

On September 13th a public meeting was held in Christchurch to discuss 2011 heli-hunting operations, to gather public feedback on these operations and to gather information regarding heli-hunting on public conservation land in general. Those attending the meeting asked we send you this summary of the issues raised and to inform you that the general feeling at the meeting was one of opposition to heli-hunting.

The meeting was attended by around 60 people, with recreational hunters the largest group present, although the meeting also comprised representatives from:

NZDA
FMC
Conservation Boards
New Zealand Professional Hunting Guides Assoc. (NZPHGA)
Heli-hunting operators
Heli-hunting Action Group
Safari Club International (SCI)
Tahr Interest Group (TIG)
FishnHunt
DOC staff
Individual members of the public

General themes developed during the meeting were:

- The need to protect the integrity of wilderness areas by keeping aircraft activity out of these, whether or not any direct user conflict occurs. Aircraft access for wild animal control work was supported, but only if this activity directly related to departmental programmes. A need was identified to develop best practice around control options (eg recreational control v culling v DOC control etc). Concern was also expressed about the weighting to which concessions staff gave regard to Conservation Management Strategies and National Park Management Plans when considering concession applications.
- The current legislation and plans permit heli-hunting and recreational hunters to be involved in wild animal control
- Opposition to the activity of heli-hunting as it currently stands (this opposition had several strands):
 - Opposition to herding and hazing and also concern over how allowing these components might damage New Zealand's reputation overseas
 - Opposition to the lack of "fair chase" in heli-hunting -heli-hunting clients can use aircraft to search for, and access trophies (not "real" hunting)
 - The feeling that heli-hunting operators have an unfair advantage over other tahr ballot hunters - heli-hunting operations aren't limited to the designated landing sites in wilderness areas that tahr ballot hunters are constrained by.

There was recognition that there is no legal basis to impose restrictions on the issues of fair chase, herding and hazing and shooting from the helicopter, but there was a desire for the law to be reviewed, where relevant. There was also discussion surrounding the public notification process, including the justification for public notification needing to be effects based, and the likely need for further non-notified, short-term permits in 2012, should public notification occur.

Other individual comments made at the meeting included:

- Culls
 - TIG achieves good cull numbers within Aoraki Mt Cook National Park
 - Recreational hunters are carrying out effective red deer control in Fiordland without DOC culls
 - Heli-hunting culls need to be better managed
 - Helicopters are required for tahr management

- Heli-hunt operators want to ensure the trophies endure. Their selective shooting and culling is more effective in doing this than recreational hunting and DOC culls.
- Permits/2011 report on heli-hunting
 - Better clarification/information needed over the definition of heli-hunting, high use recreation periods and flight tracking data in the final report on the 2011 operations
 - Trophies taken can't be considered as wild animal control
 - A desire for public notification of the long-term applications
 - Heli-hunt fees are higher than the equivalent fees paid by recreationists for aircraft landings (response to a question)
 - People wanted heli-hunting in areas where the public is absent – ie areas that are difficult to access, so this, in part, led to heli-hunting operators applying for wilderness areas
 - How much has it cost DOC to date on the heli-hunting process?
 - How much money from 2011 heli-hunting income has been returned to conservancies for wild animal control?
- Wilderness Areas
 - Recreational hunters would be prepared to pay to have more aircraft landing opportunities in wilderness areas
 - Heli-hunting involves more aircraft time spent in wilderness areas than that spent for positioning ballot hunters
 - Could heli-hunting be provided for outside wilderness areas and national parks but biodiversity offsets occur within these areas?
 - Move tahr ballot opportunities forward to give exclusive access to wilderness areas
 - Given the heli-hunting trophy numbers taken from wilderness areas, does this justify the aircraft activity there?
- Heli-hunting doesn't achieve promotion of physical and mental well-being
- Around 50% of professional hunting guides are currently heli-hunters (equates to around 40 guides)
- Heli-hunting scatters targets
- Clarification was asked for and provided over the definition of WARO activities
- SCI has policies in place regarding herding and hazing – no notification received by SCI (NZ) of any breaches occurring in NZ over the past 18 months the policy has been in place
- Safety is paramount when NZPHGA guide their clients and the guide is “on the shoulder” of the client at all times
- NZPHGA is conducting modelling of the tahr herd
- There are more tahr bulls now than when heli-hunting operators began 17 years ago
- Heli-hunters share the same interests as recreationists
- The most precious of all is the unique NZ flora and fauna (and therefore its protection)