

FOUNDATION FOR RABBIT-FREE AUSTRALIA INC.

Strategic Plan, 2005-2010

Introduction

The Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia (RFA) is Australia's only publicly-subscribed fund that focuses its activities on the means to eradicate Australia of continuing impacts wrought by the wild European rabbit on our primary industries and our dwindling biodiversity. The primary aims of RFA are to:

- a) Support research, development and extension contributing to the eradication of rabbits in Australia.
- b) Increase government and community awareness of the continuing threat of rabbits to Australia's economic, environmental and social values.
- c) Encourage and support adoption of rabbit control in integrated natural resource management strategies.

RFA seeks to liaise with the three spheres of government, industry, environmental and community agencies/groups to achieve its planned outcomes as set out in this strategic plan.

Context

RFA continues to be greatly concerned with the national decline in rabbit research and development effort and on-ground control, particularly following the success of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD – formerly known as calicivirus) during the 1990s. We believe that the large economic, environmental and social gains made with RHD across Australia's rabbit-affected lands are inadequately acknowledged and are being eroded by lack of appreciation of the continuing threat and the accompanying complacency.

RFA also recognises that RHD has not effectively reduced rabbit numbers in higher-rainfall regions of Australia and the reasons for this situation are not well understood through lack of research effort. In addition, it is inevitable that either rabbit populations or RHD will adapt to their new situation, with the result that rabbit numbers will recover as they did from myxomatosis in the 1960s.

RFA notes that an investment of less than \$5m in RHD, a second form of biological control for rabbits, and related research in Australia and New Zealand netted an accountable benefit of well over \$100m. This high return on investment excludes the unaccounted biodiversity and social benefits.

Current estimates conservatively value the annual national cost of the exotic European rabbit at \$133m, not including the uncosted high levels of damage to the environment and the social cost — even with low numbers of rabbits post-RHD. This introduced and highly competitive species does not have a place in our landscape without contributing to attenuation to landscape quality.

Rationale for this Strategic Plan, 2005-2010

This Strategic Plan provides directions for the activities and desired achievements of RFA for the next five years. The Plan should be reviewed at least every two years to ensure that RFA's efforts are contemporary and outcome oriented.

Strategic Plan — 2005-2010

Purpose:

Provide a specific focus and support the need for innovative, Australia-wide rabbit control research, development and extension, leading to adoption of acceptable control strategies for a rabbit-free Australia.

Goals:

1. Improved rabbit control R,D& E, regionally and nationally, by identifying priorities and by supporting and contributing ideas and funding to R,D& E programs, where feasible.

Outcomes:

- Independent research advice, needs and program reviews provided for rabbit R,D& E agencies and funding corporations.
 - Rabbit workshops/seminars initiated, facilitated and/or funded.
 - Increased awareness of the need for research on new biological control agents.
2. Increased industry, government and community awareness of the continuing threat of rabbits to economic, environmental and social values.

Outcomes:

- Key audiences for awareness programs identified and targeted.
 - Invited journalists funded to prepare high impact rabbit stories for submission to the most effective communication vehicle.
 - An informative and up-to-date website maintained.
 - An independent voice and commentary provided, where needed.
 - Haigh's Easter Bilby Weekend supported.
3. Rabbit control included in integrated natural resource management strategies.

Outcomes:

- Contributions provided to national and state government INRM policies and inquiries, where needed.
- Land managers encouraged to adopt rabbit control.
- Government agencies encouraged to retain and provide rabbit management capacity.

4. Increased rabbit R,D& E capacity in Australia provided through appropriate tertiary training.

Outcomes:

- Acknowledgement by tertiary institutions of the need for trained rabbit researchers and information providers.
- Post-graduate students provided with grant funding by RFA.
- Supervisors suggested by RFA for post-graduate students.

5. Funds raised to support RFA's primary aims by increasing the numbers of members and sponsors.

Outcomes:

- Numbers of private and corporate members increased.
- Number of sponsors increased.
- RFA funds enhanced by targeted shares investment.