



TOWARDS A PREDATOR-FREE PENINSULA

Information about OPBG activities over 2021-2022

What is happening.

Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group (OPBG) began a possum eradication programme on Otago Peninsula in 2011, as the first stage in a long-term predator-free programme. To date, over 20,000 possums have been removed. OPBG is one of three delivery partners for Predator Free Dunedin (PFD) alongside the Halo Project and City Sanctuary. OPBG's possum eradication and future multispecies pest work is funded through PFD as a PF2050 landscape project till mid-2023.

From June 2021 until December 2021, we will undertake possum control on rural areas of Sector 4 of the peninsula, as a first mop-up. This area includes Conservation Areas (Sandymount, Boulder Beach/Highcliff and Sandfly Bay) as well as farmland and forestry blocks. It will again involve a combination of poisoning, trapping and surveillance monitoring.

In Sectors 1, 2 and 3 (Portobello to Cape Saunders and Taiaroa Head), a Lean Grid network of traps will be maintained to decrease numbers to near zero.

OPBG will also engage with communities to promote backyard trapping in residential areas. We will continue to support The Guardians' volunteer trapping programme at the base of the Otago Peninsula (Sector 5) to fulfil its strategic function as a buffer zone.

Why is this happening?

The brushtail possum has been causing widespread damage to New Zealand's flora and fauna ever since their introduction from Australia. The negative impacts include extensive damage to native forest, reduction of food resources for our native animals and direct predation of eggs and chicks. We've been monitoring the numbers of birds on the Peninsula for the past 11 years and have seen increases in birdlife, in particular tui and bellbirds, in response to the decrease in possum numbers. As an agricultural pest possums can host a range of diseases, including Bovine Tb and leptospirosis. This programme will help ensure that Otago Peninsula remains Tb free and support stock health by removing possums from the landscape.

Where it is happening.

Most work will occur on private rural land, occasionally close to neighbouring residential properties. OPBG will continue to consult with residential neighbours as well as landowners to ensure that domestic animals and children are not in any danger.

Work will only be undertaken at the consent and/or request of landowners or occupiers. This includes where and when work is undertaken and applies to both residential and rural properties. If landowners or occupiers have any concerns about the work, OPBG is happy to discuss them at any time.

When this will happen.

Trapping operations using volunteers and employees will continue as normal. The Sector 4 bait station operation will begin with wax tag monitoring in May/June 2021 and deployment of stations and 'Double Tap' toxin in June. By December it is expected that this phase of eradication will end with another round of wax tag monitoring to assess the result. The Lean Grid network of traps will expand into Sector 4 in early 2022.

Who will carry out the possum eradication and other animal pest control?

Contract Wild Animal Control (CWAC) will undertake the Sector 4 toxin operation. OPBG staff and volunteers will undertake trapping work unless otherwise specified.

Predator Free Dunedin and Otago Regional Councils new pest plan

PFD's work is supported by the Otago Regional Council through the Regional Pest Management Plan 2019-2029. This includes site-led programmes for the Otago Peninsula (OPBG), West Harbour and Quarantine and Goat Islands (Halo). OPBG's Predator Free Peninsula vision is directly supported through the new plan with the following Plan Objectives: "eradicate possums, contain mustelids and sustained control of feral cats, rats and hedgehogs" with an additional Rule relating to the keeping of these pests.



Otago Peninsula possum control sectors

Monitoring

Surveillance monitoring allows us to gauge possum distribution and to estimate relative possum population densities. This allows us to target activities and improve the efficiency of possum control.

Residents and landowners are encouraged to report possum sightings and activities, as well as monitor possums on their land with chew cards.

Non-toxic chew cards (white corflute cards laced with a possum lure) and **Wax Tags** (a plastic, orange device with a ball of wax) are laid out close to habitat. A week later they are checked for possum specific bite marks.

Trail camera and Automatic Lure Device (ALD):

Trail cameras and ALDs (Automatic Lure Devices) are used to monitor and record presence/ absence of animal species in the field.

Some cameras are set to monitor animal interactions with the Lean Grid traps, providing useful information about possum and rat behaviour, in particular.



Chew card



Wax tag



ALD (centre), trail camera (right)

Eradication & Control Methods

Toxin

Double Tap (Cholecalciferol+Diphacinone) pellets:

Double Tap is effective for control of both possums and rats. It is a combination of a first generation anticoagulant (diphacinone) and a naturally occurring substance, Vitamin D (cholecalciferol).

It is metabolised and biodegrades relatively quickly, posing a lower level of risk for nontarget animals (stock, pets or wildlife) than other anticoagulants.

The use of Baitsafe stations ensures that only possums can get at the bait, eliminating nontarget poisoning and maximising bait quality.



Baitsafe station



Double Tap pellets (Connovation Ltd)

Kill traps



Trapinator

Trapinator and **Possum Master** kill traps are recent additions to our toolbox. These are kill traps that can be set in trees or positioned above the reach of pets, children, stock or ground birds. Trapinator, Possum Master and **Timms** traps do not require checking every day, so they are well-suited for use in less accessible areas.



Possum Master



Timms

Cage traps are now used regularly. The Lean Grid has 'celium' cage sensors that provide immediate, reliable remote monitoring. The system incorporates some **Victor leghold traps** that also provide instant celium messaging. This allows our Trap Network Technicians to receive a notification when a trap has been triggered, greatly reducing the labour costs and efforts of physically checking every trap in the field daily.

AT220 traps are a new self-resetting trap that can reduce possum and rat numbers for several months without servicing. These traps are the backbone of the Lean Grid network and are used in areas where the topography and/or remoteness make regular maintenance and servicing difficult.

Nightshooting and **Detection Dogs** may be used for control and monitoring of trap-shy possums in some areas.



AT220 self-resetting trap



Celium cage trap

Important information about pesticides

When using any pesticide there is a poisoning risk to humans and animals. **Primary poisoning** can occur by eating toxic baits directly. **Secondary poisoning** can affect wildlife and domestic animals by eating poisoned carcasses.

Dogs and children require close supervision if there are warning signs present at access points to an area. By keeping to the main walking tracks in public areas people are unlikely to encounter baits or bait stations.

Toxic baits will normally be present for a limited period of time (less than a month) per treatment. However, some areas may require more than one treatment.

Warning signs

Warning signs will remain in place for as long as each area is being treated or is being considered for further treatment. In public reserves, signs will also remain in place through a standard 'Caution Period' to ensure that poisoned carcasses are decomposed, and therefore non-toxic prior to sign removal.

Trapping signs

OPBG and contractors will notify people of trapping in public areas through signage at access points. Signage for kill traps will have a picture of the trap(s) in use, a warning, and a request that people do not interfere with the traps. Traps are usually placed off formed public tracks, depending on habitat.

Working safely

Control work will be discussed with affected landowners/occupiers before commencement of work to ensure that boundary details, access to areas, health and safety, operational procedures and any other issues of concern are discussed and addressed with the landowner.

Compliance

Operational work undertaken by OPBG employees and contractors will be monitored by OPBG to ensure that it complies with regulations, consents, label instructions, Health & Safety standards and guidelines.

General warnings

Do not touch any poison baits or bait stations.

Do not touch any traps.

Do not touch any possum carcasses.

Keep pets under control; do not let dogs eat possum carcasses.

Do not let young children into the area unattended.

Inform any visitors to the area of the dangers and warning signs.

What to do with a suspected poisoning.

In a case of suspected poisoning, immediately contact your:

Local doctor;

Local medical centre; or

National Poisons Centre (phone 0800 764 766)

Who to contact for more information.

Duty Phone	021 221 6106
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Bruce Kyle

OPBG Operations Manager	021 2424 996
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Matthew Montgomerie

OPBG Project Manager	021 987 332
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OPBG are grateful for the efforts and support of the community, particularly the residents and landowners of the Otago Peninsula and we look forward to continuing our work together towards a predator-free peninsula. We encourage people to report possum sightings and activity, and to support the group in a volunteer capacity. We also appreciate hearing from people about new bird or other wildlife sightings.