



# Poison pens

1080 has had an unfairly bad press. (a)

**C**  $2H_2PO_2Na$ . Few chemical formulae have caused quite so much strife as sodium monofluoroacetate - or, as it is better known, 1080.

You may have been told, variously, that 1080 is an indiscriminate killer of all living things (including people), that it pollutes waterways, or even, as some West Coast residents were, that it was developed by the Nazis as an agent of genocide.

(c) The trail of such claims, more often than not, leads to recreational hunters.

New Zealand hunters don't like 1080 because, besides killing the possums and rats it's aimed at, it kills deer, and they're industrious and resourceful about protecting their interests.

Some sat down to negotiate over 1080, but others took a paramilitary approach, threatening to release stoats and possums into pest-free wildlife sanctuaries and, more recently, to set their dogs on kiwi in Tongariro National Park if 1080 operations went ahead.

(d) The best way to undermine 1080, though, is to whip up public fears. Take this paragraph from the website of *Soup* 1080 Poison: "It is a known fact that 1080 (sodium monofluoroacetate) kills everything that consumes it, and goes on killing. Many animals, insects and birds die after every aerial drop; kea, morepork, even our kiwi are dying through secondary poisoning."

Like all good spin, this sort of stuff relies on the old campaigning adage that if it's your job to be right, then you're never wrong.

The Department of Conservation has never denied that 1080 will kill some forest birds, but, says DOC's Herb Christophers, it's about the greater good: "You will lose individuals, but it's the population that benefits."

(f) (j)



A possum has eyes as big as its stomach.

To say that 1080 kills every living thing is just plain wrong; different creatures have different susceptibility, and some don't have any. (P)

(g) Put simply, stoats, rats and possums eat vast numbers of native birds and their eggs and chicks. If DOC treats the forest with 1080 just before the birds start to breed, they have a better than even chance of reproducing that season.

(h) Last year, DOC monitored the survival of kiwi chicks in Tongariro Forest after a 1080 operation. In the previous season, seven out of eight chicks were killed by stoats. In the wake of a 1080 drop, 15 out of 20 survived to independence and another two lost their tracking collars.

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It's all but impossible to kill a frog with 1080, for instance, but dogs are acutely vulnerable to it. A 70kg human would have to consume around a kilo of pure 1080 (at six grams per bait - just 0.15 per cent of a bait is actually poison) to ingest a lethal dose.

If you're reading this with a cup of tea, you just ingested some 1080 is a natural compound found in a number of plants.

The wider public - and Maori in particular - are concerned that 1080 will pollute their drinking water. In New

Zealand, standards allow for a presence of two parts of 1080 per billion.

So far, nearly 1000 tests have been unable to find a significant presence of 1080 after possum operations. The highest recorded in a Waikato survey was 0.0006 parts per billion, the analogous equivalent of one second in 32 years.

At that concentration, it's claimed, a human would have to drink 300,000 litres of water at one sitting to ingest a lethal dose of 1080.

However, faecal coliform levels in the water fell with the removal of feral animals from the catchment.

Opponents of 1080 are fond of describing a post-1080 forest as a silent, apocalyptic wasteland, but the truth is that the apocalypse came when we let stoats, rats, possums and deer loose in there; any silence is due wholly and solely to that act of supreme folly.

Despite a recent Environmental Risk Management Authority review that cleared 1080 for further use and acknowledged the benefits of pest control for native wildlife, the hunters nevertheless got their way.

DOC has agreed to add a deer repellent to 1080 baits in future drops, confirming another lobbying adage: "I don't have to prove I'm right; I just have to prove that you might be wrong."