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BILL WALLACE, LEADER OF BAN 1080 PARTY RESPONDS TO GOVERNMENT PLAN TO KILL ALL PREDATORS BY 2050

"SMOKE AND MIRRORS"

Bill Wallace

The Government announcement of planning to eradicate all predators by 2050, with a starting budget of \$28 million over four years, is simply a smokescreen for ever-increasing aerial drops of the toxic poison 1080 over the next 30 years. If this \$28m was targeted solely at developing technology to replace the Department of Conservation's current inept use of aerial 1080 poison then it would be laudable. But following so soon after the extra \$20m for the 2016 'Battle for Our Birds' 1080 poison programme one cannot help but be cynical.

How refreshing it would be if the Minister of Conservation for the next government was to announce \$20m a year for self-resetting kill traps, and the biodiversity division of DOC could direct their share of DOC's \$400m budget to prioritising the valleys for deployment where the greatest benefit would be achieved for endangered or vulnerable native species, and each year increase the number of valleys with permanent partial protection. Rats are largely confined to the valley floors and their numbers drop significantly naturally during the winter months (DOC Official Information Act rat data, September 2014), so restricting traps to valley floors and low level ridges would achieve more than the sporadic, dangerous and indiscriminate aerial application of aerial 1080 poison, often into vast areas where rats are at 0% tracking. Sponsor companies are far more likely to stump up two for one dollars to 'adopt a valley' with clean humane predator control, than to be associated with an incredibly cruel and toxic poison with native birds and rats dying side by side. "Animal behaves as if terrified but appear to be unaware of its surroundings, tonic convulsions, running movements ... death is never primarily cardiac in origin, the heart continues beating for some time after respiration fails." — (Animal Health Division).

DOC's recent claim that trapping would require 62,000km of tracks and 300 huts is absolute budgetary scaremongering (Graeme Elliot, Golden Bay Weekly, June 2016). DOC currently fly dozens of rat counters into the bush every few months with peanut butter to feed the rats, and blotting paper to count their footprints. They do not need a single hut or track, as the current staff with bush skills and hand-held GPS are able to find the permanent tracking tunnels without problems. Why not use the same staff, the same helicopter budget to deploy the traps, and the return visits to change the cylinders and record the number of kills? Sponsor companies could nominate staff with appropriate fitness levels to join the trap checking team in their 'sponsored valley'. Great PR value.

The 25 million bird losses attributed to predators each year is actually potential eggs not laid, it is based on five breeding pairs per hectare, multiplied up by percentage of nesting failures, by percentage of failures attributed to predation, by the number of eggs laid. DOC's own figures (Veltman, Westbrooke 2014) of potentially 20% live bird losses for most aerial 1080 drops, multiplies to the same 25 million eggs not laid.

So aerial 1080 poison is achieving nothing for conservation in New Zealand. DOC's Graeme Elliot says it is "1080 or nothing" (New Zealand Herald, September 10, 2014), but if the choice is between two evils, choose neither. Let's hope the \$28m just announced turns up something that actually works. Already this year, the wheels are falling off the 2016 'Battle for Our Birds' 'massive beech mast, mother of all rat plagues' propaganda, with a patchy beech mast at best, and "rats are not breeding as the Department of Conservation predicted" (Fairfax, June 16, 2016). Some areas scheduled for 1080 drops have been canned (Fairfax, June 21) but unfortunately once the poison is made it has a finite shelf life, and must be either spread or destroyed (destruction is not a DOC option), so it is being re-consigned to regions where staff have proven to have less scruples spreading it into areas of patchy beech mast, and rats well under the 20% threshold, with Kahurangi up from 270,000ha to 324,000ha (67% rock wren loss in 2014). Battle for Our Birds in 2014 was a resounding defeat, with rat numbers back in equal or greater numbers, but the kea and rock wren, among many others, are one step closer to extinction. DOC's claimed figures for 2014 of 97% rats killed and 85% stoats were later found to be false, about a 65% kill on rats (40% drop every winter anyway), and no stoats were counted (Official Information Act, November 20, 2015).