

Board Meeting: May 2017	Agenda Number: 12 (i)	File Ref: ED17/36
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# LORD HOWE ISLAND BOARD

## Business Paper

### OPEN SESSION

#### **ITEM**

Lord Howe Island Rodent Eradication Program Update

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Board note the LHI Rodent Eradication Program (REP) update

#### **BACKGROUND**

On 18 May 2015, after the community consultation process over late 2014 and early 2015 ending with the community survey, the LHI Board decided to proceed with the planning and approvals stage of the Program leading towards implementation of the rodent eradication plan, if the required approvals were received.

The rodent eradication program has now been divided into three stages:

#### **Stage One: Preliminary planning and community consultation**

This stage has already been completed. It involved undertaking required initial trials including captive management and toxin resistance trials as well as initial operational planning. It included the biosecurity review and progressing of biodiversity outcome monitoring. Finally it included the community consultation and engagement process and the community survey.

#### **Stage Two: Planning and Approvals**

This stage is now underway. The key tasks during this stage are:

- Assemble personnel to undertake the work on the next stages
- Review the Rodent Eradication Plan to ensure that it takes into consideration all new information since it was drafted in 2009
- Develop individual property and livestock management plans, which will inform the eradication plan and the approval process. This will involve a detailed property by property consultation with individual leaseholders and residents.
- Undertake any necessary studies required for the approval process, including independent health assessment
- Continue the relevant baseline outcome monitoring
- Finalise detailed planning and all necessary risk assessments;
- Obtain required permits and approvals,

- Update and finalise operational details;
- Prepare tender documentation

### **Stage Three: Implementation and evaluation of the eradication plan**

This Stage will not happen until Stage Two is completed.

After all the necessary approvals are obtained and the required planning is undertaken, the decision-makers, that is the Commonwealth and State funding bodies and the Board will consider all the information and make the decision about proceeding to Stage Three. It is likely this will occur in Sept 2017.

Stage Three will involve the eradication plan being implemented in winter 2018 over a three month period.

### **CURRENT POSITION**

#### **1. Delay of Final Go / No Go Decision to Sept 2017**

The REP team, with the Project Steering Committee endorsement, has advised the Board that as a result of delays in receiving key approvals, the REP will not be ready for the Board to make a final go /no go decision at the Board meeting in May 2017. It is now planned that the final go / no go decision will occur at the Board meeting in September 2017. There will be sufficient time to proceed with implementation in winter of 2018 if the decision is made in September 2017, provided that planning for implementation continues to proceed in the meantime: Key tasks include:

- Securing funding: Funding Agreement extension requests have been sent to both funding partners (Commonwealth and State).
- The helicopter contract will need to be executed as soon as possible with appropriate penalty clauses if the project does not proceed.
- Workforce accommodation for winter 2018 will need to be secured prior to September 2017 again with negotiated cancellation clauses. The request for quote process will be revised with workforce accommodation likely to be booked in June 2017 for winter 2018.
- Continued planning for construction of the aviaries.
- Recruitment of key positions such as the project GIS Officer to progress development of detailed ground baiting and aerial baiting plans

The Steering Committee has endorsed continued investment in planning.

The LHI community has been advised of the delay via the Signal and CWG. Other stakeholders have been notified. The community response has generally been positive with people understanding the reasons for delay and need for a thorough assessment process.

#### **2. Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA)**

The NSW Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer (OCSE) has presented their report and the consultant's HHRA to the Minister for the Environment. The Board has not yet received a copy. The Minister needs to formally accept the HHRA. The HHRA will be made publicly available

once it is received. The NSW Chief scientist (or her representative) is planning to visit the island to present the HHRA findings to the community.

### **3. Approvals Applications Update**

- *EPBC Public Environment Report (Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy)*

Department of the Environment and Energy (DoEE) representatives visited the island from 15 to 17 March 2017 as part of the assessment of the Public Environment Report (PER). Their itinerary included a Mt Gower Climb, an around the island boat trip, other sites of interest, attendance at the Community Working Group meeting and meetings with individuals for and against the program.

The statutory exhibition of the Final PER concluded on 22 March 2017. All public submissions on the Draft PER are now available to the public with all personal and identifying information redacted.

The expected decision on the PER was due on 7 April 2017. A notification was received from the DoEE on the 6 April 2017 extending the decision period by 90 business days to 17 Aug 2017. The DoEE is awaiting finalization of the APVMA permit before completing assessment of the PER.

- *Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Medicine Authority (APVMA) Permit Application*

The outcome of the APVMA assessment of the application for a permit to use the rodent bait for the REP was expected in January 2017. The APVMA has received two out of the four assessment modules that make up the assessment (human health and chemicals). The environment module (undertaken by DoEE) is expected at the end of April 2017. Once that is received the residues assessment module can be completed and then a decision on permit approval and conditions can be made. This could be several weeks after the assessment modules are received.

- *Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR)*

The rodent bait is produced in New Zealand. The Board has received an import permit that allows the bait product to be imported into Australia without the need for gamma irradiation. This shortens delivery time to LHI and potentially opens the door for importing the bait direct to LHI from NZ with on island inspection by DAWR staff.

- *NSW Approvals*

A Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries) permit application was submitted on 3 November 2016. A Marine Parks permit application was submitted on 30 December 2016. There is no statutory timeframe for assessment of this application. The Board has reviewed draft permit conditions which are awaiting approval. These are likely to include development of a marine spill plan, a monitoring plan (including water and fish sampling for Brodifacoum) and undertaking local bait attractiveness studies.

A Development Application for the construction of the captive management facility (for woodhen and currawong) was submitted to the Board on 19 January 2017. This will be considered by the

Board at its September 2017 meeting as part of overall rodent eradication program go / no go decision.

The Species Impact Statement (SIS) was submitted to the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) on 16 Feb 2017. Public exhibition of the SIS period was from 20 February to 20 March 2017. 55 comments were received with 52 expressing support for the proposed project.

OEH assessment officers are scheduled to visit the island as part of their assessment from 9 to 12 May 2017. A decision is expected by the end of July 2017 at the latest. OEH has advised that assessment is likely to be completed shortly after the visit (unlikely to need the full 120 statutory days).

#### **4. Community Engagement Update**

Meetings of the Rodent Eradication Community Working Group were held in March and May 2017.

A letter was discussed with the LHI Tourism Association regarding false statements made by operators to tourists.

A new series of REP fact sheets has been commissioned through a local marketing consultant. At least five flyers will be released over the next ten weeks answering common questions on:

1. The current rodent situation (released)
2. Pets and Animals (released)
3. Water and the environment
4. Kids
5. Human Health
6. Tourism and World Heritage

The REP team will be undertaking a community baiting demonstration at a resident's house and property to show the community what a baited house and property would look like. This will be an open day style demonstration.

#### **5. Island Cleanup**

The few remaining ad hoc property clean ups continue and will be completed by 30 June 2017. Cleanup and site preparation at the captive management facility at the nursery are near completion.

#### **6. Biosecurity**

The detector dog handler position description has been developed and is currently undergoing grading assessment prior to advertising. It is expected that interviews will be held from 7 to 11 June with the consultant dog trainer sitting on the selection panel. Handler training is scheduled for mid-August 2017 with handler teams expected to be operational immediately after.

A trial regarding devices that could be used in the ongoing rodent detection monitoring network has commenced. It consists of four 300m transects with each of the devices (chew blocks, chew cards, tracking tunnels, traps) at 20m intervals.

## **7. Operational Planning**

A preferred helicopter contractor has been selected, Helicopter Resources Pty Ltd, which undertook the Macquarie Island eradication project. Helicopter Resources have partnered with Central South Island Helicopters from New Zealand. Helicopter Resources will provide the machines and engineer, whilst Central South will provide pilots and buckets. A draft contract is being prepared that covers planning advice and implementation with cancellation clauses if the decision not to proceed is made in Sept 2017.

A protocol for ground baiting trials to be undertaken in July 2017 has been developed. The trial will be essential for determining how long ground baiting will take, number of staff required and how to ensure full bait coverage. The trial will be led by Pete McClelland with local staff.

The Island Eradication Advisory Group has reviewed the latest operational plan for the project. Their summary advice is that critical planning tasks (such as detailed ground and aerial baiting plans) need to continue to be progressed prior to the Sept 2017 decision in order to minimise technical risks and increase chances of eradication success.

Biodiversity benefits monitoring has continued on plants, seabirds and invertebrates with reports to be completed by the end of financial year. Early results suggest only 2% breeding success of Black winged petrels on LHI due to rodent predation. This contrasts with 50% success on the control site (rat free Phillip Island near Norfolk).

The Board is considering investment in a new GIS / GPS and field data collection system. The system has been reviewed for suitability for the REP and has been endorsed by the team.

## **8. Project Timelines**

The project schedule has been revised to account for the delay to the go / no go decision. There is sufficient time between the decision in September 2017 and implementation in winter of 2018 providing planning continues.

## **9. Budget**

The Project budget has been revised considering the delay in implementation to winter 2018. Current estimates show an overrun at the end of the project of approximately 6% of total budget which is below the expected 10% variance for a project of this size. At present there is still uncertainty in many line items until approvals are received. It is expected that either the overrun can be reduced once costs of individual line items are confirmed or additional funding can be secured or both. A Budget Report follows:

LHI Rodent Eradication Project											
Balance											
			Balance on Hand 30 June 2015	Balance on Hand 1 Jul 16	Balance Estimate 1 Jul 16 - 31 Dec16	Balance Estimate 1 Jan 17 - 30 Jun 17	Balance Estimate 1 Jul 17- 30 Jun 18	Balance Estimate 1 Jul 18 - 30 Jun 19	Balance Estimate 1 Jul 19 - 30 Jun 20	Balance Estimate at Completion	
			\$ 8,172,756	\$ 8,041,314	\$ 7,287,728	\$ 6,056,465	\$ 2,418,858	-\$ 382,917	-\$ 644,365	-\$ 644,365	
Revenue											
Project Revenue	Total Approved Revenue		Revenue recieved to date 30 June 2015	Revenue Earned FY15-16	Revenue Estimate 1 Jul 16 - 31 Dec16	Revenue Estimate 1 Jan 17 - 30 Jun 17	Revenue Estimate 1 Jul 17- 30 Jun 18	Revenue Estimate 1 Jul 18 - 30 Jun 19	Revenue Estimate FY19-20	Total Revenue Estimate at Completion	Cross Check
NSW Env Trust	\$ 4,542,442		\$ 4,542,442	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 0			\$ 4,542,442	
Caring for Our Country	\$ 4,500,000		\$ 4,500,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 0			\$ 4,500,000	
Interest	\$ -		\$ 610,390	\$ 177,020		\$ 128,000	\$ 46,000	\$ 20,610		\$ 982,020	
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$ 9,042,442</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 9,652,832</b>	<b>\$ 177,020</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 128,000</b>	<b>\$ 46,000</b>	<b>\$ 20,610</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 10,024,462</b>	<b>\$ 10,024,462</b>
Expenses											
Item	Budget Estimate	Expenses Incurred 2012/2013	Expenses Incurred 2014 to 30 June 2015	Expenses Incurred 1 Jul 15 to 30 Jun 16	Expenses Incurred 1 Jul 16 - 31 Dec16	Expense Estimate 1 Jan 17 - 30 Jun 17	Expense Estimate 1 Jul 17- 30 Jun 18	Expense Estimate 1 Jul 18 - 30 Jun 19	Expense Estimate 1 Jul 19 - 30 Jun 20	Total Expense Estimate at Completion	
Captive Management Sub Total	\$ 2,134,110	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 96,000	\$ 621,000	\$ 652,418	\$ 764,692	\$ -	\$ 2,134,110	
Community Liaison Sub Total	\$ 767,924	\$ -	\$ 327,106	\$ -	\$ 210,818	\$ 50,000	\$ 130,000	\$ 50,000	\$ -	\$ 767,924	
Baiting Sub Total	\$ 2,243,243	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 3,000	\$ 19,000	\$ 29,500	\$ 1,590,743	\$ 598,750	\$ 2,250	\$ 2,243,243	
Livestock/Animal Management Sub Total	\$ 691,512	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 21,000	\$ 13,500	\$ 368,363	\$ 288,649	\$ -	\$ 691,512	
Operational Monitoring Sub Total	\$ 599,575	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 84,305	\$ 22,300	\$ 54,100	\$ 402,380	\$ 36,490	\$ 599,575	
Eradicating Owls Sub Total	\$ 137,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 90,000	\$ 47,000	\$ 137,000	
Project Management Sub Total	\$ 2,207,733	\$ -	\$ 336,000	\$ 262,945	\$ 227,463	\$ 243,963	\$ 591,677	\$ 382,685	\$ 163,000	\$ 2,207,733	
Biosecurity Sub Total	\$ 470,244	\$ -	\$ 60,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 40,000	\$ 296,307	\$ 61,229	\$ 12,708	\$ 470,244	
Outcome monitoring Sub Total	\$ 462,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 278,000	\$ -	\$ 184,000	\$ -	\$ 462,000	
Misc Sub Total	\$ 955,487	\$ 756,970	\$ -	\$ 42,517	\$ 95,000	\$ 61,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 955,487	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 10,668,827</b>	<b>\$ 756,970</b>	<b>\$ 723,106</b>	<b>\$ 308,462</b>	<b>\$ 753,586</b>	<b>\$ 1,359,263</b>	<b>\$ 3,683,608</b>	<b>\$ 2,822,385</b>	<b>\$ 261,448</b>	<b>\$ 10,668,827</b>	<b>\$ 10,668,827</b>

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Board note the LHI Rodent Eradication Program (REP) update

**Prepared:** Andrew Walsh, Rodent Eradication Project Manager

**Endorsed:** Penny Holloway, Chief Executive Officer