



Possum Management Policy

Document Control

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Author: | National Parks and Wildlife Service |
| Date of original endorsement: | November 2005 |
| Date of effect: | November 2005 |
| Date last modified: | September 2011 |

Note: The Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act) replaced the Freedom of Information Act 1989 (FOI Act) on 1 July 2010. The GIPA Act encourages the routine and proactive release of government information, such as publishing policy documents on the internet free of charge.

Published by:

Office of Environment and Heritage NSW (OEH)

Department of Premier and Cabinet

59–61 Goulburn Street

PO Box A290

Sydney South 1232

Ph: (02) 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Ph: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests)

OEH 2011/0793

ISBN 978 1 74293 363 4

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Objectives | 5 |
| Scope and application | 5 |
| Definitions | 5 |
| Relevant legislation or other mandating instruments | 5 |
| Policy and framework | 6 |
| Developing community appreciation for living with possums | 6 |
| Section 120 licence (general licence) | 6 |
| Section 121 licence (occupier's licence)..... | 6 |
| Licence application | 6 |
| Licence conditions | 6 |
| Licence return | 7 |
| Release site | 7 |
| Euthanasia | 7 |
| Stakeholder involvement..... | 7 |
| Training | 8 |
| Monitoring and compliance | 8 |
| Procedural guidelines | 8 |
| Development and provision of educational material..... | 8 |
| Responding to enquiries | 8 |
| Property inspections | 9 |
| S120 (General) licence applications | 9 |
| S121 (Occupier) licence issue | 9 |
| Management Plans | 9 |
| Weather forecast..... | 10 |
| S120 (General) Licence holders – possum removal procedures | 10 |
| Loan of possum traps | 10 |
| Compliance and enforcement..... | 10 |
| Related policies and other documents | 10 |
| Accountabilities | 11 |
| Positions with significant responsibilities | 11 |

Introduction

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) often receives requests from the community to manage possums that are negatively impacting on buildings and other property or perceived to be causing a nuisance.

The types of interactions reported include possums accessing and damaging roof cavities and chimneys, soiling living and work areas, damaging gardens or making excessive noise.

All possums are protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act) and it is illegal to kill or catch and release them without a licence.

The species most often encountered, particularly in urban environments is the common brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*). However, staff also receive enquiries about the common ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus peregrinus*) and bobuck (*T. caninus*).

In NSW, despite being relatively common in some urban and rural areas, possums face a range of ongoing threats to their survival including the loss of habitat, increasing competition for den and nest sites, increased mortality from motor vehicle impacts, predation from domestic pets, poisoning, disease and illegal capture and dumping.

In response to the ongoing loss of habitat and to avoid interactions with domestic animals, possums will occupy available dark recesses such as a garage or unsealed roof cavity or chimney. Residents may also enhance the local habitat of possums by providing supplementary food resources through the planting of fruit, vegetable and/or ornamental gardens.

NPWS's preferred management approach is to encourage landholders to implement proactive long term measures that will reduce conflict with possums without resorting to trapping, which significantly stresses the animal.

Where these measures are unsuccessful, NPWS may issue a licence to a landholder to catch and release a possum on their property or alternatively contact a licensed commercial operator to undertake the task. In certain exceptional circumstances, NPWS may authorise the euthanasia of possums where they are suffering from disease or cannot be safely released.

Possums are highly territorial and cannot be successfully translocated. In addition, a possum removed from a roof will quickly be replaced by another unless the roof is repaired. Conversely, a resident possum in a backyard 'possum box' will deter other possums from entering the property.

Educating the community on living with and appreciating possums, as well as how to manage them where required, is an important role shared by NPWS, fauna rehabilitation groups, local councils, veterinarians and, police and licensed pest controllers.

This policy specifies how NPWS manages possums that damage residential or commercial property and provides standard procedures for considering a licence application to catch and release a possum.

Objectives

To establish policy and procedures for the management of possums, that:

- provide a consistent framework for staff to apply when responding to requests for assistance;
- enhance the capacity of the community to appreciate and minimise conflict with possums;
- ensure that impacts to the welfare of possums are minimised; and
- engage relevant agencies and organisations to participate in managing these issues and furthering community education.

Scope and application

This policy applies across NSW to the common brushtail possum (*T. vulpecula*), common ringtail possum (*P. peregrinus*) and bobuck (*T. caninus*).

Sick, orphaned and/or injured possums which require rehabilitation are not covered by this policy (see the Rehabilitation of Fauna Policy).

Definitions

- NPW Act: *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.
- General licence: a licence issued under s120 of the NPW Act.
- Commercial Operator: An individual or company operating as a legal entity.
- Authority: The approval for a person to catch and release possums, granted by a licensed company in accordance with the terms of their licence.
- Harm: as defined in the NPW Act and including trapping a possum.
- Landholder: the owner or occupier of specified lands.
- Authorised officer: an officer appointed under Section 156B of the NPW Act with powers to enforce national parks legislation.
- Occupier's licence: a licence issued to a landholder under s121 of the NPW Act.
- Possum: for the purposes of this policy, the common brushtail possum (*T. vulpecula*), common ringtail possum (*P. peregrinus*) and bobuck (*T. caninus*) (also referred to as the mountain brushtail possum or short-eared possum).
- Protected fauna: fauna of a species not named in Schedule 11 of the NPW Act (all possums are protected fauna).
- PWG: the Parks and Wildlife Group within the Office of Environment and Heritage, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- WLMU: Wildlife Licensing and Management Unit, part of the Parks and Wildlife Group (National Parks and Wildlife Service, Office of Environment and Heritage).

Relevant legislation or other mandating instruments

National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974

National Parks and Wildlife Regulation 2009

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979

Policy and framework

Developing community appreciation for living with possums

1. Staff will seek to raise community awareness, understanding and appreciation of possums by providing information about living with possums (sections 29-31 of this policy) and stressing the use of trapping as a last resort measure.

Section 120 licence (general licence)

2. WLMU is responsible for issuing general licences under s120 of the NPW Act to a commercial operator or fauna rehabilitation group to catch and release a possum causing damage to a residential or commercial building.
3. WLMU may permit a commercial operator with an Australian Company Number (ACN) to issue an authority to an employee to operate under the terms of their licence.
4. WLMU may charge a fee for the administration of general licences.

Section 121 licence (occupier's licence)

5. Staff with the appropriate delegation (authorised officer) may issue an occupier's licence under s121 of the NPW Act to a landholder to personally catch and release a possum from a residential or commercial building, where damage mitigation measures are assessed as ineffective or impractical.
6. An occupier's licence will be issued on each occasion a possum needs to be captured and released.
7. On lands of public significance such as hospitals, nursing homes and schools where there is documented evidence of chronic ongoing problems with possums, an authorised officer can issue an occupier's licence for up to 12 months. The licence will be issued with the requirement for a management plan to be developed and implemented (section 40 of this policy).
8. Where necessary, a licensed landholder can seek the services of a commercial operator to catch and release a possum (section 2 above).
9. Occupier's licences should be issued free of charge.

Licence application

10. Commercial operators and landholders should complete an application form prior to receiving a licence.

Licence conditions

11. All general licences issued to commercial operators to catch and release a possum should include the standard licence conditions provided in Appendix 1.
12. All occupier's licences issued to landholders to catch and release a possum should include the standard licence conditions provided in Appendix 2.

13. Authorised officers may, at their discretion, vary one or more standard licence conditions as appropriate to the circumstances.

Licence return

14. All general licences will require the licensee to complete a return form and lodge it with WLMU prior to renewal or termination of the licence (Appendix 1).
15. Occupier licence holders do not need to submit a licence return form, unless it is a requirement of an agreed management plan or additional licence condition.

Release site

16. A possum must be released on the property and not more than 150m from the point of capture. The possum should be released against a structure that they can immediately climb such as a tree or fence.
17. A possum must not be released in an area of identifiable danger where there is a high probability of the possum being injured or killed.
18. Releasing a possum beyond the area prescribed on the licence is prohibited.

Euthanasia

19. An authorised officer may only permit euthanasia of a possum under the following exceptional circumstances:
 - The possum shows obvious signs of disease as verified by a registered veterinarian or licensed fauna rehabilitation group; and/or
 - There is evidence as verified by an authorised officer that ongoing property damage significantly threatens human health or livelihood (for example, at a hospital ward, where it is impossible to release the possum within the distances prescribed in this policy) and alternative management options are considered to be impractical or ineffective;
 - The release site is to be, or has been, modified such that any existing threats to the possum will be worsened e.g. significant tree removal, land clearing or reduction in arboreal thoroughfares as verified by an authorised officer.
20. Landholders and/or licensed commercial operators must not arrange for the euthanasia of a possum unless specifically directed by an authorised officer.
21. An authority, given by a suitably delegated officer, for the euthanasia of a possum must be provided in writing. See Appendix 6.
22. Where euthanasia is justified the licence must require that the possum is euthanized by a registered veterinarian including any pouch or dependant young.
23. NPWS will not meet euthanasia costs.

Stakeholder involvement

24. NPWS will communicate the objectives and requirements of this policy to key stakeholders.
25. PWG Area Managers may make an agreement with a local fauna rehabilitation group to assist landholders in capturing and releasing possums. Under such an

agreement the group may hold a possum for longer than 24 hours to allow time for the roof cavity to be permanently sealed.

Training

26. WLMU will in the first year of this policy, investigate with the Australian Environmental Pest Managers Association or other registered training providers opportunities for a training course for general licence holders who catch and release possums to improve animal welfare outcomes.

Monitoring and compliance

27. A general licence holder who fails to provide a licence return may have subsequent licence renewals refused.
28. Licence holders found to be illegally dumping possums may have their licence cancelled and future licence applications refused and be liable to prosecution.

Procedural guidelines

Development and provision of educational material

29. WLMU will develop and maintain educational material to inform the community of:
 - NPWS policy and licence conditions;
 - Possum behaviour and ecology;
 - Proactive measures to avoid damage or disturbance such as 'possum proofing' a roof, the benefits and methods of constructing possum boxes, how to protect garden plants, and alternative native plant species as possum food sources; and
 - How to remove a possum from a roof.
30. WLMU will provide educational information and resources including sample licence conditions and relevant application forms:
 - On the organisation's website and intranet;
 - To companies that supply possum traps;
 - To the Real Estate Institute of NSW for distribution to its members; and
 - To commercial operators seeking to apply for a general licence.
31. PWG Area offices will provide educational material and if necessary, sample Occupier's licence conditions to:
 - People enquiring about possums or requesting an Occupier's licence to trap a possum; and
 - Local councils, veterinary facilities, fauna rehabilitation groups and companies that supply possum traps.

Responding to enquiries

32. When a person reports a 'nuisance' possum, the responding authorised officer should record the details as per Appendix 3.

33. The officer should first explain this policy and discuss the preferred management option of resolving the issue without the need to catch and release the possum.
34. If the issue cannot be resolved using alternative means, the officer may issue an occupier's licence to the landholder and provide advice on the use of licensed commercial operators or licensed fauna rehabilitation groups who can professionally catch and release the possum.
35. Staff at information centres and call centres must direct a caller to the relevant Area office if an occupier's licence is requested.

Property inspections

36. A property inspection may be required when:
 - An occupier's licence is to be issued for up to 12 months for a site of public significance;
 - An authorised officer considers there is an ongoing threat to human health, livelihood or critical assets and the caller has unsuccessfully implemented alternative management options and/or requests that the possum be euthanized; or
 - A occupier's licence to catch and release a possum has previously been issued for that property.
37. During a property inspection, an authorised officer will:
 - Verify and document the damage reported to be caused by possums and the degree of threat to human health and livelihood, and
 - Assess the implementation and success of alternative management options.

S120 (General) licence applications

38. General licence holders operating as a business will be required to list on their licence application all employees who are authorised to act on behalf of the licence holder. A register of persons operating under the terms of an s120 licence must be maintained by the licensee and submitted with their licence renewal.

S121 (Occupier) licence issue

39. An authorised officer should reiterate clauses 6-9 of the standard licence conditions to the licensee when issuing the licence (Appendix 2). These conditions stipulate how the welfare of the animal should be managed.

Management Plans

40. A management plan for a site of public significance where there are ongoing problems with possums should:
 - Consider long term strategies for possum management
 - Prioritise key sites and management actions
 - Support the maintenance of a possum population within the site and
 - Integrate broad management tools into possum management including building modifications and waste management.

Weather forecast

41. Authorised officers should consider the local weather forecast prior to issuing an occupier's licence. Poor weather conditions may impact on a licence holder's ability to humanely catch and release a possum and compromise the ability of the occupant to block ongoing access to a roof or chimney.

S120 (General) Licence holders – possum removal procedures

42. WLMU will encourage general licence holders and fauna rehabilitation groups to check that property access will be possible throughout a catch and release operation, before setting a trap. This will avoid situations where a trap is set and cannot be checked the next day because the landholder is absent.
43. WLMU will encourage licensed commercial operators to seal roof cavities as part of their possum removal service.

Loan of possum traps

44. PWG Area offices may loan a possum trap to a licensed occupier or refer them to an equipment hire company or local council that supplies possum traps.

Compliance and enforcement

45. WLMU will send an official caution letter to a general licence holder who does not submit their licence return form (Appendix 4).
46. If the licence return is not received within 14 days of the issue of the caution letter, WLMU should issue a Penalty Infringement Notice (PIN) and may refuse subsequent licence applications and/or renewals until the licence return is received.
47. The procedures for investigating reported illegal trapping and/or licence condition breaches are provided in Appendix 5.

Related policies and other documents

Department of Environment Climate Change and Water (2010). Policy on the Rehabilitation of Fauna. DECCW. NSW.

Matthews, A., Lunney, D., Waples, K., and Hardy, J. (2003). Brushtail Possums: "champions of the suburbs" or "our tormentors"? In *Urban Wildlife: More than meets the eye*. Edited by D. Lunney and S. Burgin. Proceedings of the Royal Zoological Society of NSW, Sydney.

Pietsch, R. S. (1994). The fate of urban Common Brushtail Possums translocated to sclerophyll forest. In: *Reintroduction Biology of Australian and New Zealand Fauna* (Eds: M. Serena). Surrey Beatty and Sons, Chipping Norton.

S.A. Dept. of Primary Industries and Environment and Natural Resources. (1997). *The Common Brushtail Possum in South Australia*. Seminar Proceedings. Adelaide, South Australia.

Statham, M. and Statham, H.L. (1997). Movements and habits of Brushtail possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula* Kerr) in an urban area. *Wildlife Research*, 24: 715-726.

Accountabilities

Positions with significant responsibilities

| Position | Responsibility |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Manager, WLMU | Policy implementation, communication and review. Reviewing s120 and s121 licence activity. |
| Coordinator Wildlife Licensing, WLMU | Administration of general licences to catch and release licenses to commercial operators. Updating educational materials. Issuing caution letters and PINs to general licence holders. Maintaining Government Licensing System. |
| Authorised officers | Raise awareness, education and community awareness of landholders seeking assistance with problems caused by possums Administration of occupier licences. Assessing possums for euthanasia. Undertaking property inspections. Updating the Area s121 licence database (once implemented). Make an agreement with a local fauna rehabilitation group (Area Manager). |