

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 previously 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 progression 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 complete. The key tasks during this stage were:

- Assembling key personnel to undertake the work on the next stages
- Reviewing the Rodent Eradication Plan to ensure that it takes into consideration all new information since it was drafted in 2009
- Developing individual property and livestock management plans, which inform the eradication plan and the approval process. This involved a detailed property by property consultation with individual leaseholders and residents.
- Continue working with community to fully understand the programs objectives
- Undertake any necessary studies required for the approval process, including independent human health risk assessment
- Continue the relevant baseline outcome monitoring
- Further develop detailed planning and all necessary risk assessments;
- Obtain required permits and approvals,
- Update operational details;
- Prepare key tender documentation

Final Go / No Go Decision

The Board made the final decision to proceed to implementation of the project at the Board meeting 12 Sept 2017 considering:

1. The status of key approvals
2. Safety of the environment
3. The advice of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer regarding a further independent Human Health Risk Assessment
4. Social Acceptability
5. Budget considerations
6. Technical Feasibility
7. Steering Committee recommendation

Stage Three: Implementation and evaluation of the eradication plan

This Stage is now underway.

Stage Three will involve the eradication plan being implemented in winter 2018 over an approximate three month period. Key elements are:

- Finalise detailed logistics and operational planning
- Assemble and train remaining resources
- Construction of captive management facilities for the woodhen and currawong
- Capture of woodhens and currawongs
- Operational readiness check
- Implementation of ground and aerial baiting
- Follow up monitoring and release of woodhens and currawongs
- Maintaining an ongoing biosecurity and rodent detection monitoring network

CURRENT POSITION

1. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The Communication Strategy for Stage 3 has been revised. It covers a range of communication methods with stakeholders including island residents and visitors before, during and after the eradication. Key facets include:

- Continued one on one consultation with residents and island businesses
- A range of materials such as key messages, fact sheets and letters specific to identified groups
- A stand-alone REP website
- A niche winter 2018 ecotourism marketing campaign developed with the LHITA
- A marketing strategy for post eradication also developed with the LHITA
- Countering misinformation that could be potentially damaging to tourism and island businesses

2. Approvals

On 1 November 2017 a letter was sent from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority (APVMA) to LHIB Chair Sonja Stewart regarding the Minor Use Permit issued by the APVMA on 31 August 2017.

The letter advised the Chair that the APVMA had identified technical issues in the way in which they had granted the Permit. The APVMA invited the Board to consider surrendering the current permit and submitting a new application for a permit.

This was very disappointing in that the Board believed that the Permit issued by the APVMA was correct, noting that it did come with some conditions to be met. Work is well underway towards satisfying the permit conditions.

However it is essential that there is no question about the validity of the Minor Use Permit issued by the APVMA in implementing the rodent eradication program. Accordingly based on the APVMA's advice and in the interests of time, we have written to the APVMA on 1 November, voluntarily surrendering the permit and indicating that a new application will be submitted as soon as possible. The APVMA has been asked to deal with the new application expeditiously, when it is submitted, based on the assessment that has already been undertaken.

A new permit application will be submitted as soon as possible. The program is still planned for winter 2018.

The REP team is continuing to work with the various other regulators to develop the required post approval documents for the project. This includes:

- Establishment of the Terms of Reference and Membership of the Technical Advisory Group
- Development of the various monitoring and risk mitigation plans

3. Recruitment

Recruitment is now well underway for key roles for the project. This includes:

- Darcelle Matassoni has joined the team as a Grade 4 Admin Officer / Communications Coordinator from an existing talent pool. Darcelle will be working part time (4 days / week) until September 2018.
- Extension of contract for Technical Advisor – Pete McClelland. Pete will continue to assist the project team remotely until January 2018 and then return to the Island from January to September 2018.
- Recruitment of the project GIS Officer Ann De Schutter. Ann was the preferred candidate from the selection process and will join the LHIB on a secondment agreement with the New Zealand Department of Conservation. The secondment will be from 9 November 2017 to September 2018.
- Replacement of the Assistant Project Manager – Community. A candidate has been identified and final negotiations are currently occurring, with an anticipated start date of 22 November.
- The team is actively searching for candidates for the Aerial Operations Manager role. This position may be filled as a temporary vacancy or contractor.
- An Expression of Interest has been developed and issued to invited experienced contractors to provide key staff for the Ground Baiting teams. This will include the Ground Operations Manager, Quality Assurance Supervisor and some Field Supervisors / Field Officers.

Further development has also occurred on the overall project team structure. This includes identification of positions that can be filled by locals. It is expected that there will be approximately 30 locals employed in a variety of roles.

4. Workforce Accommodation

Tenders have been awarded for the workforce accommodation required for the period May to end of August 2018. A total of 3189 beds nights have been booked with lodges which are open during winter and responded to the request for quote. Additional accommodation will still be required outside of the period May to August 2018 and this will continue to be booked under normal arrangements.

Biosecurity

The detector dog and handler teams have finished their formal training and are now working on additional minor training and developing operating procedures for the island. The next major milestone for the teams will be practical assessment to receive accreditation with the Canine Detection Certification Council, expected to take place in February 2018. Passing the practical assessment is an ongoing requirement to maintain proficiency.

5. Operational Planning

The helicopter contract for the aerial baiting component has now been finalised.

Construction of the captive management facilities will commence in November. Construction is expected to occur between November and December 2017 and recommence in January 2018 for completion in April 2018.

Biodiversity benefits monitoring has continued focusing on Currawong population estimates and rodent impacts to plants.

A request for quote for miscellaneous services including transportation, catering, bike hire, boat hire and other services will be reissued for the winter 2018 period. The request will not be exhaustive but instead provides an opportunity for island businesses to offer services that they feel could be beneficial to the project.

RECOMMENDATION

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