

MEMORANDUM

To | Huntly Community Board
From | Open Spaces
Subject | Canadian Geese at Lake Hakanoa
File |
Date | 6 May 2021

Lake Hakanoa has had a resident Canadian geese population for several years. Their numbers tend to decline over the winter months and increase over summer, however in recent summer seasons their numbers have increased significantly. This year there have been up to 180 geese present.

The Canadian geese have had a significant negative impact on the sports fields. A single Canadian goose consumes around 1kg of grass a day, they eat not only the leaves but also the roots and shoots. The turf is unable to regenerate in this situation. As a result, the fields have been stripped bare. Each goose also produces between 0.5kg and 1.5kg of faeces a day. The amount of defecation on the fields poses a serious health risk to any users. In addition to this, the faeces have contained weed species which have now become established on the fields.

Waikato District Council has investigated and trialled several different humane control measures, in preference to eradication (culling). These measures have included:

- Installation of low fencing. Canadian geese prefer to land on the water and then walk onto land. The fencing was intended to reduce their access to the field. Initially this helped to reduce the issue but the geese have become accustomed to it and fly over it.
- Anti-geese grass. This grass is bred with an endophyte that is unpalatable to the geese, they do not like the taste of it and are encouraged to move elsewhere. This has had some success but has not had enough of an impact to control the issues.
- Flock-Off. This is a chemical spray that acts as a repellent. It was investigated but due to there being a low chance that it could cause minor skin irritation, Council decided it was not appropriate for use on a sports field and to not proceed with trialling the product.

As these control measures have had limited success, eradication options have now been investigated.

Initially, shooting was considered the preferred eradication method. However, this is only successful from approximately November to April as during the colder months the geese are very flighty. The entire flock will take off from a single gunshot. Council has been advised that this option is currently not advisable as the cost would be considerable and this method would be ineffectual.

The only option currently available is baiting. Baiting involves hand feeding the geese for several days. The food would then be mixed with the bait and fed to the geese. The bait takes a maximum of half an hour to take effect, during this time the contractor remains on site to

monitor the birds, tracking any effected birds that move outside the control area. The contractor then immediately collects the deceased birds for disposal. They undertake a second collection the next day to ensure no deceased birds remain.

The cost of resowing the fields is \$9892.84. Eradicating introduced weed species will be an additional estimated \$500. If Council continues with current control measures, resowing the fields will only be partially successful. It is likely that additional resowing will be required, even then the damage caused by the geese will continue to be an issue.

The cost of baiting will be an estimated \$3000. Eradication is an effective but short-term solution. It is expected that the geese population will re-establish in early summer. However, population numbers will be lower, control measures will be continued and alternative eradication methods, such as shooting, can be explored if necessary.

Due to public perception of baiting as an inhumane method and the potential that the community may not agree with the eradication of the geese, Council has brought this issue to the Huntly Community Board to be discussed in the public forum space at the next meeting. Council would appreciate it if the community board could communicate to the community that this issue will be discussed and feedback from the community is being sought.