

# Notes from the Rodent Eradication Program Community Working Group Meeting

Lord Howe Island Museum Library 20/01/2016

4.30pm – 5.45 pm

## Attendees:

Penny Holloway (CEO LHIB Board) Anthony Wilson (LHIB Board) Andrew Walsh (LHI Board) Ian Hutton, Rob Rathgeber, Karen Wilson, Mark McKillop, Jack Shick, Carole Rathgeber, Rodney Thompson, Pam Goyen, Beth Wilson, Esven Fenton, Bert Simpson Therese Turner, Frank Reed, Helen Tiffin

## Apologies:

Bronwyn Tofaeono

## Notes of Meeting

### 1. Introductions and apologies

Penny opened the meeting made introductions and thanked everyone for attending and made introductions. She explained that notes from the last CWG meeting had been sent via email and hard copy to members.

### 2. Review of agreement (from meeting of 18/11/15) about how the group will work together

Penny presented on the whiteboard the agreement developed by the group at the last meeting about how to work together:

1. Focus on the aims and the process to progress to APVMA & EPBC of Stage 2 Planning and Approvals
2. Be polite, general manners as with normal general meeting procedures. One person speaks at a time
3. The ability to raise issues
4. Go through the chair to talk
5. We can add more as we go

No changes to the agreement were made.

### 3. Notes from last meeting: Action items and matters arising

Anthony presented a document showing 6 islands that had been treated with island residents present during the eradication process (document attached). He identified the Island Conservation database ( <http://diise.islandconservation.org>) and said that eradication projects around the world (planned, completed and being implemented) were on this website along with techniques being used: aerial, hand broadcast and bait stations. Anthony encouraged all CWG members to look at the site as it was the easiest way to source information on inhabited islands, their size and population. Rob asked for the paper to be posted out to all members or emailed.

Rob raised the point that the Options paper had stated that the aerial drop would be 10m from houses and Penny had said that wasn't correct in a previous meeting. Penny said that although the options paper had said 10m would be buffer, this was incorrect, and it would be a minimum of 30m. Rob asked if the Board would categorically say "no closer than 30m" and Penny said that was correct.

Rob asked why the Universities haven't been engaged to look at the Toxicos report independently and the 109 questions that have been raised. Penny restated the commitment of the Board to undertake another independent human health risk assessment and reported that the process of engaging the NSW Chief Scientist to undertake the independent assessment had begun. Rob said that Elton Consulting had been sacked. Penny said this was not correct as Eltons had completed their project and finished their contract.

Helen asked whether there have been tests done on the marine environment particularly the coral. Andrew said that no specific studies had been done on coral that he was aware of.

Rodney asked if all the studies that Elton considered and have not been done yet have to be completed before the approval is given. Rob said that the Board has used a consultant to identify the concerns of the island but they hadn't been allowed to finish their work. Penny said that the Board had made a commitment that the community would have a say at the end of the financial year 2014/2015 and so the Options paper had been prepared by Elton Consulting and the Community Poll had been held in May 2015. In making the decision about proceeding to the Planning and Approvals stage, the Board had then made a commitment that a further independent human health risk assessment would be done, preferably by the NSW Chief Scientist.

Helen said the group had requested more studies from University of Sydney in regards to damage to marine life from brodifacoum. Anthony said that we have results for mussels and fish but there have been no studies done on coral specifically. She asked if nothing has been done whether it was possible to get some undertaken. Jack said there was a lot of information presented in the past on a range of topics and the information was readily available.

In response to repeated questions from Rob, Penny reminded him of the rules for the meeting.

Ian asked if Rob could behave in the meeting.

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

Andrew told the group that discussions had commenced with the NSW Chief Scientist about undertaking the independent Human Health Risk Assessment to look at all human health issues with brodifacoum use.

Rob said the Chief Scientist was biased. Penny said that the Chief Scientist was independent and would engage independent experts (which would include Universities) to do various parts of the study.

Karen said she was concerned that NSW Health had rubber stamped the last report on health but South Australian Health had "canned it". Andrew explained we haven't got the Chief Scientist's scope of works yet but when we do we can distribute it for members to look at. Andrew asked if the group would be happy with that and the consensus was yes. Rob asked whether the group can have a say in who gets involved. Penny replied that it would be up to the Chief Scientist to determine which independent experts were engaged. Rodney said that no one will believe the fish health report. Penny said it would be up to the Chief Scientist to independently assess.

#### **Action – distribute Chief Scientist's scope to CWG when available**

Helen said that the report on Wake Island says you can't eat fish from around the Island for 4 years and would this be the case on Lord Howe Island if the project proceeds.

Anthony said that the recommendation for Lord Howe is not to eat livers of fish caught after the baiting for 6 months after completion.

Carol asked about the industry on the island and Rod said that the island has had the best tourist season in years and the Board is putting it all at risk. Andrew said it's not at risk and that the Chief Scientist will look at all areas of concern for human health. Rodney asked whether the Chief Scientist would be paid. Penny said we are trying to get the best independent advice from the experts and we would need to pay whoever did the study. Rodney asked if the Chief Scientist would know that health and safety is of paramount importance to which Penny replied yes.

Rob said that the earlier CWG had chosen the Universities of Sydney and Queensland and asked whether we will get the same level of independence. Andrew said the process that the Chief Scientist would use to select independent experts will include a Conflict of Interest process and transparency about who will do what. Rob said that the South Australian Health Department had a completely different view than NSW Health. Andrew said that's why we are going for an independent assessment.

Andrew then gave an overview of the key agencies involved with the Approvals process and their roles and responsibilities including the Federal Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicine Authority, the Department of the Environment and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, and various NSW agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Planning and Environment, the Office of Environment and Heritage and the Department of Primary Industries – Fisheries and Marine Parks . Andrew said he could provide more detail about the approvals process to anyone who was interested.

Helen asked how these fit into the discussion earlier regarding Marine Parks. Andrew explained that they will look into all studies that have been undertaken and consider risk mitigation and whether we have enough information or studies in key areas. Karen asked whether all the studies accompany the applications. Andrew replied yes through the various processes.

Rodney said it seemed strange that with all the talk over the years the Board has just given approval. Penny said the Board had only approved going to the planning and approvals stage, but we have not yet got approval from the various authorities, which is why we will now be seeking approval. Rodney asked whether the Board is seeking approval for the aerial baiting method. Penny said that the application will outline how we propose to do the eradication. Rob said all the information needs to be put there in front of the authorities e.g. the Toxicos report says brodifacoum is not teratogenic but we know it is so the information has to be updated. Rob said that the South Australia Health was critical of the Toxicos report yet NSW Health says it is fine so the information is clearly biased. Penny said all evidence will be provided and referenced.

Karen asked Ian if there had been any studies done on the coral around Lord Howe Island. Ian said no. Karen also asked if the studies will be done locally on the island or reference made to studies done elsewhere e.g. on kingfish. Andrew said that would be checked.

Jack asked if Rob could do a survey of the island population to check who is already using brodifacoum. Carole asked Jack if he buys it from the shop and how much he uses. Jack said he doesn't use brodifacoum, he uses the Board's poison. Carole said that she knew that about 90% of the island was using the Board supplied poison. Rob said there it was very difficult for anyone to know that. Rob suggested seeing what Thompsons and Joys Shop supply in a year to get some answers. Penny said we don't how much brodifacoum gets used or by whom because people are able to order it on-

line and bring it in over on the ship directly and there is no way of knowing how much people order. Helen said it's getting used now in the settlement area but the project will drop it all over the island.

Karen asked if the cereal bait could spread weeds and where the grain was sourced. Andrew said it will be checked by Department of Agriculture – Quarantine as part of the importation. Andrew said he would send the Manufacturers Declaration to the CWG.

**Action – will source information on product information and also country of origin (raised by Helen).**

Andrew outlined the second round of mice toxicity trials that will be conducted to determine how much bait is need to kill the mice. Rob said he wasn't aware of the first trial. Andrew then explained the previous trials. Rodney then asked if they say bait stations only will work whether that is that what we will use.

Frank said if we lose control of our current control program in the future because of growing resistance to poisons, we could have a health issue on our hands similar to the Aleutian Islands. Rob asked which islands. Rob asked Frank to email the islands in question. Frank said he was much more concerned with other drugs on the island like alcohol than he was with brodifcaoum. Carole said alcohol was people's own choice.

## 5. Other Business

Helen shared her discussions from a recent trip with Peter Harrison, a world expert on birds. Helen said Peter was in favour of rodent eradications to protect birds but stressed that his opinion was the program would not work on Lord Howe Island for two main reasons: Henderson Island (similar to LHI) has very dense and because it is a raised coral atoll it has nooks and crannies everywhere. Peter's main issue with Lord Howe was the level of community support due to the number of votes against the program from the community. Helen said she was against the program to start with but even more so now.

Rob said that Frank had stated that rodents will be in plague proportions but there are lots of ways to treat them e.g. Coumatetralyl and warfarin. He said years ago we used 7 tonnes of poison a year and now it's down to 1 tonne a year, with no rat plague.

Rodney said Frank was right in that the Board has failed in the way that they bait the island. He said we need to use more bait and more bait stations. Penny explained that the current program is designed to do control without further increasing resistance in the rodent population and that's why pulse baiting is done. Therese said that while there is community resistance it won't work. Andrew said that's why at the end of the planning and approval stage, we will look at the go/no go feasibility of the project.

Helen asked Frank if he thought brodifacoum was safe through skin absorption and if the amount being proposed will affect people. Frank said as a result of his reading of toxicology material, he wasn't aware that brodifacoum being absorbed through the skin was an issue. Helen then asked how many people had been treated for rat bites. Frank said one.

Roney said the main reason for why we are here is due to the phasmid. Penny said no it's not just about the plasmid and reiterated the other reasons for the proposed program and benefits of protecting other species on the Island..

## 6. Communication

- **How to communicate with the group outside of meetings**
- **Communication with the community on progress to date**

Penny asked how information should be distributed to the community.

Karen suggested Andrew should have an introduction to the island through The Signal and give an update what studies will be done. Helen said not the information on the studies but the detail - how has money already been spent on the program because the information which Rodney was previously given doesn't have it. Penny said Rodney was given the information about where money had been spent after he asked for it two years ago. Rob said it doesn't have any figures on it. Penny said Rod didn't ask for figures, only who had received funding during the program. Penny agreed that project financials could be provided if requested.

Frank suggested community bulletins and one pagers to the Signal as well as a synopsis of the minutes to be distributed.

Rodney said that the Board pays money to people to get the answers they want and what's to stop the Board paying to get the right answer. Penny said she found that comment highly offensive and an insult to her integrity.

## **7. Next Meeting**

Next meeting to be organised for around a month's time.

Meeting finished 5.45pm