

# **Minutes of the Community Working Group Meeting**

## **Lord Howe Island Museum Library 17/3/2017**

**4.00pm – 5.30pm**

Attendees: Penny Holloway (LHI Board); Anthony Wilson (LHIB Board); Andrew Walsh (LHI Board); Esven Fenton; Jack Shick; Frank Reed, Karen Wilson; Therese Turner,; Barbara Ardill; Peter Curtin; Helen Tiffen; Mark McKillo,; Karen Wilson; Ian Hutton; Rodney Thompson; Jasper Clark (Department of Environment and Energy (DoEE)); Dougal McFarlane (DoEE)

Apologies: Beth Wilson; Robyn Curtin

### **1. Introductions**

Penny introduced Jasper Clark and Dougal McFarlane from the Department of Environment and Energy.

### **2. Minutes - matters arising from last meeting and corrections**

Helen made several correction to the minutes from the last meeting (attached to these minutes).

Peter also said he had numerous corrections but asked to be left out of future minutes as he felt the content was incorrect and it was not achieving anything. Penny said that minutes would be recorded for attendees even though it was difficult but asked if the group would prefer to have dot point minutes and actions only in future.

Rodney said he was misquoted in the minutes, regarding a misleading statement about throwing bait out over water and Helen had asked if it was marine or freshwater. Rodney said he had spoken to his insurance company and they had told him he wasn't covered for throwing poison around his property. Andrew said the Board had insurance for the project. Peter said Rodney had a legitimate concern regarding whether or not he was covered for the baiting program.

Therese said that Rodney had asked to see the financials regarding the program, and was told it was part of Board Meetings. She said that they were not shown in the open session so it must have been in the closed session. Penny agreed that this was the case.

### **3. Department of Environment and Energy update**

Dougal and Jasper gave the group information about the Commonwealth assessment, Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) and the Public Environment Report (PER) process. They said they were in the assessment period.

Helen asked for clarification on DoEE jurisdiction in regards to water resources as the REP could impact on water. Dougal replied that water resources were only considered for coal seam gas and mining projects and not the REP.

Peter spoke about the PVC bait stations that are currently used and said the lockable black station is a better product. He said only PVC stations were referred to in the PER and that

lockable stations should be a condition of any approval. Andrew said that several types were discussed in the PER. Anthony showed the group the lockable station that is located in the museum.

Karen asked whether the Department will be looking at the Marine Park and fish. Dougal replied yes including fate of the bait and toxin and impacts to threatened species and World Heritage values based on the information in the PER and their own resources. Helen asked whether the department would be having anyone doing those studies in-situ. Dougal said no but there is a large amount of studies available that the department will be looking at.

Rodney said that the compound lasts a long time and rodenticide pellets that are proposed to be used in the program float on the water and don't sink. Dougal replied that he had dropped two pellets into some water at the Board office today and they had both sunk immediately.

Jack said that he has been trialling non-toxic Pestoff and the pellets that had been left in the garden after rain had practically disappeared over night. Dougal said he expected they would break up like Weetbix.

Rodney said he had seen on a National Geographic program about Pitcairn and Henderson Islands that birds were dying everywhere on the beach and there were still rats alive in the bush. He also said that the poison can get into people's skin. Dougal said he would be interested to see the program.

Frank asked Ian whether seabirds will eat the bait pellets. Ian said that seabirds only eat marine species such as fish, crustaceans and squid so they won't eat pellets.

Peter said that there were leaked emails about a fish ban on Wake Island but information is very limited due to it being a military base. Ian said that Wake also had other complications from previous military waste around the island.

Rodney said the New Zealand government won't let the poison be distributed by aerial means. He said he has a document from NZ DOCs prohibiting the spreading of brodifacoum by aerial means and saying that it could only be used in bait stations. Penny asked Rodney to supply the document. Rodney said he would.

**Action – Rodney to supply documentation by New Zealand DOCs prohibiting the spread of brodifacoum by aerial means.**

Karen asked what value the DoEE placed on all the peer reviewed studies in the PER. She said that some studies referenced were not peer reviewed including one from Haselden and Bower on fish eating pellets. She asked what qualifications they had. Dougal said that inclusion of referenced studies was part of the PER Guidelines. He said that as far as he could tell there were many studies cited in the PER and checking those was part of the assessment. Peter said there was a lot of circular references in the PER such as the health and economic studies.

Rodney said Ian Wilkinson had said you could eat a packet of poison and nothing would happen to you.

Helen mentioned credible sources and said the scientists knew what they were doing through published research. She questioned who the credible sources were on the REP and which scientists would be in charge on the ground. She also asked what the qualifications of the staff running the program are. Penny said that current project staff are project managers and that's what they were employed for. They both have university degrees and are qualified for the job. Andrew said he was the scientist on the ground responsible for the REP and gave Helen an overview of his qualifications and job experience in environmental science and project management.

Rodney asked Andrew about safety measures during the program and said that Andrew has no concern for safety of people or the environment. Andrew said that was incorrect.

Esven entered meeting at 4.50 pm.

Dougal explained about the various assessment stages and what was considered at each stage. He said that the PER assessment stage included an acceptability test that considered the environment and socio economic factors.

Barbara asked about secondary poisoning of animals. She said she couldn't see how the program could stop this. Dougal explained that would be considered as part of the acceptability test and explained the non-target mitigation plan and Currawong and Woodhen captive management as mitigation. Barbara asked about other species. Dougal explained that risks of proceeding vs not proceeding would be considered. He gave the example that prevention of further extinctions would be one upside. Barbara said there was also a large downside. Dougal said that on balance risk would be considered. Barbara said that there was no way it was possible to get rid of rats.

Mark entered meeting at 4.55pm.

Jack suggested that everybody on the CWG go for a walk over to Boat Harbour and hear the silence of the bush with no birds due to rats. Penny asked Jack what the relevance of his question was. Dougal said that everyone has a different baseline and perspectives for numbers of birds present. Jack said that there are more birds in his backyard where he baits. Helen said she had been assured that the Emerald Green Pidgeon won't eat pellets as they are green. She said she had undertaken some trials and found that they indeed eat green food. Helen also commented on Jack's statement saying that the reason why more birds are around his house and the settlement is that there are greater food sources with fruiting trees etc. Frank said that these places are baited at present which reduces rat predation and that's why you see more birds. Frank said he was a little worried about by-kill but wasn't seeing many dead birds as a result of current baiting.

Rodney suggested baiting the paths to get data. Esven said he has 80 years of baseline data and remembers many more birds present when he was younger. Helen said there are a lot more people now too. Therese said that she and Jack were the same age and they rarely saw Golden Whistlers when they were kids but that was due to cats preying on them. Therese asked whether the DoEE assessment considered community concern as almost half the people were opposed. Dougal said that it was a consideration.

Karen said that attacking the entire environment to get rid of rats was antiquated thinking. Dougal replied that the assessment process was designed to weigh up the risks, consider

upsides and downsides by assessing the evidence from past impacts and trends for future impacts of proceeding or not. Karen asked what about long term health impacts.

Esven asked Dougal and Jasper about the number of submissions received and how many were for and against. Peter answered saying that the total received were 128 with 118 for and 10 against. Helen said that you can't go by that as some people were scared to submit or didn't feel confident writing submissions.

Rodney said that some of the comments were from weeders and some people who will benefit from commenting and seeing the rodent program go ahead. Rodney said that the Premier's Office said that wasn't a good look. Andrew said he will not accept Rodney calling project staff corrupt. Ian asked Rodney if he was calling him corrupt also. Penny said there was no evidence of corruption on the Board.

Jack asked the people in the group who are against the program exactly what they are against. All members replied the method, it has always been the method. Jack said the CWG should focus on the method then.

Helen said that the rat sterilisation treatment will work with current control over a number of years to achieve eradication. Andrew asked Helen if she had one study where the sterilisation method has worked for an eradication. Helen replied that she didn't.

Esven asked Dougal and Jasper whether they understood the implications of the delay in the approvals process in that the program had been delayed by a year. He said it had two implications: (i) The wildlife loss and (ii) The financial costs and wages of staff. Esven also said there would be other hidden costs due to the delay. He said he was concerned that extra delays would possibly give rats time to develop resistance to brodifacoum like some mice are showing. Dougal said that the DoEE had assessed the application within the statutory timelines once it was received and it's unfair to say they have stalled this project. He said the DoEE had acted as swiftly as possible under statutory timeframes and that an environmental assessment takes time. He said it was a large responsibility and it took time to make the right decision. Penny reiterated Dougal's statement.

Mark asked whether the delay in the program by a year was a result of the winter baiting window. Several people responded yes.

#### **4. Planning and Approvals – update on progress to date**

Helen asked whether the Human Health Study was complete. Penny replied that the consultants' report was complete and it was currently being assessed by the expert panel. Helen asked Penny if the report would be made public. Penny said yes, once it was received by the Board.

Andrew gave an update on the program's other approvals applications including the Development Application for the captive management facility at the nursery site.

#### **5. Operational Planning**

Andrew reported that the team has been trialling rodent monitoring methods that included wax blocks, chew cards, Elliot traps and snap traps. Karen asked about the Department of Education. Anthony replied that we are working with them.

## **6. CWG Issues**

Rodney said that we should thank the DoEE reps for coming across to the Island and we should be praising them for trying to stop the program from happening. Dougal told Rodney it's not about stopping the program but ensuring the process and approvals follow the right channels to make a decision. Rodney said they should be careful about documents saying it was safe. He said he had an ICAC report saying the REP would not go ahead unless it was safe.

## **7. Communication**

Anthony gave the group an update on future fact sheets and information that will be distributed to the community in the coming months. Rodney said it's more propaganda like the past.

## **8. Other Business**

Karen asked the DoEE reps whether additional submissions would be considered. Dougal replied that the official period for comments had closed but people could write to whomever they chose. He said additional information may or may not be considered.

Penny thanked Jasper and Dougal and closed the meeting at 5.30 pm.

Next meeting to be scheduled in April and CWG members will be notified.