

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

CONFIDENTIAL

Title of Report: License to shoot Crested Caracara (Caranchos) at Teal Inlet

Paper No: 115/10

Date: 29 April 2010

Report of: Environmental Planning Officer

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Members of the large number of Crested Caracaras at Teal Inlet settlement, their impact on livestock and the community and a request for a licence to shoot some of them.

2.0 Recommendations

- (i) The licence to shoot up to 6 Crested Caracara at Teal Inlet be approved.
- (ii) To request that a further report be submitted on the delegation of powers to the EPO for the issuing of shooting licenses for Crested Caracaras.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 A large number of Crested Caracaras have grouped at Teal Inlet settlement this autumn. Up to 40 birds are currently congregated in the trees in the settlement in the early morning and late evening. The same pattern took place last winter. Some of last years group have remained in the settlement since last winter and it is likely that the numbers present will increase.
- 3.2 Teal Inlet resident Ms Kristiane Thorsen has reported the harassment of her ewe flock by Crested Caracaras. The Crested Caracaras are also reported to be killing poultry and destroying the flowers on the grave of Mr Thorsen nearby, causing considerable distress to the Thorsen family.
- 3.3 Ms Thorsen has tried several different techniques to scare the Crested Caracaras away from her sheep, including firing different weapons in close proximity to the birds. None of these have succeeded in moving the birds away for any period of time.
- 3.4 Ms Thorsen has been issued with several licenses to shoot Crested Caracaras previously, two last winter and one in the winter of 2008. A total of 14 Crested Caracaras were permitted to be shot at Teal Inlet last year, although

only 4 birds were destroyed. This increase in licenses is an indication of the escalating numbers present at the settlement. In the last two winters the numbers of caracaras have increased steadily over the winter to over 70 birds being present. It is to be expected that this will be the case again this winter. Ms Thorsen provided photographs of the damage done to her sheep last year – with images of two ewes and five lambs that were killed by the Crested Caracaras at Teal Inlet. These images are available from EPD on request.

- 3.5 The request was forwarded to the raptor control consultation group (comprising representatives from the Agricultural Department, Rural Business Association, Falklands Conservation and the Tourist Board) for views.
- 3.6 Crested Caracara are known to group together, particularly in winter months and often move into camp settlements to access food sources. They often move away from settlements by the end of the lambing period – around October. It is believed to be unusual for them to gather in the numbers reported at Teal Inlet and cause the levels of damage reported.

4.0 Proposed action

- 4.1 Crested Caracara are rare in the Falkland Islands, but numerous in mainland South America. While they are not globally endangered or threatened, they are locally rare. There is no up-to-date population estimate available - Robin Woods' Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands (1997) estimated the population in the Falkland Islands at 400-800 pairs. If this was the position today it would mean that between 9 -18% of the entire population of the Falkland Islands were over-wintering at Teal Inlet.
- 4.2 Our understanding of Crested Caracara numbers and behaviour is lacking and the Environmental Planning Department is intending to work with Falklands Conservation this year to develop a better understanding of this species and enable a more informed response to requests to shoot them.
- 4.3 It is proposed that a licence be issued for 6 birds to be shot over two months. It will be made clear in the license that the birds are only to be shot when threatening or attacking sheep. It is established practise in camp settlements to reduce the impact of raptors on chickens with the use of netting and covered runs. It is hoped that the culling of a proportion of Crested Caracaras will scare the remaining birds away, and thereby save having to kill a larger number. This figure has been endorsed by the raptor control consultation group.

5.0 Future applications to shoot Crested Caracara

- 5.1 While applications to shoot Turkey Vultures are processed within 3 working days by the Environmental Planning Department, it could take up to five or six weeks for a report to come before Executive Council for decision on shooting Crested Caracara. However, in practice this is not happening. The problem last year was dealt with by an urgent exchange of emails and a similar situation

has arisen this year. If licenses take too long to be determined it is likely that farmers will take the law into their own hands and shoot these rare birds rather than go through the application process.

- 5.2 It is proposed that a system of delegation is agreed for Crested Caracara, similar to that already in place for Turkey Vultures. Subject to the finds of an upcoming research project into birds of prey in the Falkland Islands and their interaction with agriculture, it is proposed a report is produced by EPD recommending the delegation of powers to the EPO. This research is planned for this winter – a report will be produced at the end of the year.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 Recommendation 2(i) relates to a licence under section 9 of the Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance.

6.2 Recommendation 2(ii) is supported; such a paper was proposed when the matter was last considered in November 2009

7.0 Financial Implications

None.