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Report to the Rural Services and Wairarapa Committee
from Wayne O'Donnell, Manager, Biosecurity

Bovine Tb Operations - Long Term Maintenance Issues

1. Purpose

To seek Committee direction on the issue of landowner responsibility for long-standing maintenance control operations.

2. Background

There are a number of Bovine Tb vector control operational areas in the region where vector control services have been provided for many years. These areas generally have low vector densities and low Bovine Tb infection levels.

Following the introduction of the differential rate in 1994, these areas have continued to pay the higher operational rate. No thought has previously been given to possible incentives to encourage the landowners to undertake maintenance control themselves.

One exception was the Ponatahi – Longbush operation where landowners were invited in 1997 to consider undertaking their own control. The incentive, in this case, was a reduction to the non-operational rate level. Approximately 60% of landowners responded. Only small, lifestyle properties indicated interest in self-help. All large, traditional farming property owners wished to continue to receive Council assistance. In this case, the reduction of approximately \$1 per hectare in rates was not perceived to be a sufficient incentive. This is not a surprising result, given that it would cost landowners considerably more to undertake control themselves to achieve the required performance standards.

The perceived benefit of landowners undertaking their own control is to enable more Council resources to be directed to new operations. It is an appropriate time to consider this issue as Council has indicated its intention to expand the current operational programme.

3. Possible Incentives

Clearly, the option of applying the non-operational rate to self-help areas is an inadequate incentive.

Landowners will, generally, only consider a change if the costs of continuing with Council programmes are perceived to exceed the benefits. Two options could be considered –

- ◆ adding further incentives such as supplying bait and equipment, developing individual property management plans, providing training and advice, co-ordinating operations, and managing performance monitoring. Ongoing liaison would be critical to ensure commitment and continuity.
- ◆ incorporating financial disincentives which effectively forced landowners to consider self help options. For example, the Bovine Tb rate could be significantly increased for operational areas where vector control maintenance had occurred on at least five occasions, or, alternatively, landowners were required to pay 50% of the budgeted cost on a per hectare basis.

4. Critical Factors

- 4.1 The Committee will be aware that the Animal Health Board (AHB) has introduced more stringent contractual obligations in recent years. Operational performance targets now include individual monitoring line specifications. This trend is likely to continue in the future, with the targets likely to become even more stringent. If AHB funds are to be used to support self-help projects, it is expected that similar performance targets will apply. This will place significant pressure on Council staff to ensure the self-help programmes are successfully implemented. The costs of ‘managing’ a self-help programme, including the provision of various incentives, are unknown.
- 4.2 Any proposed change needs to consider the risks of failure. Should a self-help scheme fail to reach the performance targets, who will take responsibility for fixing the problem and who will pay? Where Council is dealing with an individual contractor or the Bovine Unit, the contractors have the responsibility. However, dealing with a multitude of landowners presents a challenging problem. This issue could be resolved if the landowners concerned contracted their responsibilities to an independent contractor.
- 4.3 Council must consider the long-term objectives for Bovine Tb in the region before recommending any significant change to the current programme. The Council is aware of the need to expand in to non-operational areas where Tb infection currently exists. This would permit progress towards the eradication objective. However, we need

to be confident that we do not allow the benefits of significant historical investments to be eroded.

- 4.4 The AHB has clearly signalled its intention to ‘eradicate’ Bovine Tb from NZ. They have supported this by providing for Eradication Zones (EZ) within Vector Risk Areas. The EZ attract a greater share of AHB funds than regional initiative operations. The prerequisite for an EZ is for the area to have been free of feral related TB infection for at least two years. This necessitates having a low vector density and providing intensive maintenance control to eliminate the risk of re-infection. If Council were to encourage self-help programmes in these areas, then the risk of TB breakdown, based on historical records, would be considerable higher. This risk would have to be managed. Options could include greater Council involvement or sub-contracting, as discussed earlier in this report.
- 4.5 All self-help programmes would require performance monitoring. Currently, the residual trap catch method is used. This method requires a minimum area to be effective. Self-help programmes would, therefore, need to be a minimum size and achieve co-ordinated control to enable an accurate performance assessment to be made. A 500 hectare minimum area would be appropriate. As monitoring has a cost, a decision on who should pay is necessary. Options include the landowner, Council or a shared arrangement.

5. Communication

As this report is presented for discussion, it is not considered necessary or appropriate to seek any particular publicity.

6. Recommendation

- (1) *That the Committee identify preferred options from this report for maintaining long standing Bovine Tb vector operations.*
- (2) *That if deemed necessary by the Committee, the Manager, Biosecurity, be requested to prepare a report providing additional details on the preferred options for consideration at a future Committee meeting.*

Report prepared by:

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