Notice of Motion (Cr Elizabeth McKenzie):

"That Council requests staff to investigate how a cooperative initiative with Predator-Free 2050 to make fully-automated, 'set and forget' possum traps available to all Canterbury households might work, with an estimate of the likely effectiveness on predator reduction and potential costs, and report back to Council for consideration in the lead-up to the next Annual Plan."

Rationale

1. Possums are a major threat to both indigenous and exotic forests and ecosystems. They are a vector for disease, in particular for TB, which they can spread to dairy herds: https://www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2016-05/ris-mpi-bvt-may16.pdf
   They also have direct effects on carbon stocks and sequestration: https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/threats-and-impacts/animal-pests/wild-animal-control-emissions-management.pdf
   Although possums are listed in the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Plan as a pest to be managed under a 'site-led program' possums will rapidly become a problem with the increase in native and mixed native-exotic carbon sequestration forests, a situation that our current CRPMP did not anticipate. Totara, in particular, are likely to be heavily impacted.
2. The Predator-Free 2050 scheme will fail if predators such as possums continue to flourish in refuges such as in rural-residential and residential areas: https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2021/07/new-study-sheds-light-on-how-many-possums-live-in-urban-areas.html
   If New Zealand is to become truly predator-free, a region-wide solution is needed.
3. New Zealand has a unique biota, and thus has developed unique solutions for protection of biodiversity. Recent advances in New Zealand trapping technology have resulted in fully-automated, self-resetting, continuous auto-baiting traps that do not need to be regularly monitored. These traps are now widely used by the Department of Conservation and are robust and durable, requiring only 6-month refilling with a mayonnaise bait. They are exceedingly effective in remote areas as they are virtually maintenance-free.
4. The traps are designed to trap possums, but also trap non-target species - mustelids, rodents, and feral cats. The bait is not attractive to domestic cats and the traps do not trap birds. The traps are safe – they do not operate until one hour after nightfall, and turn off again one hour before sunrise, making them safe for children.
5. Since these traps are designed primarily to trap possums, they are covered by the ECan CRPMP and therefore would not require a significant change to the CRPMP. Since it is well-accepted that almost all pest control methods impact non-target organisms, the fact these traps catch other predators is hardly surprising - current ECan pest control operations also kill non-target organisms.
6. Because the trap uses a mayonnaise bait, it is toxin-free. While poisons have been used in the past, the Department of Conservation now discourages use of poisons for possum control because there is mounting evidence of bioaccumulation of anticoagulant poisons in the environment. Trapping avoids the creation of a toxin problem.
7. However, production of these traps is currently small-scale and expensive. Having trap libraries is not effective because traps need to be in place permanently to be effective. A bulk-buy or subsidy scheme, for example, could make these traps more widely accessible to the community. People who currently have these traps have noticed a significant drop in possums and other predators.
8. There only needs to be one landowner who is not controlling pests for pest control to fail. Rural-residential and urban residential areas are known refuges for possums, but these areas are not being actively managed by the Department of Conservation. Having a region-wide scale scheme for all households will significantly and permanently reduce possum numbers, which will protect new and regenerating forests required for carbon sequestration, and will protect birds that are required for seed dispersal for regenerating forests to regenerate.