

Identifying sites for possum control in the Waikato Region

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The spatial conservation planning software, Zonation, has been used to develop a set of regional rankings for natural ecosystems in the Waikato Region. This has provided a high-level view of indigenous biodiversity priorities across the region with an emphasis on identifying sites at a broad scale that will meet Council goals of protecting a representative range of indigenous ecosystems. The rankings are intended to support decision-making by Council staff around allocating funding for biodiversity management and in particular the maintenance of a full range of indigenous dominated ecosystems in good condition. Possum control is one of the major programmes undertaken by Waikato Regional Council that contributes to biodiversity management. Under the Regional Pest Management Plan, the council relies upon a scoring prioritisation process to evaluate which areas should receive possum control. The scoring criteria include agricultural values, ecological components and catchment health considerations, particularly soil erosion prevention. In the past, agricultural values have outweighed other values, with bovine tuberculosis eradication being the main focus. Over time, bovine tuberculosis has been progressively eliminated from the north of the region, ultimately resulting in re-examination of the focus for possum control. A new scoring process is being developed, involving independently ranking the potential impacts of possums upon the three scoring criteria. The regional rankings obtained from Zonation have been used as the basis for prioritising natural ecosystems, combined with an estimate of the threat posed by possums to each type of ecosystem. Results show that possum control will have greater impacts on ecological components than on agricultural values and catchment health. In addition, some ecosystems are likely to benefit more than others from possum control, particularly in lowland hills and coastal areas.