

Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia Inc
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 18th November 2008

CHAIRMAN	Mr T Rogers	TREASURER	Mr W Morgan
SECRETARY	Mr R Downward	ADVISERS	Ms F Bartholomaeus Mr G Mutze Mr N Newland
EXECUTIVE OFFICER	Mrs K Lapidge	HONORARY POSITIONS	Mr S Packer, Auditor
COMMITTEE MEMBERS	Mr B Barratt Dr C Holden Dr N Long Ms S Oldfield Dr J Radcliffe		

Chairman's Report

2008 has seen FRFA continuing to provide advice and direction to the community on Rabbit control. During this time we have considered applications ranging from the "robotic rabbit shooting machine", right through, to our own relevance. We have seen Governments change and the rise of new policy agendas, only then to be swamped by a world economic malaise. In such times, RFA remains very fortunate to have good expert advice through it's committee members and advisors and good commercial support provided by our major sponsor "HAIGHS.

Notwithstanding the "Global economic Crisis", there has been throughout this year, much public discussion concentrating on the impacts of climate change and the drought. While larger and sometimes, more populist agendas have dominated public discussion, the committee has continued to receive antidotal evidence for the resurgence in rabbits throughout much of areas where RHDV has suppressed numbers over the past decade. Our challenge is to be effective in keeping the message of rabbit control in the minds of Australians, especially those who make the decisions on Government funding.

By way of demonstrating these changing times, RFA was unable to conduct it's "Easter Bilby" promotion in the Rundle Street Mall again this year. In response, the committee believed that the time had come to reassess this program. With HAIGHS in agreement, we have approached the Adelaide Zoo to investigate the possibilities being created by the Zoo's redevelopment. SA Zoos have responded positively and we look forward to more detailed discussion. It is our belief, that RFA can be enhanced by a closer working association with SA Zoos and similarly has much to offer in return.

To further public awareness of the importance of continued rabbit control, the committee investigated engaging professional advertising advice. The proposed publicity campaign could not be guaranteed of success, regardless of the expenditure and so the committee decided against it. We have, rather, determined to develop closer working relationships with other national bodies with a view to involvement in national programs and publicity.

In July, I was able to attend the Australian Vertebrate Pest Conference in Darwin. Included in the approx. 130 presentations was an afternoon session on Rabbits, where Greg Mutze delivering a paper on "The effectiveness of RHDV releases for rabbit control". The afternoon tea, before the session, was "hosted" by FRFA. This gave the Foundation an opportunity to present itself to the conference and also to reinforce our relationship with the CRC for invasive animals. My impression remains that while there were many very impressive programs being undertaken, most were ultimately lacking adequate funding. The strongest message that I came away with from the conference, was the advantage of a quantifiable cost basis of the impact to the economy, for any proposal, if it is to be successful in attracting funding. To this end, FRFA has investigated whether this information is available in Australia for rabbit environmental and economic impact. Our advice is that this is near to completion and is potentially showing a far greater cost impact than previously considered. FRFA has written to the Rabbit Management Advisory Group with the intention to join them in using this information in making the case to corporations and Governments, of the value of effective rabbit control.

The Foundation continues to provide support for the RMAG and has corresponded with Government Members in support of it's proposal for a centre for Biological Control of Rabbits. The Foundation continues to regard the funding of research as an important role and has just been advised by Dr. Brian Cooke, of a research project that may qualify. The proposed project would investigate whether rabbits selectively remove nutrient-rich plant parts thereby limiting intake of these micronutrients in sheep to levels that could affect breeding success. RFA also awarded a \$5000 Postgraduate Research grant to Mr. Peter Ellsworth for a study titled "Investigating the body temperature profile of rabbits challenged with Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV)". We believe this research will provide important information to assist the use of RHDV as an effective biological control for European rabbits in Australia.

There has recently been a 'spike' in media interest, in rabbit numbers that we have been able to take advantage of. We have spoken with

newspaper and radio journalists and have been advised that there has been some Government interest in response. We are also in the early stages of becoming involved with the CRC /RMAG and the ABC, on a national media program based upon the 150th year anniversary of the introduction of the rabbit pest. This is expected to create a great deal of public interest and represents an important opportunity for FRFA. More detailed information will be included in our next newsletter.

During this year we were advised that with the change in Governors' General, we would need to re apply to the incoming office holder to continue as Patron. The committee felt that this might be the time for the Foundation to look for a person who would be more relevant to, and effective for our cause. To that end, we seek nomination proposals from members for the committee's consideration. We believe that this opportunity will enhance FRFA and it's cause.

Finally, I would like to make mention of the death of Mr. Allan Bartholomaeus of the Pine Creek pastoral lease, a long time member and invaluable supporter of the Foundation. For those of us relatively new to the foundation, it is right to acknowledge the many years of effective involvement that others have committed to this cause. Our condolences are with the Bartholomaeus Family.

Mr Timothy J. G. Rogers, Chairman
November 2008