

# Presentation to 'Translocation Workshop'

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Chris Smuts-Kennedy  
MEIT  
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***The Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust is restoring 3,400 hectares of central North Island high-quality podocarp/broadleaf forest, to as close to a pre-human state as possible.***

***This is being done by:***

1. Encircling the mountain with a 40 km pest-proof fence.
2. Removing all of the introduced mammalian pests (a dozen or so species, from deer down to mice).
3. Introducing appropriate native species, which might include:
  - Species for which there is acceptable evidence of previous presence (i.e. they will be re-introductions).
  - Species that are 'ecological analogues' for missing species that are no longer available for translocation themselves (e.g. extinct).
  - Threatened species that have a dire need for a site like Maungatautari, but may not have occurred here in the past (but their potential impacts will need to be considered).

## ***The current situation***

### **Existing native wildlife on the main mountain:**

Tomtits, bellbirds, long tailed bats, Hochstetter's frogs; as well as the commoner species that one might expect in a habitat block of this size and type (including 4 known lizard species) in this area with its history of pest impacts. I.e. there a lots of native species now missing – see handouts.

### **Current management status:**

- Fence is now completed
- We have 5 separate enclosures
- Pest eradication status in each enclosure:
  - Tautari Wetland (3 ha) – mice at least still left (no eradication has been attempted here yet).
  - Northern enclosure (35 ha) – pest-free for 2 years now.
  - Southern enclosure (65 ha) – probably now pest-free (certainly of all but rodents).
  - Main Mountain (3,400 ha) – first poison drop went on earlier this month.

○ Garland QEII block (approx 16 ha) – no pest management yet. The number of enclosures will provide opportunities for different management, and for research.

### ***Translocations***

We have introduced 13 **kiwi** (starting in July 2005), and a pair of **takahe** in June of this year – into the northern & southern enclosures and the Tautari Wetland. We needed charismatic/iconic and newsworthy species in the early stages.

**There are another 7 species being seriously considered for the near future.**

As well as for the contribution they will make to the ecological functioning of the forest; they have been chosen because they are more or less ‘givens’ (non-controversial), they are iconic/charismatic, and they are pretty easy to do.

- Kaka
- Robins
- Whiteheads
- Kakariki (red-crowns initially)
- Kokako
- Tuatara
- Hihi

**The first 5 of those still survive in other pest-managed (but unfenced) mainland sites.**

So that tells us they can do well in the presence of low number of the relevant pests, and that’s important because we won’t absolutely know the M’tautari pest situation for a little while yet, and we don’t want that uncertain pest status to hold up these early translocations.

We can probably say that those pests are likely to already be in lower densities here than at any other such mainland site where those threatened species currently occur, where there is pest-management but no pest-proof fence.

So that means that the pest-threat for any of those 5 species on Maungatautari – right now and in the foreseeable future – will be less than at any of the mainland sites they might come from.

**The last 2 species are in a different category – they only occur on offshore islands (or in pest-fenced mainland sites) with no (or limited) pest mammal species.**

#### **Tuatara**

The plan is to put the first ones into known-pest-free enclosures, and any decision where to put them beyond there (except for e.g. display/captive breeding in the info centre) can probably be delayed for some years/decades.

#### **Hihi**

The Hihi Recovery Group has supported a translocation to the Waitakeres where pests are controlled to low levels by continual trapping/poisoning. It has also supported a translocation to Maungatautari before the absolute confirmation of eradication of the relevant pests.

## ***Problems encountered***

We have come to terms with the **Translocation SOP process**, and it seems to be working for us now. But the current efforts to simplify it for Community Groups will be helpful, especially for newcomers.

**Iwi consultation and involvement** in the process does affect what we are able to do. It can certainly add a special cultural/spiritual/emotional dimension and make a translocation ‘complete’; and it can also slow things down and use scarce MEIT resources. Iwi can certainly also assist with getting access to source populations of species for translocation. This consultation is necessary under Section 4 of the Conservation Act, and MEIT want to do it anyway – there is a strong iwi representation on the trust, and much of the managed land is maori-owned.

**Recovery groups** and other advisors/experts have in general been very helpful.

Re **health-screening issues**, we are lucky in having Mike Goold. There do seem to be inconsistencies in how the process is applied in different conservancies. The emphasis seems to be changing to information-gathering, with growing recognition that some ‘pathogens’ are normal and perhaps may even have their own intrinsic conservation and ecological values.

There has been a **DOC capacity issue** at times in processing proposals – more in the early stages when MEIT and Waikato DOC were getting to grips with the process, and we had more than one proposal in the pipeline at the same time. The staff are as helpful as they can be.

It would be nice if our management wasn’t so ‘**controlled**’ by **tight permitting**, and we had the ability to make some of our own wildlife management decisions ‘on the fly’. We can build trust with existing DOC staff, but staff change on both sides. DOC staff operate and make such decisions under Section 53 of the Wildlife Act (no permit needed for ‘normal’ work), I wonder if that could be extended to suitably trained and qualified Community Conservation Group staff – especially with Dale Williams’ initiative/proposal to include such people in the DOC training system. Or at least more liberal ‘blanket’ type permitting where appropriate.

### **Two examples where DOC have been very helpful in solving problems:**

- **Kiwi from Taranaki** (essential that MEIT sources birds from there, and that was proving difficult)
  - John McLennan’s Technical Report on western NI brown kiwi was commissioned by Waikato Conservancy.
  - That will result in a WNIBK Management Plan, with buy-in by all 3 WNIBK conservancies – and everyone will know what needs to happen for M’tautari to fulfil its role in that.
- **Tuatara from islands** (M’tautari’s tuatara need to come from eastern Coromandel islands, and that was proving difficult)
  - Keri Nielson’s information-gathering report on Waikato tuatara, with analysis and recommendations – commissioned by Waikato Conservancy office.

- Ollie Overdyck will now write a Waikato Tuatara Management Plan based on that – and everyone will know what needs to happen for M’tautari to fulfil its role in that.

**It would be very helpful to Community Groups if there was more such strategic planning for some threatened species. The Cook’s petrel example:**

There are threatened species out there whose recovery needs to be better managed/coordinated nationally and regionally, beyond conservancy boundaries. Some have Recovery Plans/Groups, but some don’t. Cook’s petrels are a prime example of a species with such a need, but they have no R Group or Plan. MEIT is currently looking into the possibility of translocating Cooks petrels, but there is conflicting evidence and opinions regarding their previous presence on the mountain. We shouldn’t have to go through that. We should be fitting into a national/regional plan to establish viable populations of Cooks additional to the only existing significant population (on Little Barrier), and especially to return the species to the mainland where they primarily used to be. Unless the trust wants to make a decision based on e.g. circumstantial evidence, I can’t see a resolution to the M’tautari/Cooks issue in the near future. DOC should be doing most of the background work to e.g. pinpoint and prioritise the appropriate translocation sites, not individual community groups – especially with only one source population. There could well be several managed mainland sites (on the Coromandel perhaps, or Bream Head, or Mt Maunganui, or Tawharanui Regional Park), which could be considered as translocation sites. M’tautari may or may not end up being a priority site in such a plan – but we need to know that.

It would also be extremely helpful to Community Groups if these national/regional plans included at least some initial **iwi consultation** with the relevant groups, so that there is already some general tacit agreement in place regarding the overall strategy for that species, when an actual Translocation Proposal process starts. If the strategic plan identifies the prime reintroduction sites; then surely some iwi consultation and support-seeking is essential at that stage, to enable the sites to be included in the plan.

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