

# POSSUM PRESS

Possum Control Areas Newsletter – February 2016

**I**t's been another busy year for the Possum Control Areas (PCA) team at Environment Southland, with a number of new PCAs set up and increased monitoring of existing areas.

We now have 37 PCAs covering nearly 250,000 hectares of Southland. This involves over 1300 farms, all playing their part in ensuring possum numbers are maintained at a low level.

The main focus of the PCA programme continues to be transitioning areas that no longer have possum control under the successful TBfree vector control programme. This will ensure possum numbers don't increase and impact environmentally or economically. More information on this inside...

Due to the success and ease of controlling possums, many farmers are now starting to turn their attention to other pest animal species, such as stoats, ferrets and feral cats. Biosecurity PCA staff can also assist farmers to develop control plans for these species and source effective traps for farmers to use.



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PCA contractor Trevor Jackson tops up a possum bait station.



**PossumControlAreas**

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**247,000 ha**  
in **37 PCAs**  
throughout  
Southland

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PCA location map



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REGIONAL COUNCIL



## Maintaining the gains

The success of OSPRI's TBfree programme means a large number of areas in Southland have been declared free from bovine TB in wildlife.

Although this is good news, it does mean that TBfree will no longer carry out possum control in these areas, directing their resources instead to areas which are still considered to be a TB risk.

Possums will be keen to take advantage of this opportunity and will breed steadily if left uncontrolled, once again increasing the potential TB risk and having an impact on pasture production, crops, plantings and gardens.

Possums are a landowner responsibility to control, however Environment Southland aims to transition TB areas into its Possum Control Areas programme (PCA). This means farmers will be able to take advantage of the low possum numbers left through the TB programme and be in a better position to maintain this with the assistance and coordination of Environment Southland.

As part of a PCA programme, farmers can have bait stations set up on their property, with the cost covered by Environment Southland. This means the ongoing maintenance of possum numbers will be easier and more effective. Information from the TB programme, farmer feedback and Environment Southland knowledge will help determine the location of each bait station and numbers required.

Farmers can look at other control methods as long as they achieve the same target of a 5% residual trap catch level. Environment Southland staff can help advise on alternative control options most suited to your property and the possum habitat on your land.

If you are in an area that has transitioned from TB to PCA but have not had the opportunity to talk to an Environment Southland biosecurity staff member, please contact one of the team for an on-farm visit to discuss the many benefits of "maintaining the gains".

## Monitoring

As the PCA programme grows, so too does the need for possum population monitoring to ensure possums are being maintained to the required level under the Regional Pest Management Strategy. In most cases the target level is 5% residual trap catch (RTC), which means for every 100 trap nights, five or less possums will be caught. Where possum monitoring is to be undertaken in a PCA, farmers will be advised.

If the monitoring identifies any properties or areas where the 5% RTC is not being met, biosecurity staff will talk with farmers to revise the current control plan with the view to meeting the targets.

### Two methods of possum monitoring used



**WAX TAGS** – These are left out for seven nights and then retrieved. Possums bite the wax block, leaving an identifiable mark, which gives an indication as to numbers and locations.



**RESIDUAL TRAP CATCH** – Possums are caught in a leg hold trap that is put out and checked daily over three nights, with the number of possums caught expressed as a percentage.





## Trevor Jackson – Central Southland Pest Control

Catching his first possum at age 10 was the start of a long career in the possum industry for Trevor Jackson.

As the operator of Central Southland Pest Control, Trevor is contracted by Environment Southland and farmers to carry out the control and maintenance work in a number of Possum Control Areas (PCA) throughout the region.

Growing up in Tuatapere, Trevor has a long history in pest control, including 25 years working for the Animal Health Board. He's been contracted to the PCA programme for the last two years and is committed to providing landowners with a hassle-free and efficient possum control service.

He says it's important landowners keep on top of their possum control, as they can quickly increase in numbers if left uncontrolled and bringing them back to manageable levels again takes more time and resources.

"There's certainly been a huge decrease in possum numbers in recent years and the attitude towards possum control has changed. Most farmers now see it as being good farming practice to have a pest control plan in place."

Gaining the trust of farmers is a big part of any contracting service and Trevor says his reputation and business rely on providing a high quality and safe service.

Making sure gates are closed, the correct signage is displayed and any on-farm rules are adhered to, are all crucial to building this trust and he believes farmers are much more conscious of their responsibilities in terms of pest control and farm safety than they have been historically.

As well as taking control of possums on properties, Trevor offers a multi-pest service and can assist with managing rabbits, goats, deer and other unwanted animals.

Environment Southland biosecurity officer Alfredo Paz says using an approved contractor for possum control has many benefits for landowners, including ensuring they are fully trained and know their responsibilities for health and safety requirements.



### Felling trees?

If you are preparing to fell trees on your property, consider whether there are bait stations around. If there are, carefully remove them first or check with our PCA team who can advise you on what you need to do before removing the trees. Bait stations left at ground level can be a hazard.



Jeff Farm manager John Chittock talks possum control with biosecurity officer Craig Smith.

## Maintaining the gains

Taking a proactive approach to possum control is the only option according to Jeff Farm manager John Chittock.

The 2,424 hectare property owned by The Salvation Army Trust Board and located on the back road between Matura and Clinton, comes with many challenges, but keeping on top of possums is one which can be easily managed with good practice.

John says the property is one of many in the area which has been under the TBfree animal control programme for several years and they rarely see signs of possums these days.

"We seem to have very minimal possum numbers now, we do a wee bit of trapping around the houses, but there aren't many around."

With TBfree now stepping back from possum control in many areas, John says a proactive approach is the only way forward.

He's already been in discussions with Environment Southland's biosecurity team about being part of a Possum Control Area and has taken the initiative to chat with neighbouring landowners about how they can work together for the best results.

"I got a newsletter from PCA team and it just seemed like a good idea to get on board. We would be letting ourselves down if we didn't be proactive about getting involved and maintaining the low possum numbers.

"Good possum control is reliant on everybody doing their part, so ensuring our neighbours get on board is really essential."

John says as a training farm, it's also important to demonstrate good practice to his young trainees and teach them the value of working with others.

## Environment Southland PCA Team



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