

4 August 2024

Statement for FNDC District Plan Hearing



I provide comment on behalf of Kiwi Coast Trust, re: the Far North District Council District Plan.

Substantial kiwi protection effort in Northland

The total estimated kiwi population in the whole of Northland is approximately 8,000 birds. Kiwi have been, and are present, in very high densities in specific areas within the Far North. Kiwi call densities above 5 calls/hour are rated as high. It has been feasible to maintain and even increase kiwi populations in the areas where local groups carry out predator control and there is effective management of dogs..

Many community groups, iwi, hapu, companies, schools and other organisations have been undertaking predator control and eradication programs as part of Northland Regional Council's regional pest plans, Save the Kiwi and the national Predator Free 2050 objectives. This kiwi protection effort has involved thousands of volunteer hours over several decades.

- 259 organisations and entities are currently involved with kiwi protection in Northland.¹
- Last year, 4,538 people attended Kiwi Coast supported events and capacity-building workshops about kiwi protection, taking the tally to 27,236 people in the past 11 years.
- 136,646 animal pests were removed in 2023, giving a total of 846,219 since 2012.

The collective effort of many people has seen an improvement in kiwi numbers in areas where predators are managed. As a result, North Island Brown Kiwi have had their status revised from "At Risk – Declining" to "Not Threatened – Conservation Dependent" due to extensive conservation efforts. Kiwi and other native species remain 'absolutely protected' under the Wildlife Act 1953. Other species under pressure from human activity include Australasian bittern (Nationally Critical), pāteke (At Risk - increasing), spotless crane (At Risk - declining) and dotterel (Nationally Threatened – declining). Kiwi are an umbrella species, and conservation efforts to protect kiwi has positive benefits for other species covered by the wildlife act.

However, in many areas of Northland where predators are not managed, kiwi numbers have declined due to predation by predators including stoats, feral cats and uncontrolled/roaming dogs. The fact that kiwi numbers have held up overall in Northland is due to the community commitment to controlling all of these threats. The key phrase in the new classification for kiwi is **Conservation Dependent**. Where predator control is not carried out and poor dog controls exist, kiwi will continue to decline at around 2-4% per year.

¹ Kiwi Coast (2024) newsletter July/August 2024

Further information: Kiwi Coast (2024) Year 6 Report Mid North High Value Area.

Full complement of integrated predator control

Over two decades of the Northland brown kiwi (*Apteryx mantelli*) Annual Kiwi Call Count Survey, data shows that populations are generally either stable or steadily increasing (Craig, 2022) at the Northland sites where the **full complement** of integrated animal pest control is in place (traps and toxins) and communities are committed to excellent care and control of their dogs. This bucks the national trend identified by the Kiwi Recovery Group of an overall 2% decline per annum of kiwi populations (Germano, et al., 2018).

Any loosening of the dog restrictions would be premature and would undermine the huge effort of the community in areas looking after native bird populations. We believe that loosening the district plan restrictions for dogs and cats will reduce protection for kiwi and other wildlife and will set a precedent for further removal of safeguards, and potential reversal of rules currently in place to protect kiwi. Northland is a unique area where kiwi are present in unexpected places. We need to protect our taonga species from decline.

The adverse effects of any changes which dilute the existing restrictions would be substantial. This could be a significant detriment to the kiwi in the Far North area, with long-lasting consequences.

The decision we would like from council is to have the existing dog control conditions retained and strengthened.

It would be far too premature to loosen the existing controls and reverse the good work being carried out. We would like to see better education for dog owners together with existing controls and limits on dogs.

Strengthening wildlife-friendly safe dispersal corridors with further pest control is vital. It not only allows vulnerable species such as matuku/bittern to find resources needed in times of scarcity and stress, but enables roaming kiwi to travel between discrete population patches and find mates – supporting regional gene flow and maintaining a healthy gene pool in the kiwi population.

Kiwi vulnerability

As young kiwi disperse from their natal area they can cover a large distance in search of suitable habitat and other kiwi. Allowing more dogs and cats into an area that has successfully breeding kiwi populations, would put these young kiwi at risk of predation. Locking dogs and cats up at night is only part of the kiwi protection solution. Kiwi are often exposed during daylight hours when resting within farmland, such as kikuyu grass. They also will shelter in grasses or under ferns, as day roosts, and are particularly vulnerable to predation by dogs and cats. Kiwi often travel many kilometres to find and establish new territory. Kiwi will cross open spaces, roads, farmland, riparian margins and backyards to move out of their natal territory.

Kiwi are very interesting to dogs because of their aromatic smell. Kiwi communicate largely by their sense of smell which is highly developed. Consequently, dogs will find kiwi very quickly and as they are often in unexpected places, the dog has mouthed or bitten the kiwi before the owner has even had time to react. Most dog attacks result in dead kiwi. Dogs tend to kill adult and juvenile kiwi, whereas stoats tend to kill young kiwi before they have reached 1200 grams (at around six months old).

The average age of adult kiwi in Northland is only 14 years due mainly to dog predation. The full lifespan of kiwi should be 50-60 years. The impact of the loss of adult kiwi is particularly devastating on a population because of the loss of many years of potential breeding. The loss of an adult disrupts a breeding pair and their territories. Loss of kiwi during the breeding season often results in abandonment of eggs in the nest, compounding the losses.

Work to support current restrictions on pets

Kiwi deaths from uncontrolled dogs continue much to the dismay of all those working hard to help Far North kiwi thrive. Kiwi Coast's efforts are ongoing with dog owners, communities, DOC and the Far North District Council to deliver a successful and effective approach that will make a real difference. Recently developed 'Know Your Dog Workshops' are an innovative way to engage dog owners and provide education as a base for increasing responsible dog ownership. To be successful, these efforts need continued support from district plan restrictions.

Kiwi Coast advocates for responsible pet ownership and supports communities working to reduce feral cats and improve dog control to protect native wildlife. Left unaddressed, feral cats thrive in Northland's temperate forests, preying on insects, lizards, aquatic species and birds – including kiwi chicks. Uncontrolled dogs remain the most significant threat to adult kiwi survival in Northland. Raising awareness of these issues and stressing the need for good dog control was a recurring theme at all Kiwi Coast events and workshops. 'Kiwi Live Here' signs, customised with group names and selected dog control messages were supplied on request. While Kiwi Aversion Training workshops are held regularly for hunting and working dogs, few resources have been available for owners of pet and lifestyle dogs in kiwi zones. The new "Know Your Dog" workshops, developed and delivered by Kiwi Coast have begun to fill this gap and proved to be successful and well received by dog owners. The first workshops were delivered in 2021 and have quickly gained popularity. A further 11 Know Your Dog Workshops were held over the last year, taking the three-year total to 33 workshops.

2018 saw the first of the Kiwi Coast roadside billboards go up in collaboration with DOC in response to requests for help from local communities. Customised billboards in English and Te Reo Māori featuring dog control messaging or advising drivers to slow for road-crossing kiwi are now spread across Northland. Roadside billboards are now in place at Ngunguru, SH1 Hikurangi, Hihi, Mangamuka, Purerua, SH1 Pakaraka, Russell and Patua North.

Limits of kiwi avoidance training

Kiwi Avoidance Training (KAT) as a mitigation method was developed in response to hunting and farming dogs encountering kiwi while working. These dogs are generally well trained to focus on the task at hand (e.g. rounding up the sheep, or hunting pigs), and they know to ignore distractions (e.g. not chasing possums or rabbits). As they already have the concept of 'ignore', KAT training generally works well for these dogs.

Most pet dogs are not as well trained as dogs with jobs, and typically don't have the same understanding about 'ignore'. Thus, it is harder for them to learn from the KAT training. Moreover, the effect of KAT wears off over time, and would require long-term and substantial commitment from owners to carry out regular dog re-training.

KAT training is not particularly reliable as a primary method for protecting kiwi from pet dogs, and instead specialists would recommend that physical distance (keeping dogs well away from kiwi) is maintained through other means. In both high density and kiwi present areas it is very difficult for there to be reliable physical distance kept at all times, and that the owner may instead rely on KAT training of pet dogs as a primary method. This would not be safe for kiwi in the area.

Kiwi Deaths from Dogs

The attached document from the Department of Conservation shows from 2018 to 2023, 77 kiwi were discovered dead and the death attributed to dogs. The actual number of kiwi killed by dogs will be higher than this due to either undiscovered or unreported dead kiwi. (Appendix 1)

Conclusion: What we would like to see from Council

Any loosening of the dog restrictions would be premature and would undermine the huge effort of the community in areas looking after native bird populations. We believe that loosening the district plan regulations for dogs and cats will reduce protection for kiwi and other wildlife and will set a precedent for further removal of safeguards. We believe that the existing regulations should not be loosened as changing the existing regulations has the potential of long-term cumulative effects which will arise over time.

The decision we would like from council is to have the existing dog control conditions retained and strengthened. It would be far too premature to loosen the existing controls and reverse the good work being carried out, leading to a negative effect on wildlife. We would like to see better education for dog owners together with existing controls and limits on dogs.

Andrew Mentor

Kiwi Coast Coordinator – Mid North

Appendix 1: Examples of kiwi killed by dogs in Northland, 2015-2023

Table below is based on DOC data and further details reported by NZ Herald and Kiwi Coast.

Date	Number of kiwi killed by dogs	Location	Source
2015	8	Wharau Rd, Kerikeri	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/bay-of-islands-kiwi-deaths-investigated-after-suspected-dog-attacks/X7BCOT4VDVECXEANT6SITV3C7M/
1 Feb 2015	5	Tapuaetahi Beach, Purerua Peninsula	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/five-more-kiwi-killed-in-northland-and-after-suspected-dog-attack/5OZ2L6JZ7GUS7PBYSHDYVG2NXM/?ref=readmore
1 Oct 2016	8	Hihi-Taemaro	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/a-joint-effort-to-save-kiwi-from-dogs/4PSQA4QNYTZI6HJNGYQJG6FG7E/
1 Feb 2018	5	Hansen Rd, Purerua	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/bay-of-islands-kiwi-deaths-investigated-after-suspected-dog-attacks/X7BCOT4VDVECXEANT6SITV3C7M/
April 2019	2	Opito Bay, Kerikeri Peninsula	Kerikeri Peninsula Conservation Charitable Trust
1 Jun 2020	5	Signal Rd, Ōkaihau	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/five-more-kiwi-killed-in-northland-and-after-suspected-dog-attack/5OZ2L6JZ7GUS7PBYSHDYVG2NXM/?ref=readmore
1 Jul 2019	6	Purerua Peninsula	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/five-more-kiwi-killed-in-northland-and-after-suspected-dog-attack/5OZ2L6JZ7GUS7PBYSHDYVG2NXM/?ref=readmore
5 Feb 2021	1	Kerikeri	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/dog-attacks-northland-kiwi-sparking-warning-from-bird-rescuer/HK2HHPFIV4BN7VWJQU37ETM7IM/#google_vignette
2022	3	Bay of Islands	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/northland-kiwi-deaths-caused-by-dogs-prompts-nationwide-campaign/G23KN6RYPFGEJN6K2ZNU7BGVL4/
Jan - August 2023	12	Bay of Islands	https://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/northland-kiwi-deaths-caused-by-dogs-prompts-nationwide-campaign/G23KN6RYPFGEJN6K2ZNU7BGVL4/
Jan - August 2023	4	Kaitaia	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/
Jan - August 2023	4	Purerua Peninsula	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/
Jan - August 2023	1	Haruru Falls	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/
Jan - August 2023	7	Opua	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/
Jan - August 2023	1	Tahere	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/

Jan - August 2023	3	Whangarei Heads	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/
Aug 2023	1	Hikurangi	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/
Aug 2023	1	Tutukaka	https://kiwicoast.org.nz/31-kiwi-killed-in-northland-over-last-six-months/
Total	77		

Footnotes

The reported data do not include all cases of kiwi deaths due to dog attacks. DOC notes that a number of kiwi deaths (in bush or undergrowth) are never discovered and are not reported.

(<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/498314/sharp-increase-in-number-of-kiwi-killed-by-dogs-in-bay-of-islands-data-shows>)

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/oia/2023/august/oia-3291-attachment-1.pdf>

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