



Options for rabbit control

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In 1859 when Thomas Austin released 24 wild rabbits on his Geelong property, he could not have foreseen that they would breed so prolifically and spread across the southern parts of the continent. Each year rabbits cause an estimated \$600 million worth of damage to agriculture. They also cause serious erosion problems, prevent native vegetation from regenerating, attack domestic gardens and undermine farm sheds and other buildings.

Landholders planning to grow broadacre, horticulture or tree crops or to preserve native vegetation need to control rabbits first.

Even landholders not growing crops are still legally obliged to control rabbits to protect their neighbours' land from the impact of rabbits.

Control issues

- The key to success is persistence. One-off efforts produce only short-term results as rabbits may produce many offspring and populations can recover quickly even after successful control programs.
- Maximum effectiveness is achieved by integrating appropriate control methods. Best control is achieved in late summer when rabbit numbers are decreasing and feed is limited.
- District-wide campaigns can reduce the problem of re-infestation by covering a large area.
- Sometimes it will not be possible to use poison but other methods are available. (For example, fumigation, ripping.)

Are rabbits present?

Areas intended for seeding, planting or conservation efforts, especially near rabbit harbourage, should be thoroughly checked. This is particularly important in areas where rabbits have previously been a problem.

Rabbit activity is usually indicated by scratchings, dung heaps and active burrows or warrens. More revealing checks can be made late in the day or at night by spotlighting when rabbits are active and more observable.

Baiting

Baiting is the most cost-effective way to reduce rabbit populations, particularly over large areas, but restrictions do apply.

1080 baits

Several types of 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) rabbit bait is available. Trained landholders can purchase bait products after they have obtained Baiting Approval from an authorised officer of the Department of Agriculture.

1080 is quickly broken down in the environment. Many native animals have developed a high degree of tolerance to 1080. Domestic stock and pets are however very sensitive to the poison in both baits and poisoned rabbits.

Pindone baits

Pindone is an anticoagulant with an effect similar to products used in some rat poisons. It can sometimes be used near settlements where pets might be at risk from 1080, because unlike 1080, an antidote is available for pindone.

However, pindone poses a risk to native animals including kangaroos, birds of prey and perhaps bandicoots. The poison must not be used in the presence of these animals.

For further advice on this issue contact the Department of Agriculture.

Warren fumigation

Rabbits use warrens as refuges and for breeding. Fumigation is the best method to use when a few rabbits live in widely scattered warrens or inaccessible areas. Fumigant tablets (commonly Phostoxin®) are placed in burrows to release poisonous phosphine gas.

Warren ripping

Areas where warrens have been destroyed by cross-ripping the soil are much less likely to be recolonised by rabbits. A tractor-mounted ripper is used to penetrate the soil to a depth of at least 60 centimetres.

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Harbourage destruction

Areas that rabbits use for harbourage/refuge include rock piles, deadfall timber and stumps, old buildings and abandoned farm machinery. Such material should be removed, buried or surrounded with rabbit-proof fences. Permission will usually be required before remnant or roadside vegetation can be cleared.

Rabbit-proof fencing

Rabbit-proof fences can be effective in preventing animals moving into or re-infesting an area. Well-maintained fences can provide a permanent solution to rabbit problems. Fencing can also be used to contain rabbits in an area where they can be more efficiently poisoned.

Myxomatosis and Rabbit Calicivirus Disease (RCD)

These viruses have been introduced to help reduce rabbit numbers, but may be difficult to manipulate. Following up immediately with other control methods can enhance their benefits.

Other methods

Shooting, trapping and the use of ferrets can be useful additional tools when very few rabbits are present. All these methods should be used legally and humanely.

Further information

Contact any office of the Department of Agriculture, or the South Perth office on phone 9368 3333.

See also Farmnotes:

- Guide to the safe use of 1080 poison
- Landholder use of 1080 One Shot oat rabbit bait
- Fumigation for rabbit control
- Rabbit warren and harbourage destruction

Summary of options for rabbit control

Options	When to use	Cost	Advantages	Disadvantages
1080 baiting	Late summer. Before seeding, planting or regeneration efforts.	Most cost-effective method.	Large areas covered quickly. Most native animals tolerant of 1080 but can be affected if baits misused. Foxes killed by eating poisoned rabbits.	No effective antidote. Livestock and pets can be at risk. Uneaten baits should be buried or weathered by exposure to rain. Dry weather required.
Pindone baiting	Best late summer. Before planting/seeding.	Moderate cost.	Less hazard to domestic animals. Antidote available.	Must not be used in presence of some native animals.
Warren fumigation	Best late summer. Before planting/seeding.	Labour-intensive. Follow-up to ripping.	Useful if rabbits are underground in inaccessible or scattered areas. Follow-up after baiting, ripping. Does not cause erosion.	Cannot be used where rabbits live above ground or where warrens cannot be sealed.
Warren ripping	Summer for sandy areas. Winter for areas with clay soils. Before planting/seeding.	Labour-intensive.	Good for large paddock infestations. Reduces recolonisation. Long-term solution.	Can cause soil erosion. Cannot be used in bushland as it destroys native vegetation. Cannot be used in some rocky country.
Harbourage destruction	Before planting/seeding.	Labour-intensive. Little value alone - combine with other methods.	Good follow-up method.	Cannot be used in all situations (e.g. native vegetation)
Rabbit-proof fencing	Before planting/seeding.	Very labour-intensive. High initial cost.	Long-term effect, stops reinvasion.	Needs regular checking.
Myxomatosis and RCD.	Naturally spread.	No cost.	Effective in reducing numbers before other controls are used.	Timing and effectiveness unpredictable.
Shooting, trapping, ferrets	Best late summer.	Very labour intensive.	Must be used with other methods, to be useful. Need permit for many trap types.	Only appropriate for low rabbit numbers. Trapping and shooting not suitable in built-up areas.