

How Does our Possum Control Programme Work, and Help Awhitu Landowners?

Awhitu Landcare is a community organisation run by volunteers (most aged 60+), who give a total, on average, of 70 hours of their time every week working to enhance the Awhitu Peninsula’s natural environment.

Awhitu Landcare has an annual contract with Auckland Council to manage possum control on the Peninsula, currently $50k pa, or $2.20 per hectare. An additional $12k has been allocated to target possums living in the extremely difficult-to-access west coast cliff habitat with a carefully controlled cyanide programme.

Obtaining Council financial support is the result of many years of work by Awhitu Landcare and landowners, who succeeded in reducing possum numbers to a level where the Peninsula was awarded Possum Control Area status by Council, and was thus eligible for funding. Before then, landowners regularly reported being able to shoot 70 possums a night! Anyone who has been on the Peninsula for a decade or more knows what an obvious and dramatic improvement the programme has made to Awhitu’s native vegetation and wildlife.

However, ongoing Council assistance with possum control on the Awhitu Peninsula each year is not guaranteed – it is dependent on keeping possum numbers at a very low level.

To measure this level, independently run residual trap-catch monitors\*, regularly organised in different parts of the Peninsula, accurately measure possum numbers.

Auckland Council funding for possum control on the Awhitu Peninsula currently covers the following costs:

* Provision of free brodifacoum bait to Awhitu landowners ($85 a bag retail). The success of the programme hinges on landowners doing regular possum control on their own properties, so Awhitu Landcare aims to make it as easy as possible for landowners to access bait. (Please note, this programme does not use 1080 on the Peninsula.)
* Provision of bait stations to landowners – the first few stations free per property (additional stations can be supplied at a subsidised cost).
* The employment of contractors on an hourly rate to do pest control work on publicly owned land, and in strategic areas on the Peninsula, which will change from time to time as pest populations move. Current strategic areas include a permanent bait line across the bottom of the Peninsula, to prevent possum spread north, in large tracts of bush in the north, and on land where monitors prove that possum numbers are highest (called hot spots). The aim is to intensively deal to these ‘hot spots’, to prevent possums spreading onto neighbouring ‘clean’ properties.
* From time to time, if funds allow, Landcare may be able to help private landowners needing special assistance with setting up bait stations on their property (eg: absentee, unwell, elderly, landowners.) If help is needed, please feel free to initiate this, and contact Awhitu Landcare - phone: 235 1616 or email: landcare@awhitu.org.nz. The aim in these situations would be to set up bait stations in appropriate locations and do the first fill of these at no cost. After that time, if a private landowner requires ongoing assistance, the landowner would need to pay a contractor for labour and other direct costs. A quote would be given prior to any work commencing.

*April 2016*

\*The residual trap-catch (RTC) index is a simple method of determining relative possum abundance. A national protocol for the use of this method was developed which requires that lines of 10 leg-hold traps, with the traps spaced 20 metres apart, are set for three consecutive fine nights and are randomly located within the treatment area. Lines are in different locations, before and after control. The number of lines to be used is determined by the size of the management area. The standard performance target commonly set for a reduction in possum densities, is a residual trap catch of < 5% (i.e. less than 5 possums caught for every 100 trap-nights).