



OIA 19-E-0417/docCM6010350

19 July 2019

s9(2)(a)

Dear s9(2)(a)

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, dated 21 June. You requested the following:

"Can you please supply me with all the evidence of DOC's analysis of the aerial 1080 success/failure rate as it relates to the rat density operational targets.

"Can you please supply me with copies of all reports, published and unpublished, that DOC is aware of that deals with the issue of the underestimation of surviving possum population densities post aerial 1080 operations. (This should include all internal DOC reports, DOC commissioned reports and reports written and/or commissioned by DOC's partners and collaborators, which include MAF, MPI, Agricultural Pest Destruction Council, Regional Pest Boards, Animal Health Board, TBFree, OSPRI, Regional Councils, DSIR, LandCare Research, Universities, National Pest Control Agencies (NPCA) and any private companies involved in the aerial 1080 industry".

Context for your request:

Your email says you want to know how many aerial 1080 predator control operations match or exceed rat density targets set for each operation. This is because you believe the Department of Conservation is underestimating possum (and rat) population densities after aerial 1080 operations and has not been making this public. You claim the department is aware it is making false claims about the effectiveness of aerial 1080 in predator control operations and is hiding what you call their "failure rate"

You have further requested

"the information DOC has as to how many aerial 1080 rat operational failures there have been if the measure, of success and failure, is measured by the ability for aerial 1080 to match or exceed the rat density targets set."



The purpose of DOC's aerial 1080 predator control operations:

Before I answer your questions, I would like to make it clear that we do not use rat or possum density targets as the only measure of success or failure in 1080 predator control operations.

We consider an operation successful if it meets biodiversity outcomes. The department is primarily concerned with protecting and restoring our native species, not with killing rats and possums, although of course this is necessary to achieve our aims.

It follows that the department mostly reports on the effectiveness of 1080 for saving birds, rather than its effectiveness in killing rats and possums. I suggest it is possible that you have confused these different aims in your evaluation of claims about the effectiveness of aerial 1080 predator control operations.

I would also like to emphasize that we do in fact publicly release research about meeting target levels for mammalian predators. For example, we have already sent you our main analysis of pre- and post- 1080 rat tracking rates, carried out in 2014 by department scientists [s9(2)(a)] and [s9(2)(a)].

Their article reports that *“at 25 South Island sites, rat abundances were substantially reduced in all the 1080 operations (Fig. 6). However, it was our aim to reduce rat tracking rates to less than 5% so that they cannot recover to the threshold level (30% at most sites). This was achieved at 72% of sites. The sites where rat tracking rates were not reduced to below 5% were mostly in the northern South Island (e.g. Mt Stanley, Te Maruia, Goulard, Leslie, Wangapeka, Rotoiti) and mostly at sites at which 1080 was sown much later than was optimal”*

Another analysis is publicly available on the Department's website at

www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/threats-and-impacts/animal-pests/ship-rat-stoat-possum-control.pdf

This shows the variability of rat kill results in 2015 operations:

“While all operations killed most rats present only 19 operations of 25 (76%) got the rats below 10% rat tracking, and 15 (60%) of the operations got the rats to 1% rat tracking or less. Many operations were carried out late in the season when rats had reached very high densities with likely small home ranges”.

Our responses:

Our answers to your specific questions are as follows:



1. Can you please supply me with all the evidence of DOC's analysis of the aerial 1080 success/failure rate as it relates to the rat density operational targets.

As outlined above, we have already supplied you with our analyses and these are publicly available. We therefore decline your request under section 18(d) of the Official Information Act.

2. Can you please supply me with copies of all reports, published and unpublished, that DOC is aware of that deals with the issue of the underestimation of surviving possum population densities post aerial 1080 operations. (This should include all internal DOC reports, DOC commissioned reports and reports written and/or commissioned by DOC's partners and collaborators, which include MAF, MPI, Agricultural Pest Destruction Council, Regional Pest Boards, Animal Health Board, TBFree, OSPRI, Regional Councils, DSIR, LandCare Research, Universities, National Pest Control Agencies (NPCA) and any private companies involved in the aerial 1080 industry”.

The department is not aware of any published or unpublished reports about the underestimation of possum or rat population densities. Therefore, this question is refused under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act, as the information does not exist.

However, I can assure you that department operations follow NPCA possum monitoring best practice, with minor adjustments to account for different locations and outcomes. This gives us confidence that our relative abundance measures are consistent and standardised with the estimates of other agencies, including TB Free New Zealand and Regional Councils.

www.bionet.nz/assets/Uploads/Publications/A1-Possum-Monitoring-2015-Nov-HR.pdf

3. The information DOC has as to how many aerial 1080 rat operational failures there have been if the measure, of success and failure, is measured by the ability for aerial 1080 to match or exceed the rat density targets set.

The department does not hold information about “how many 1080 rat operational failures there have been”, other than the analyses you have already been shown. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act. I note that the department does carry out pre- and post- monitoring for individual operations, but that this information is not what you have requested.

If you wish to analyse our monitoring data yourself, you are perfectly welcome to submit a request through our publicly available Monitoring and Reporting pages on the DOC website.

www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/monitoring-reporting/request-monitoring-data/



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai


I further note that my email to you on 7 February 2019 advised that we believe we have already provided you with the context and information needed to understand the Department's approach to animal pest control techniques.

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 Official Information Act.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) will be published on the Department's website.

Yours sincerely,

s9(2)(a)

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Amber Bill
Director Threats, Biodiversity
for Director-General