

By Email

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Tēnā koe Ray

Canada Geese Management – Request for National Coordination and Inclusion in the National Pest Register

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of the Environment Committee at Greater Wellington Regional Council, following a resolution passed by our Farming Reference Group (FRG) at its meeting on 28 May 2025.

Greater Wellington Regional Council has established the FRG to provide advice, information and recommendations on matters concerning the Council's functions as these relate to the well-being of the Wellington Region's farming communities. We've been privileged to have this forum to ensure our policies and regulations reflect the views of our farming and rural sector. This forum also helps the Council to stay across key issues for our farming communities and rural stakeholders.

A key issue that has been raised by this group are the increasing numbers of Canada geese in the region. Greater Wellington has formally raised this issue with the Minister of Conservation and the Minister for Biosecurity on four occasions between 2021 and 2024, highlighting the escalating impacts of this species across our region. In the most recent response, the Minister of Conservation advised that Canada geese could be managed through Regional Pest Management Plans (RPMPs). However, this approach is not practical due to the highly mobile nature of the species, which renders regional-only management ineffective. Control efforts at the regional level are both cost-prohibitive and unsustainable, particularly when eradicated populations are quickly replaced by migrating flocks from other regions.

Impacts of Canada Geese

Canada geese were introduced to New Zealand in 1905 and managed as a game bird under the Wildlife Act until 2011. At that time, their classification was changed to “unprotected,” with the expectation that coordinated control arrangements would be developed, as no single agency was made responsible for their management. While the Department of Conservation (DOC) initially committed to monitoring these arrangements, this has not materialised. Additionally, a recommended national pest management strategy was never developed, leaving Ministers without the necessary framework to set clear objectives for Canada geese management.

The environmental and economic impacts of Canada geese across the Wellington region are significant and growing. These include:

- Destruction of pasture and crops, with some farmers reporting losses of up to 10–15 hectares of grass and pastoral land per night
- Soil compaction and contamination from faeces, leading to long-term productivity issues on agricultural and horticulture land
- Contamination of water bodies, contributing to nutrient loading and potential health risks
- Disruption of riparian planting and ecological restoration efforts due to browsing of young vegetation
- Increased faecal fouling of sports fields, parks, and other public spaces in urban areas such as Kāpiti, Masterton, and Porirua, presenting potential public health risks
- Elevated concerns considering the arrival of High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI H5N1) and the role Canada geese may play in spreading the virus regionally and nationally.

Farmers, particularly those around Wairarapa Moana, have been self-funding culling operations, removing up to 3,000 birds annually during the moulting season. These efforts provide only temporary relief, with goose populations quickly replenishing due to regional and inter-regional movements. Anecdotally, Wellington territorial communities have also observed increasing encroachment of Canada geese into new areas previously unaffected.

This is not an isolated issue. Recent media coverage and anecdotal evidence from other regions, such as Otago, confirm that similar challenges are being experienced across the country. Yet, the absence of a nationally led, coordinated approach continues to hamper effective long-term management.

Requested actions from MPI:

Considering the growing scale and cross-boundary nature of this issue, Greater Wellington Regional Council is requesting that the Ministry for Primary Industries take the following actions:

1. Regulatory Review

Undertake a review of the current regulatory classification and formally classify Canada geese as a pest animal in the National Pest Register.

2. National Coordination

Allocate appropriate resources and prioritise the development of a coordinated, nationwide Canada goose management programme, like those in place for other nationally significant browsing species. This programme should include:

- Inter-agency collaboration and coordination.
- Centralised monitoring and data-sharing systems.
- Support for regional control initiatives through guidance, funding, and research.

Conclusion

Canada geese present an escalating biosecurity, economic, and environmental challenge that cannot be adequately addressed through regional-level management alone. A nationally coordinated strategy, led by MPI, is essential to achieving long-term, effective control.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can work together to implement a more sustainable, nationally consistent approach.

Ngā mihi nui,



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