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Dunedin City Council
9 Year Plan
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Submission on Dunedin City Council's Nine-Year Plan (2025 - 2034)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on Dunedin City Council's 2025 – 2034 Nine Year Plan Consultation Document.

Acknowledgement

Predator Free Dunedin acknowledges the support received to date from Dunedin City Council and the leadership it has demonstrated towards achieving the national vision for a Predator Free New Zealand by 2050 through its support of both Predator Free Dunedin and the City Sanctuary project.

Predator Free Dunedin also acknowledges the commitment made by Dunedin City Council as the delivery partner for Predator Free Dunedin's City Sanctuary project and we enjoy the alignment of Parks & Reserves' pest control work with PFD's objectives. This has been critical for supporting community-led predator control in backyards and reserves across Dunedin's wider city and urban areas.

Background

The Predator Free Dunedin Trust (PFD) is a conservation collective of 22 organisations working collaboratively to protect native biodiversity and strengthen communities. Together, our members share

a long-term vision to get rid of possums, rats and stoats from Dunedin's urban and rural landscapes by 2050.

The vision for a Predator Free New Zealand by 2050 was launched in 2018 by the New Zealand Government. It aims to eradicate mustelids (stoats, ferrets, and weasels), rats and possums from New Zealand by 2050. Dunedin has an important role to play in this movement. As the wildlife capital of New Zealand, we are well-placed to see immediate gains for a diverse range of native species through large-scale predator control.

Project Progress

Predator Free Dunedin has made remarkable progress over the past year, advancing its mission to protect native biodiversity and strengthen communities across Dunedin by eliminating introduced predators.

1. City Sanctuary

City Sanctuary – delivered by Dunedin City Council - has made significant strides in urban predator control, removing over 21,000 predators to date, including 5,000 possums and rats in 2024 alone. These efforts have led to measurable biodiversity recovery, evidenced by declining possum detections and increased bird activity in areas like Ross Creek Reserve. Volunteer engagement remains central to this success, with 3370 traps being serviced by several hundred volunteers. Additionally, the project saw a 24.8% increase in hours contributed in 2024 compared to 2023. City Sanctuary continues to support community trapping groups across Dunedin while expanding biodiversity monitoring programs.

2. Possum-Free Peninsula

We are now in the final stages of achieving a Possum Free Peninsula. Collaborative efforts between the Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group (OPBG), City Sanctuary, and the Halo Project have brought possum numbers down to single digits, with final eradication expected by mid-2025. Advanced tools such as thermal drone detection, scat detection dogs, and AI-enabled trapping systems have been instrumental in achieving this milestone. The community continues to play a vital role by reporting sightings, ensuring rapid response to any remaining possums.

3. Halo Project

The Halo Project continues to focus on reducing possum and mustelid populations in the biodiverse rural landscape between Heywards Point and the Silverpeaks. Intensive trapping networks in this area alone have removed over 4,230 possums since installation, creating safer habitats for native wildlife and reducing risks like bovine tuberculosis transmission. Mustelid control around Orokonui Ecosanctuary

remains critical, with over 1,400 stoats, weasels, and ferrets removed since 2021. Volunteers have played a pivotal role in maintaining these networks and protecting species such as tīeke/South Island saddleback.

4. Te Nukuroa o Matamata

This initiative, led by Ōtākou Rūnaka, focuses on restoring the lower Taiari Catchment's cultural and ecological values through riparian habitat restoration and biodiversity enhancement. Originally funded by Jobs for Nature, Te Nukuroa o Matamata transitioned into a contracting organisation in October 2024. One of its first major contracts involves mustelid control for Predator Free Dunedin, operating in the Silverstream and Mt Allan areas.

Collaboration with funders, delivery partners, mana whenua, volunteers, and local communities continues to be essential for achieving long-term biodiversity goals. Predator Free Dunedin is proud of its progress but recognises that continued support from regional stakeholders is crucial for sustaining momentum and community engagement.

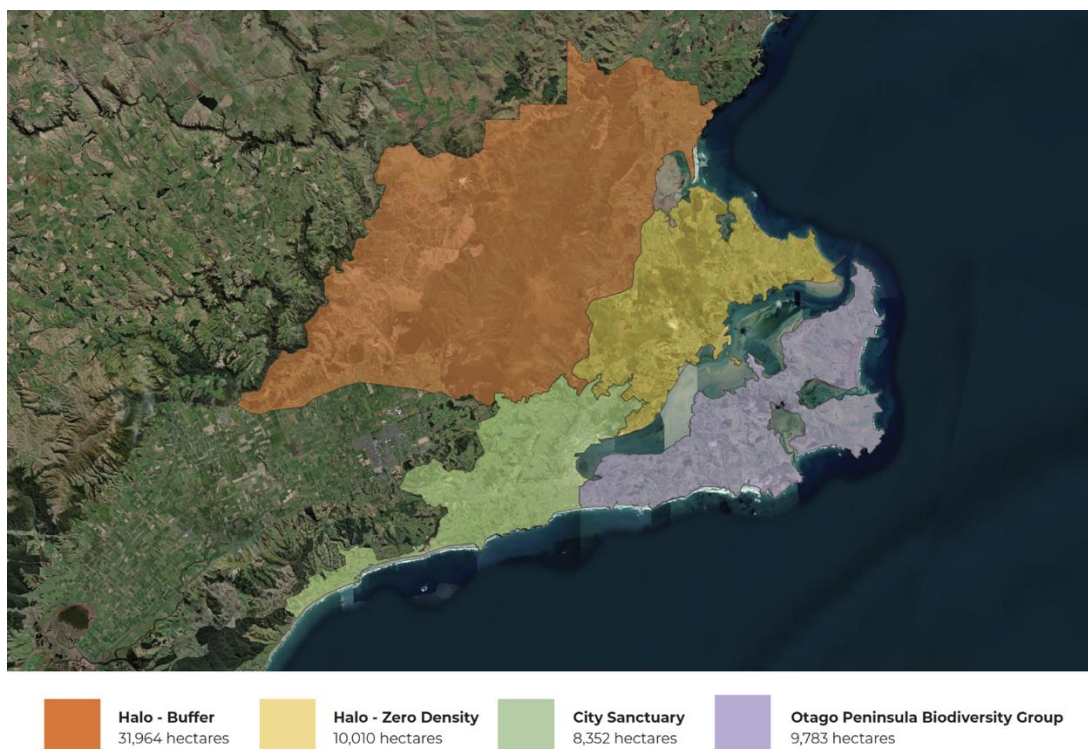


Figure 1. Map of Predator Free Dunedin operational area.

Recommendations and submission points

1. Long-Term Financial Commitment to Predator Control

Predator Free Dunedin (PFD) strongly urges the Dunedin City Council (DCC) to make a sustained, long-term financial commitment to predator control, embedded within the 9-year plan. We seek annual funding at least matching previous DCC contributions of \$150,000 per annum, commencing from the 2026-27 financial year.

Cornerstone Funding

PFD remains one of six projects throughout New Zealand that is funded by PF2050 Ltd. As well as being nationally recognised for our delivery model, our leadership in the use of new technology and smart solutions, our ability to deliver on ambitious objectives has kept us at the fore.

The funding model from PF2050 Ltd requires a 1:1 co-funding arrangement, and our previous ability to deliver this co-funding is a further reason we remain as one of the funded national projects (down from 16 nationally in 2024). Over the last six years we have had co-funding from the ORC, DCC, Wenita Forestry, City Forests and OSPRI. We acknowledge the difficult economic situation for all of these parties, but suggest that deferring investment in key projects such as PFD will lead to a loss of jobs, reduced economic value to the city, and a less attractive city to live and work in. Deferring investment has demonstrably negatively impacted on New Zealand communities, and places an unfair burden on subsequent generations.

This commitment from the DCC would underpin and support consistent co-funding agreements with other sources such as central government's PF2050 Ltd. This approach would allow additional resources to flow into the region, amplifying the impact of local projects. For example, PFD's alignment with the Predator Free 2050 program positions it to leverage central government funding, creating employment opportunities while delivering positive biodiversity and biosecurity outcomes.

Benefits to DCC of Landscape-Scale Predator Control

Dunedin City Council would see a wide range of benefits for policy outcomes through the continuation and support of landscape-scale predator control being carried out by Predator Free Dunedin and the community.

Predator Free Dunedin is a community-driven project, with benefits enjoyed by all sectors of Dunedin's population. To date, PFD has seen over 35,600 volunteer hours contributed, and 23 full-time staff employed or contracted. This team of staff and volunteers monitor over 15,000 devices on the ground in the 67,418ha funded to receive predator control. This has resulted in over 62,000 possums, 27,500 rats and 1,900 mustelids removed from this area.

Protecting Vital Infrastructure

Rats pose a significant ongoing threat to Dunedin infrastructure. Dunedin has recently experienced major impacts on both digital and food infrastructure from predators. In April 2025 internet and phone services were cut to thousands of people across Otago and Southland after rats chewed through a fibre cable near Dunedin. The economic impacts of this were significant, with the DCC reporting difficulties with phone lines and payment systems, employees at Dunedin Inland Revenue offices being sent home for the day, University of Otago experiencing disruptions to internet and mobile services, and trains suspended. Traffic lights in central Dunedin were also affected, thus presenting a health and safety risk to the public. The risk to vital digital infrastructure from rats has been well documented in urban areas across New Zealand, with notable examples including rats severing fibre lines and disrupting services in Auckland in May 2022, and thought to be responsible for bringing down audio-visual facilities at Waikeria Prison in 2021.

In March and April 2024 South Dunedin Woolworths was closed by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) for more than 3 weeks after a rat infestation, resulting in loss of revenue, costly measures to address the infestation, and triggering a months-long investigation by MPI. In addition to economic impacts, the rat infestation posed a health risk to humans from food contamination and rat-borne disease. The infestation also impacted public trust and reputation – an important factor to consider as Dunedin positions itself as a destination location for business, new residents and tourism.

Protecting housing infrastructure

Predator control also provides benefits to housing infrastructure by reducing damage caused by animals. For example, rats and possums are known to damage electrical wires, building insulation, roofing, plumbing, and walls. This aligns strongly with the work being carried out by Dunedin City Council as part of their Cozy Homes plan and has strong benefits for its social and housing policies.

Protecting and nurturing the “Wildlife Capital of New Zealand” brand

Current funding for biodiversity is insufficient, especially given Dunedin’s status as the wildlife capital and the reliance of several city strategies (Economic Development, Te Ao Turoa, Social Wellbeing, Destination Dunedin) on this brand:

- Te Ao Tūroa, The Environment Strategy’s core three purpose summary points are to set the direction for a future safe from climate change impacts, improve and maintain the health of Dunedin’s natural environment and to give Dunedin people every opportunity to feel connected to and look after the environment.
- Dunedin City Council references on their website TNZ’s New Zealand Tourism Strategy, acknowledging the need for a coordinated national approach, and that “as we continue to protect, restore and enhance Dunedin’s ecosystems, we will build on the city’s nature and wildlife reputation and help strengthen the local economy.” Indeed, the DCC states the high

value of wildlife tourism for the city - *“Dunedin attracts about two million visitors annually with an average of 5500 visitors daily. Enterprises directly involved in viewing wildlife on the Otago Peninsula have a gross annual turnover of around \$6.5 million and employ the equivalent of 70 full-time staff.”*¹

- Destination Ōtepoti lists as one of four key pathways to effective destination management to be “World-leading environmental practices” which includes “developing initiatives to support and improve the environment and connecting visitors to these”. It encourages Dunedin to promote itself as a “global leader in conservation where protecting biodiversity and the environment are top priorities.” The report cites studies showing that “opportunities to connect with nature” were a key drawcard for tourists visiting Dunedin.²
- Dunedin’s “Outstanding natural beauty and wildlife, including the Otago Peninsula” also stands as a central element of the DCC’s Economic Development Strategy³ and “Nature and Wildlife” is listed as one of the top 3 things to do in Dunedin on Tourism NZ’s 100% Pure New Zealand website.

Introduced predators are a major problem for our native wildlife and plants. There are 3500+ native or endemic species observed in Otago alone. Stoats, possums, and rats threaten native species like plants, birds, lizards and invertebrates through predation and competition for food and space. More than 4,000 of New Zealand’s native or endemic species are classified by the Department of Conservation as being threatened or at risk of extinction and New Zealand has the unfortunate title of having the highest rate of threatened species in the world. Predator control will have a major impact for these species and their ecosystems.

The current Nine-Year Plan allocates no dedicated funding to support Dunedin’s wildlife. If the Dunedin City Council and our business community intends to continue capitalising on and relying upon our city’s unique native wildlife, direct investment is essential in order to protect and enhance the assets providing the value. Predator Free Dunedin strongly recommends that a clear financial commitment to protecting the wildlife underpinning many of the DCC’s strategies and branding be included in the Nine-Year Plan. Additionally, there are clear opportunities to integrate biodiversity outcomes into existing and planned projects, such as roadside verge management and green infrastructure initiatives.

¹ <https://www.dunedin.govt.nz/council/strategic-framework/te-ao-turoa,-the-environment-strategy/the-dunedin-context>

² https://www.dunedin.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/997825/destination-otepoti-october-2023.pdf

³ https://www.dunedin.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/262997/Dunedins-Economic-Development-Strategy-2013-2023.pdf

Building resilient communities

An often-overlooked benefit to predator control and community conservation is its ability to create more resilient communities by building strong links between people and encouraging them to work with others towards a common goal. These connections are proven to improve a community's response to emergency situations and strengthen social cohesion within a community.

For example, during efforts by the City Sanctuary Project to facilitate backyard trapping in Māori Hill, there were several occasions where neighbours on the same street had not previously met and are now working collaboratively to target predators such as possums. Across all three projects, we have received the support from hundreds of volunteers who are eager to get involved with community-based conservation and meet others with shared interests.

This aligns with the DCC's Social Wellbeing Strategy's goals of building resilient, connected communities across Dunedin.

Creating healthier communities

Community conservation also creates healthier communities by improving people's health and wellbeing. Spending time in nature leads to better outcomes for mental and physical health such as a boosted immune system, lower blood pressure, reduced stress levels and improved mood.

Internationally, people who live in greener neighbourhoods have improved health — even when income and other advantages are considered.

Removing introduced predators reduces the transmission of disease. Rats are known to carry at least seven diseases that are transmissible to humans including giardia and salmonella. Possums are known vectors of Bovine-Tuberculosis which may infect cattle and other livestock.

Predator control also improves mental wellbeing with people feeling less stressed and anxious without the presence of animals such as rats and mice living within their houses or properties and thus aligns with the DCC's Social Wellbeing Strategy.

2. Dunedin City Council's Zero Carbon Commitment

Predator Free Dunedin supports reinstating the Zero Carbon Plan investment package options. These were to be included in the Long Term Plan for public feedback. Climate action and biodiversity are fundamentally linked, and strong council leadership is needed to meet community expectations, as well as national and international obligations.

The community has repeatedly identified greenhouse gas emissions and climate change as top concerns, and council strategies (including Te Ao Turoa and Destination Dunedin) already recognize this.

3. Three Waters Infrastructure

We acknowledge the urgent need for investment in degraded water infrastructure, particularly the Bioresources facility.

However we question the lack of emphasis in the plan on green infrastructure solutions, especially when it comes to the mitigation of storm events. Without seeing the detailed breakdown, it's hard to understand how much of the budget has been allocated towards emergency and remedial repairs around storm events, and how much is investment in resilience against future events.

International and national evidence shows that green infrastructure (e.g., wetlands, riparian planting) can reduce long-term costs and improve resilience. We recommend a cost-benefit analysis to evaluate whether increased investment in green infrastructure could reduce future emergency spending.

4. Maintenance of Roadside Verges

Predator Free Dunedin would encourage the DCC to review current mowing practices on roadside verges, assessing their sustainability and necessity.

Reallocating some maintenance funds to replace grass with native plantings would enhance biodiversity, align with Dunedin's environmental strategies, and by our assessment likely reduce costs over a 5–10 year period - despite higher upfront investment. Native plantings require less intensive upkeep and support local wildlife. Mowing grass is an ongoing cost to Council and does not support biodiversity.

5. Grant Allocation

We welcome the review of council grants but question the continued high allocation to DVML and Forsyth Barr Stadium. The stadium was originally justified as an economic driver for Dunedin, yet ongoing ratepayer subsidies persist, with no clear exit strategy.

With new stadiums being developed elsewhere (e.g., Christchurch), DCC must plan for reduced competitiveness and therefore potential greater demand on ratepayers from DVML. This should not be prioritised over other public needs which deliver sustainable public benefit.

6. Adapting to Climate Change framework and Community Involvement

Predator Free Dunedin supports the development of a framework for Climate Change Adaptation. We note that the proposed \$700,000 budget for this is substantial. We expect that community groups such as Halo Project and Predator Free Dunedin are closely involved in this development as groups working successfully to restore natural environments that are mitigating climate change.

Summary

Dunedin's unique biodiversity is central to its identity, economy, and community wellbeing. The DCC must deliver on its strategies and branding with robust, ongoing investment in predator control and ecological restoration.

We urge council to:

- Commit long-term funding for predator control.
- Reinvest in Zero Carbon initiatives.
- Assess the value of green infrastructure for climate resilience and reducing infrastructure repair costs.
- Reallocate verge maintenance budget to native planting where that is practical.
- Review stadium subsidies and increase community-led project funding.
- Ensure community groups are central to climate adaptation framework creation.
- Align Destination Dunedin's marketing with tangible support for the natural environment.

We appreciate you taking the time to read our submission and look forward to being able to provide further detail at the hearing. If you have any further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rhys Millar', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rhys Millar

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