Practical examples – how authorisations protect wildlife

Example: Cardrona Ski Lift and alpine lizards

DOC declined granting permission for a ski lift because the impact on a nationally significant site for alpine lizards was too great. The company supported the decision and worked to take a new approach to using the land.

- In 2020, DOC declined an application for a Wildlife Act authorisation that had been sought by Cardrona Alpine Resort, near Wanaka, to build a new chairlift.
- The application was declined because the proposed chairlift line affected a nationally significant site for alpine lizards, with the highest diversity of alpine lizards known on the New Zealand mainland.
- Hundreds of lizards across five species were identified, including populations of the threatened orange-spotted gecko and Lakes skink. Some of these lizards had the same threat classification as great spotted kiwi and whio/blue duck, and there was a high risk the lizards would not survive being caught and released elsewhere.
- DOC worked closely with the resort to examine all options. But faced with a site of such significant conservation value, it made the decision to decline.
- The Resort supported DOC's decision, and said it was excited to be home to such lizard numbers.
- As a result, the company adapted its plans for the area so that in winter, the site would instead be open to advanced skiers and snowboarders only, for what's known as 'slackcountry' access - which is without a chairlift.
- DOC subsequently provided a wildlife permit for a ski lift in another location that was less ecologically significant.

Example: Kiwi programme in the Bay of Plenty

DOC authorised an activity to capture kiwi eggs and chicks, raise them in captivity, and then release them back in the wild. This would greatly boost survival rates for kiwi. But DOC also acknowledged that some birds would be incidentally killed as part of this conservation project.

- Last year, DOC received an application from a non-profit organisation in the Bay of Plenty to capture kiwi chicks and eggs from the wild, hatch the eggs, rear chicks in captivity, and then release young adults to an area with intensive predator control measures (that is, traps and toxins) when they are big enough to defend themselves from stoats and cats.
- Previous research had shown that 95% of kiwi chicks die before adulthood, mainly due to predation by stoats and cats.
- This project is expected to lead to kiwi survival rates of over 50 percent (compared to as low as 5 percent with no intervention).
- Unfortunately, some kiwi would still incidentally die during this project.
- Any time a kiwi is translocated from one place to another there is an associated disease risk that may harm kiwi.
- Not all eggs and chicks would necessarily survive.
- Also, some kiwi would still be killed in the area they were being moved to by predators such as dogs and ferrets.
- DOC approved this application for authority under the Wildlife Act. This authority recognised that some kiwi may incidentally die during the project, as it required the authority holder to provide an annual report that included data on the number of egg/chick deaths in incubation and bird-rearing facilities, and outcomes of the project for kiwi.
- So, in a nutshell, this project that could involve some incidental deaths of kiwi would benefit kiwi overall. Some kiwi chicks would die while eggs were being translocated and incubated, and while chicks were being raised. But overall, the survival rates for young kiwi is expected to increase from as low as 5 percent to an expected 50 percent.

Example: Wildlife in production forestry

Wildlife are often present in pine plantations and can be harmed when trees are harvested. In this case, the Wildlife authorisation permitted the incidental killing of frogs, as it would not have been practical to find every little frog and relocate it, but DOC set conditions to protect the frogs.

- In 2022, DOC received an application from an organisation to catch, handle and incidentally kill Hochstetter's frogs in the process of harvesting a pine plantation.
- The resource consenting process played a role in identifying that a Wildlife Act authorisation was required in this case as frogs may be killed and lose habitat as a result of the harvest.
- The applicant's key objective for seeking the wildlife application was to ensure all practicable measures are taken to minimise any death of Wildlife (particularly frogs) in the process of harvesting the forest.
- DOC noted the risks involved with transferring native frogs, and that there is limited data on the success of transfers. DOC therefore required the applicant to develop and implement an annual Hochstetter's Frog Management Plan to minimise these risks. This includes reporting on any deaths noted while carrying out the activity.
- The applicant agreed to a range of measures to help protect frogs, such as:
  - Searching for frogs and safely moving them out of harm's way before harvesting trees
  - Not harvesting trees from some areas
  - Replanting pine trees in areas that would minimise habitat disturbance to frogs in future forestry harvests
  - Considering options to compensate for any killing of frogs, such as pest control operations in native forest remnants to mitigate any adverse impacts
  - Salvaging (capturing and moving frogs after tree harvesting) as a last resort to protect them.
- This is an example of how the applicant and conditions set by DOC ensured that reasonable steps were taken to avoid, minimise and mitigate harm to the frogs, and that they continue to be protected