain on Schedule 1 in these areas, with the allowance of special permits for control.

As a game bird species, Canada Geese are currently managed by Fish and Game NZ. Since their introduction to the Wellington region the population has increased considerably. Federated Farmers of New Zealand are strong advocates for the removal of the game bird status for Canada Geese.

In response to the complaints of the farming community, Fish and Game NZ have undertaken aerial and ground culls on Lake Wairarapa at the expense of game bird hunters. The priority of Fish and Game NZ is to improve hunting interests, limiting their effectiveness as a control agency. This control work is opposed by many Fish and Game NZ members. However, Federated Farmers strongly support further reductions of the goose population.

During the recent Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS) consultation process, both the National and Wairarapa branch of Federated Farmers and the Wellington Botanical Society requested that Canada Geese be included in the Greater Wellington Strategy document. Canada Geese currently cannot be included in the RPMS as they are still listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Act.

In our submission to DoC, Greater Wellington recommended a move from Schedule 1 to Schedule 3 for Canada Geese, a move which the DoC report has recommended, but only for a part of the Wellington region.

Federated Farmers have requested a move to Schedule 5, which would mean removal of all protection.

Fish and Game NZ wish to retain the current Schedule 1 status. Funding for current control work and coordination is undertaken with game bird hunters licence fees. This funding would not be available if the Schedule 1 status was changed.

5. Inclusion in the RPMS

Canada Geese cannot be included in the RPMS while listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Act. If their status was moved to Schedule 3, a cost benefit analysis and other criteria would need to be satisfied under the Biosecurity Act to consider their suitability for inclusion. Because the impact and subsequent benefits of any control affect only a limited number of landowners, there is likely to be little public good from control. However, this could change if there are impacts on aviation activities.

Canada Geese are a highly mobile species, and react quickly to localised hunting pressure. Intensive control in the South Island has resulted in the dispersal of breeding and moulting flocks of birds. Effective goose control requires the use of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, meaning operations incur a considerable cost.

Poisoning of Canada Geese is not considered a viable option. Public opposition is likely to be strong and there would be risks to non-target species. The GW submission to DoC supported a move to Schedule 3 as this allowed those most affected to co-ordinate control operations. However, it was acknowledged that costs would be considerable. Furthermore, this change does not provide for any ongoing contribution by Fish & Game NZ.

If Canada Geese were moved to Schedule 5 of the Wildlife Act they would cease to be a game species and would no longer be managed by Fish & Game NZ. The geese would no longer be managed to a primary objective of maximising recreational hunting operations, would be 'non protected', and could be killed by anyone at any time. However, listing Canada Geese on Schedule 5 would not provide for the management oversight necessary for effective control. Inappropriate control attempts by some landowners could easily result in geese learning to avoid control methods and increase future geese control costs for other landowners.

Canada Geese are present in parts of the Horizons region and in other North Island regions. Because of the extent, mobility, and wariness of Canada Geese, effective control would, in the longer term, require national coordination.

6. Communication

The GW submission was based on the preliminary findings and recommendation of the Canada goose review. GW will consider whether a communication strategy is warranted following notification of the Minister's final decision.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 1. Receives the report.*
- 2. Notes the content of the report.*

Report prepared by:

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