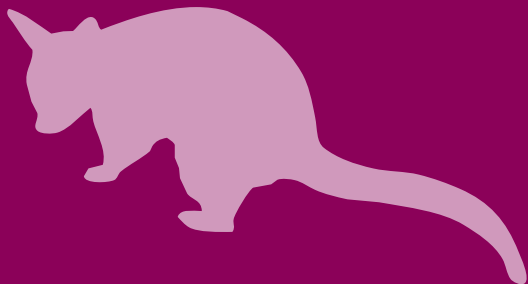


Code of Practice

for the field shooting
of brushtail possums in
Tasmania



February 2012

Code of Practice

for the field shooting of brush-tail possums in Tasmania

February 2012

Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

Approved as an Animal Welfare Guideline under Section
44B of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*
by the Minister for Primary Industries and Water

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I. Introduction and Scope

The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) is a statutory committee established under the ***Animal Welfare Act 1993*** that advises the Minister on all aspects of animal welfare. It may also endorse statements, or codes, of current best practice in relation to the use of animals in Tasmania. These statements may be approved by the Minister as Animal Welfare Guidelines under Section 44B of the ***Animal Welfare Act 1993***. The present Code provides the community with information on appropriate methods for the field shooting of brushtail possums. It is also intended to provide the courts with a clear statement of what is current best practice.

The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee has endorsed this Code in the expectation that it will provide clear instructions which, if followed, will ensure that shooting of brushtail possums is carried out in a way which ensures that animals are dispatched as efficiently as possible with the minimum of suffering.

It is intended that the requirements of this Code are adopted as conditions on the permit issued under the ***Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010*** under which all shooting of brushtail possums is undertaken in Tasmania. A failure to abide by a permit condition may result in the permit holder being liable to prosecution.

As with the development of other Animal Welfare Guidelines, the AWAC sought the input of individuals and organisations with interests in the shooting of brushtail possums in Tasmania.

This Code is based on current knowledge and experience on the hunting of brushtail possums in Tasmania and the technology available at the time of publication. It may be revised as required, to take into account advances in technology and understanding of physiology and behaviour, as well as expectations of hunters and the community.

2. Shooting of Brushtail Possums in Tasmania

Brushtail possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) are widely shot in Tasmania to protect crops and pastures, and for the commercial trade in meat and skins.

Changes to the Tasmanian environment resulting from European settlement, in particular the clearing of native vegetation for agriculture and the resulting mosaic of bush, pastures and crops, has resulted in brushtail possum populations increasing to levels where they have a significant impact on primary production and the environment.

Hunting by shooting is an important tool in controlling this damage. Where shooting is not practical, the use of the poison Sodium monofluoroacetate (1080) may be permitted.

The shooting of brushtail possums in Tasmania for crop protection or commercial purposes is an ongoing activity. Brushtail possums can be taken under permit for either crop protection or commercial purposes either by spotlight shooting or trapping and shooting on site. Trapping and transport to slaughter is not permitted.

The use of snares or leg-hold traps is specifically prohibited under the ***Animal Welfare Act 1993***.

3. Legislative Control of Brushtail Possum Shooting

Brushtail possums are protected under the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* of the *Nature Conservation Act 2002*. Under Schedule 4 of the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* brushtail possums are classified as partly protected wildlife throughout Tasmania, including offshore islands.

Regulation 26 of the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* provides for protected wildlife, including brushtail possums, to be taken under the authority of a Crop Protection Permit to prevent destruction of plants. Permits may specify a range of conditions with which the holder of the permit must comply. Crop protection permits may authorise the sale of products of brushtail possums taken under the authority of the permit.

The prevention of cruelty to animals, including brushtail possums, and the promotion of animal welfare are provided for by the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*. Section 8 of the Act makes it an offence to inflict unreasonable or unjustifiable pain or suffering to an animal. Section 12 of the Act prohibits the use of leg-hold traps or snares, while the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* require that, except under permit from the Secretary of DPIPW, a person may not take brushtail possums with chemicals,

poisons, bows and arrows or spears. Permits are not issued allowing the taking of brushtail possums with bows, arrows or spears.

In the case of the commercial harvesting of brushtail possums for meat, their shooting, handling, and transport must be carried out by accredited operators in accordance with the provisions of the ***Meat Hygiene Act 1986*** in respect of domestic product and the Commonwealth ***Export Control Act 1982*** in respect of export product.

The Commonwealth controls the overseas trade in native wildlife through the ***Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999***. Under this legislation, the commercial export of wildlife is restricted to specimens taken under an approved wildlife trade management program. A wildlife trade management plan must ensure the ecological sustainability of any harvest.

Products derived from commercially harvested brushtail possums may only be exported from Australia in accordance with a permit issued by the Commonwealth authority.

4. Guidelines for use of Rifles for Shooting Brushtail Possums

Brushtail possums are relatively slow moving when on the ground or in trees, particularly when compared to macropods. In addition, when they have reached a tree or elevated position they generally remain stationary. This means that shooters can usually approach to a relatively short range with little difficulty. Consequently, a range of firearms and calibres are suitable either for commercial harvesting or for crop protection.

A key requirement will be to deliver the selected projectile(s) with a sufficient energy and accuracy to penetrate the key vital organs. Shooters need to be vigilant of safety issues related to elevated targets and need to choose their shooting position and the power and carry of their firearm accordingly.

In particular, shooters using a rifle should have the ability to shoot with adequate skill to place a projectile on a given target so as to achieve a humane kill in which the animal undergoes a sudden and painless death. This includes the ability to judge distance, wind direction and speed as well as knowledge of the performance of the rifle being used.

It is recommended that shooters use a rifle fitted with a telescopic sight. The rifle should be sighted in against an inanimate target before commencing use. A shooter using a rifle must aim so as to hit the target animal in the brain.

The minimum muzzle energy requirement for rifles to achieve a humane kill is **140 ft lbs.**

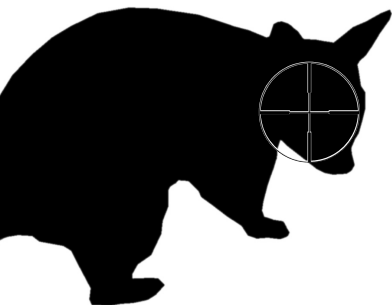
Of rifles that are likely to be in common use, the .22 Long Rifle (LR) rimfire meets the minimum muzzle energy requirement. High Velocity .22 LR ammunition is adequate to reliably achieve a humane kill provided that the target animal is within the specified range and provided that the point of aim is the brain of the animal. High velocity .17 rimfire ammunition can reliably achieve a humane kill to a greater range.

Hollow or soft point projectiles are recommended as more effective in achieving a humane kill.

Sub-sonic .22 rimfire ammunition, used at a range of up to 50metres, meets the minimum requirements provided 40grain, or greater, projectiles are used.

In situations where shooters are required to shoot over a greater range they will require a more high-powered firearm, (either rimfire or centrefire) with suitable frangible or expanding projectiles.

Recommended Minimum Requirements for use of a Rifle for Shooting Brushtail Possums



Point of aim: That part of the head so as to hit the brain of the target animal.

It is recommended that shooters use a telescopic sight.

Minimum Firearm/ammunition specifications:

Firearm	Min. Muzzle Energy	Max. Range	Purpose
.22LR	190 joules (140ft-lb)	50m	Crop protection, Commercial harvest
.17HMR	332 joules (245ft/lb)	100m	Crop protection, Commercial harvest
.22magnum	370 joules (270ft-lb)	80 m	Crop protection, Commercial harvest
Centrefire	975 joules (720ft-lb)	over 80 m	Crop protection, Commercial harvest

Projectile type: Hollow-point, or soft-point projectiles are recommended.

5. Guidelines for Use of Shotguns for Shooting Brushtail Possums

Shotguns are very effective in causing a humane kill in which the target animal undergoes a sudden and painless death.

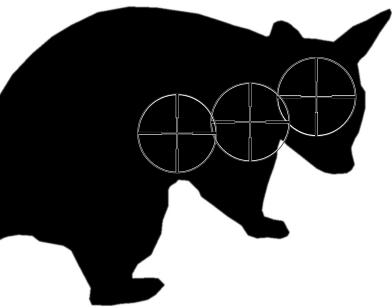
All shooters should have the ability to shoot with adequate skill to hit the target so as to achieve a humane kill. This includes the ability to judge distance, wind direction and speed as well as knowledge of the performance of the shotgun and ammunition being used.

A shooter using a shotgun must aim so that the animal will be hit in the head, neck or chest by the centre of the pattern.

Shotguns smaller than 20 gauge (e.g. 410 gauge) are inadequate to **consistently** achieve a humane kill over the range of conditions encountered in the field and are not recommended for this purpose.

Recommended Minimum Requirements for use of a Shotgun for Shooting Brushtail Possums

- Point of aim:** Centre of shot pattern to be head, neck or chest.
- Gauge:** 12, 16 or 20. **It is recommended that 410 gauge not be used.**
- Shot size:** No. 4 or larger shot
- Minimum Load:** 28 g (= 1.000 oz) or greater for 12, 16 or 20 gauge.
- Choke:** Appropriate for target and range.
- Effective range:** Normally 30 metres, but up to 40 metres for 12 gauge used with a higher load and full choke.



6. Wounded Animals and Dependent Young

Wounded animals and dependent young must be killed as quickly and humanely as possible.

In all circumstances, shooters have a legal responsibility to immediately pursue and humanely dispatch wounded animals.

Regulation 49 of the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* requires that a person who, having shot a brushtail possum under a permit, finds that the brushtail possum is alive when recovered, must immediately kill that animal.

All killed adult females must be examined promptly for pouch young and if one is present it should be humanely killed.

If an out-of-pouch dependent young is present, this animal must also be killed by a shot to the brain or heart. This measure is necessary to prevent the inhumane death of dependent young that are unable to survive on their own.

Dealing with Injured Animals and Dependent Young

The shooter must be certain that each animal is shot dead before another is targeted.

If a brushtail possum is thought to be alive after being shot, every effort must be made immediately to locate and kill it before any attempt is made to shoot another animal.

When located, wounded animals must be killed by a method that will achieve a rapid and humane death, where practical by a shot to the brain.

Under circumstances where a shot to the brain of a wounded animal is impractical or unsafe, a shot to the heart is permissible.

In circumstances where, for killing of a wounded animal, a shot to either the brain or heart is impractical or unsafe, a heavy blow to the rear of the skull with a hard, blunt instrument so as to destroy the brain is permissible.

The pouches of all female animals killed must be searched for young as soon as the shooter reaches the carcass.

The pouch young of a killed female should also be killed immediately, by decapitation or heavy blow to the skull to destroy the brain, or by shooting.

If an out-of-pouch dependent young is present, this animal must be killed by a shot to the brain or heart.

7. Safe Handling Procedures

Brushtail possums are known to carry a number of diseases that can infect humans.

It is therefore recommended that hunters take the following precautions when dealing with brushtail possums:

If possible, restrict your direct contact to that necessary.

Wear protective clothing, including tough gloves, when handling.

Make sure you wash your hands after handling.

If bitten or scratched, clean the injury with warm water and soap, and seek medical advice about whether you need tetanus and/or antibiotic prophylaxis.

If you develop a sore that breaks down or fails to heal after receiving a bite or scratch, see your General Practitioner.



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