

Guide to Humane, Ethical Possum Trapping For Hunters and Trappers

As an individual within a collective group carrying out trapping and hunting of wild animals, in this case possums, it's very important for us to promote and maintain a high level of professionalism in our work. This means ensuring the entire process remains as ethical and humane as possible, whilst maintaining individual methodology and points of difference.

History has shown the capture of possums has been achieved in many different ways. Modern day trappers use many innovative and effective methods to enhance personally delivered possum capture. Commonly used traps can be collectively grouped into live capture or kill traps. For example legholds, cage traps or box traps are live traps that have been mainly used by industry members for possum meat/fur / skin recovery.

- MPI have stated that possum meat recovery requires the collector to view the animal prior death. The use of live capture traps enables this as does night shooting.

Kill traps mean exactly that, the animal is dispatched by the trap, and dead on your return. Commercially available kill traps permitted for use on Public land are subjected to rigorous independent testing for animal welfare reasons. This ensures "a minimum duty of care" to ensure the target animal does not unduly suffer for extended periods of time.

Targeted use of cyanide, which is another method that enables a harvester to maximise captures per visit. A possum trapper requires a controlled substance licence to purchase and handle Cyanide. Cyanide is a first generation toxin being a poison that MPI suggests no carcass withholding periods are required. Cyanide acts quickly, making the possum unconcienoous within minutes and deceased shortly after. There are two main types of Cyanide, sodium cyanide and potassium cyanide. There are many varying commercial methods to manage the cyanide applications. These methods can be simplified to ground laid, pots, bio bags, strikers, bait stations and automated dispensers.

Night shooting of possums has traditionally been favoured on farmlands by farmers. Light calibre rifles or shot guns are generally used. A degree of accuracy is required to ensure possums are dispatched quickly. The animal meat can be used for the pet food markets. To use or hold (a rim fire or centre fire) firearm a person is required to be licensed. Air rifles whilst not requiring a licence are occasionally used to dispatch possums at close quarters. Unfortunately, neither air rifles nor rim fire rifles (or shot guns) are permitted on DOC lands without special permits. Shooting assisted with thermal optic's or night vision is becoming used more often in possum harvesting.

Industry Best Practice Guidelines: 2025

Leghold traps:

- Use where possible raised sets to reduce non-target / native species captures
- Position the trap in a way that the possum can sit with all four feet on the ground
- Secure the trap chain firmly to prevent the possum with trap attached escaping
- Ensure the site is free of debris that can tangle the trapped animal
- Ensure the trap is positioned in a manner that the chain or sprung trap with captured possum is not obstructed by nails or ramps
- Preferably use in line chain springs (to act as a bungee), additional swivels, to soften the end of chain impact to the possums legs.
- All set traps must be checked daily, ideally as soon as practical.
- Read the weather ahead of time. If bad weather is expected close the trap line.
- Dispatching the possum caught within the trap as cleanly as possible. This would be done quietly, with a calm approach to the trap site. If a .22 cal or air rifle can not be used, or is not practical, a sturdy wooden club or trusty hammer can be used to swiftly but carefully subdue the caught possum rendering it unconscious. Aimed with the care of accuracy and delivered through a single sharp but forceful movement targeting the top of its skull. A second strike in quick succession between the ears to confirm the job be done.

Cage Traps:

- Ensure the site is free of debris that can tangle the trapped animal
- Ensure the trap is positioned in a manner that the captured possum can not roll the trap
- All set traps must be checked daily, ideally as soon as practical.
- Read the weather ahead of time. If bad weather is expected close the trap line or place water proof (snow or sun covers) the trap tops. Ensure traps are not in the flood zone. Using a box trap may resolve the need for covers!
- Dispatching the possum caught within the cage trap as cleanly as possible. This would be done quietly and calmly when approaching the trap site. If a .22 cal rifle or air rifle can not be used a bolt gun may be handy. If it's not possible to dispatch the possum onsite preferably swap out the cage trap with another. Prior to moving ensure the cage trap door is pinned or clipped and that the cage is placed in a dark shaded space or covered.

Kill traps:

- Choose a site where the trap can be secured where the possum can hang once caught without feet touching the ground.
- Ensure all springs are in working condition. Follow the trap manufactures best practice guidelines.
- Ideally recheck the traps frequently or adjust your trap management to be considerate of non target species or fouled captures to prevent prolonged suffering. Pre-feeding the site for several days prior trap set intensifies the capture justifying quick succession return visits to check the line.
- Be responsible and considerate to limit non target captures.

Cyanide:

- Ensure the operation site access has signage to enable awareness.
- Gain appropriate permissions and permits
- Lift baits above .750mm where kiwi are present
- Keep livestock away
- Pre-feeding optimises captures whilst reducing poison shy possums
- Ensure baiting is consistent with manufactures advice
- Avoid placing baits within direct contact with water or on wet surfaces
- Leave a clean site! bury baits well or remove them in total.
- Don't use stale baits, start a fresh!
- Gain industry training prior applying