



Media Release: For Immediate Release: 19 December 2019

Not Fit For Purpose - Scientists Exposing New Zealand's Pesticide Testing

A modern, independent laboratory's toxicology report from dead wildlife collected from a beach in South Island has highlighted how the Government's pesticide testing regimes are not fit for purpose.

On November 9th, 2019, one week after a Department of Conservation (DOC) aerial 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) poison operation 140 kms upstream, torrential rainfall caused dead wildlife to be washed down the flooded Buller River. Hundreds of potentially toxic carcasses of rats, a goat, birds and numerous aquatic species were strewn across the beach at Westport, South Island. Carcasses were collected by volunteers and two non-profit environmental groups, [Flora and Fauna of Aotearoa](#) and [Clean Green New Zealand Trust](#) commissioned an independent toxicological analysis of samples. DOC also sent samples to its Government-funded laboratories at Massey University and *Manaaki Whenua* – Landcare.

The [results from the independent laboratory](#), showed positive traces of the toxic chemical fluorocitrate in the dead wildlife, in addition to traces of fluoroacetate and the green pigment from the poison bait pellets.

Toxicology results from the Government laboratory were [published on DOC's website](#), claiming the carcasses were not toxic. However, DOCs statement is implausible because the methodology used by *Manaaki Whenua* - Landcare is over 30 years old (1). Over the 65 years of aerial 1080 poisoning operations, the New Zealand Government has ensured that only Government-funded laboratories may undertake any testing of potentially contaminated drinking-water, food or wildlife. DOC's instructions to Landcare to use a method that is not fit-for-purpose, means that the major toxic agent from 1080 poison, fluorocitrate, repeatedly goes undetected (2). Professor Ian Shaw, toxicologist at the University of Canterbury [told journalists he was curious](#) about why the Government testing didn't include fluorocitrate.

"The flaws in DOC's testing calls into question all previous risk assessments and test results carried out by Government laboratories: water, food, wildlife and human cases of potential poisoning." said Di Maxwell, Flora and Fauna of Aotearoa representative.

Valid pesticide residue testing requires high-level expertise and modern technology; knowledge about the presence and the potential harm from trace chemicals has increased exponentially over recent decades. "A miniscule amount of some pesticides, particularly endocrine disrupting chemicals, can cause serious harm. Because these tests are not fit-for-purpose, the long-term impacts on public health from a sub-lethal dose of 1080 poison are unknown." said Frank Rowson, retired veterinary surgeon and pesticide researcher.

Dr Wall of Ideas Lab, a highly-qualified UK scientist of complex chemical analysis, who conducted the independent tests, runs successful international businesses that draw on high quality skills and cutting edge technologies. He initially wanted to remain anonymous due to receiving threats in the past; however his identity has since been made public. Dr Wall also has serious concerns about the inadequate testing for pesticide residues in NZ Government-funded laboratories and is consulting with international colleagues on the issue.

The two non-profit NGOs that commissioned the testing are currently working with national and international scientists to ensure further pesticide testing continues. They call for an immediate moratorium on the use of aerial 1080 poison and a thorough independent investigation into DOCs testing policies.



- (1) Ozawa H, Tsukioka T 1987. Gas chromatographic determination of sodium monofluoroacetate in water by derivatization with dicyclohexylcarbodiimide. *Analytical Chemistry* 59: 2914–2917.
- (2) Fluoroacetate is metabolised in the presence of aerobic life. The risks from secondary poisoning means that some of the victims would likely have consumed carrion that has already metabolised fluoroacetate into fluorocitrate.

Note to Journalists: Sodium Monofluoroacetate (Compound 1080) is a highly toxic, inhumane, synthetic metabolic poison. It has no antidote. It is unlicensed in many countries. The sublethal effects of the poison on humans are largely unknown (other than some deductions from animal models, accidental poisonings and suicide attempts). 1080 is a proven endocrine disruptor and impacts upon the body's major organs. It is manufactured in the USA by Tull Chemicals and transported to New Zealand's two Government-owned poison bait factories, where it is stored in a watery solution before being mixed with cereal or other substances perceived to be attractive to 'pest' species (e.g. rats and possums). Tonnes of poison baits are regularly and systematically distributed via helicopters over thousands of hectares of New Zealand's land and waterways – including drinking water catchments. For over 65 years of this practice New Zealanders have voiced their increasing concern about the negative impact of this indiscriminate poisoning, not only on wildlife, but domestic animals and humans too, from contamination of the food chain. Clean Green New Zealand and Flora and Fauna of Aotearoa are collating and recording evidence of the inevitable regular unintended consequences of these poisoning operations. To date, there has been no independent studies of the claimed safety or 'effectiveness' of this policy and no epidemiological research has been undertaken.