



10 September 2020

M Hill

fyi-request-13636-dd39320d@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear M Hill

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, received on 01 September 2020.

You stated, and requested, the following:

DOC operations director Dr Ben Reddiex is quoted below in Stuff September 1st 2020.

“In the national parks we are legally required to reduce the number of tahr to the lowest practicable densities and it’s important we protect and preserve these special areas for New Zealand’s native species.”

Please provide all scientific evidence in that Tahr damage native species and all evidence supporting the above statement.

The Department’s response is set out below.

The Department’s functions include managing all land and resources held under the Conservation Act 1987; and administering the Acts listed in Schedule 1 of that Act - including the National Parks Act 1980 and the Wild Animal Control Act 1977.

National Parks

National Parks are managed for the purpose of preserving them in their natural state in perpetuity. Introduced animals must be exterminated as far as possible.

The Department must manage national parks in accordance with general policies, conservation management strategies and national park management plans:

- The General Policy for National Parks 2005 sets out the New Zealand Conservation Authority’s policy and position on introduced animals in national parks as follows:
 - National Park pest management should give priority to eradicating introduced animals where possible and containing them and reducing the range of established introduced animals;
 - the commercial hunting of wild animals and animal pests should be encouraged to maximise their effective control; and
 - recreational hunting of wild animals and animal pests should be encouraged, where this does not diminish the effectiveness of operations to control them.
- The Aoraki/Amount Cook National Park Management Plan contains a policy requiring the extermination of tahr within and the active control of tahr adjoining the park.

The method of achieving this goal is by using all available means, including recreational and commercial hunting and Department hunting operations.

- The Westland Tai Poutini National Park Management Plan contains the same policy as that outlined above for Aoraki Mount Cook National Park, with recreational hunting being encouraged in certain parts of this national park.

Control of Himalayan Tahr

The Wild Animal Control Act 1977 has two primary purposes, to make better provision for:

- the control of harmful species of introduced wild animals; and
- the means of regulating the operations of recreational and commercial hunters including wild animal recovery operators hunting using aircraft;

with the aim of achieving concerted action and effective wild animal control.

The Wild Animal Control Act applies to all land, having regard to the provisions of any Act applying to the land, for the purposes of controlling wild animals generally, and of eradicating wild animals locally where necessary and practicable.

The Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993 is a wild animal control plan (statutory plan) prepared under section 5(1)(d) of the Wild Animal Control Act. A copy of the Himalayan Tahr Control Plan 1993 can be found at:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/threats-and-impacts/animal-pests/tahr/thar-plan-1993.pdf>

This statutory plan defined a feral range for Himalayan tahr (tahr) (the legal boundary of where tahr are allowed to be), identified exclusion zones on the perimeter of that range to prevent the spread of tahr, and divided the feral range into seven management units.

A key element of the statutory plan is that it sets a maximum population of 10,000 tahr across all land tenures in the tahr feral range. It is implemented through Tahr Control Operational Plans, which include and outline tahr control intentions, for the period relevant to each plan, for the areas within and outside the tahr feral range.

Scientific evidence of damage to native species by tahr

Tahr feed primarily on alpine tussock grasslands and sub-alpine shrublands - including snow tussock and shrub species (which are the dominant vegetation in many of New Zealand's sub-alpine and alpine environments).

As they are social animals and group together, large groups of tahr can transform tall tussocks and sub-alpine shrublands to grassy turf or bare ground.

The tahr impacts outlined affect the overall health of the habitat within the sub-alpine and alpine zones, with a flow on effect on other plant and animal species, including loss of habitat.

I set out below links to reports and papers relevant to your request:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/threats-and-impacts/animal-pests/tahr/long-term-impacts-of-himalayan-tahr-in-southern-alps.pdf>

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/threats-and-impacts/animal-pests/tahr/impact-of-himalayan-tahr-on-snow-tussocks-southern-alps-2014.pdf>



<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/threats-and-impacts/animal-pests/tahr/impacts-of-himalyan-tahr-on-snow-tussocks-2004.pdf>

In making decisions around the extent to which information has and/or documents have been provided in (or as part of) the Department's response, I have relied on and applied one or more of the reasons available under the Official Information Act (OIA).

Where I have withheld information under section 9 of the OIA, the public interest in its release has been taken into account. After carefully considering each of those reasons, I have decided to withhold that information as in each instance the reason for withholding it is not outweighed by public interest in its release.

You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the OIA.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben Reddiex".

Ben Reddiex
Director, National Operations - Issues & Programmes
Department of Conservation *Te Papa Atawhai*