

## **Foundation for Rabbit Free Australia, Inc.**

### **President's report for 2012/13**

I am pleased to submit to members my report of activities of the Foundation for Rabbit Free Australia Inc. for the year in review. This is my third report as President over the last three years and I will refer to the presidency in more detail below.

The Foundation's Committee has met several times over the year and the meetings are invariably well focused and with a clear sense of purpose. Australia's rabbit problem unfortunately does not lessen; on the contrary, it continues to worsen in various places but has yet to capture sufficient attention to attract significant investment by governments and relevant industry groups. This situation makes the work of the Foundation and its Committee more difficult and arguably less rewarding in being able to list clear achievements and progress over the year. I referred to this state of affairs in my report last year and I feel I must let the membership know that the Committee is finding difficulty in how best to use its slender resources in such a climate of relative apathy and overall ignorance of the nature and extent of the threat to our environment and primary industries.

Notwithstanding this situation, the Committee has fulfilled its three-year commitment to supporting the RHD (rabbit calicivirus) Boost project being undertaken by CSIRO and sponsored by the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre in Canberra. We have seen this as a good use of our research funding given that forms of biological control are still seen by the Committee as the most efficacious means of broadscale reduction in rabbit numbers. Subsequent to this investment, we have so far been unable to attract any applications for funding other research projects although we sought expressions of interest by advertisement. We will continue to explore ways whereby our funds can best be used to underpin Foundation activities.

During the year, we hosted a celebration at the Adelaide Zoo of our longstanding relationship with Haigh's Chocolates where our twenty-year relationship was appropriately acknowledged adjacent to the bilby enclosure. We are most grateful for Haighs' continuing support and it was a pity that more media interest was not shown. It was pleasing that two past presidents, Dr Ed McAlister AO and Dr Rob Morrison OAM were able to attend this event along with Ms Elaine Bensted, chief executive of Zoos SA. Haighs was very ably represented by Mr Simon Haigh, joint Managing Director who was very pleased to note the fact that Haighs had been 'rabbit free' for many years, unlike other purveyors of chocolate at Easter time.

Following this event and given the relative lack of media interest, the Committee decided to explore a more aggressive approach to raising awareness about the rabbit threat. A meeting was held with Mr Rob Ball and staff of Ball PR to assess the worth of developing a strategy to publicise and better inform the community about rabbits and their impact. Mr Ball was clearly interested in seeing what might be done and is finalising a proposal for consideration by the Committee.

A further initiative is for the Foundation to sponsor a visit to Australia by Dr Lorenzo Cappucci, a virologist from Brescia in Italy and a foremost authority on RHD. The SA Department of Primary Industries and Resources Biosecurity Group sees value in seeking Dr Cappucci's comment and advice on the research work being done in Australia by various agencies on three RHD related projects. Dr Cappucci has indicated an interest in visiting Australian laboratories and a date and terms for his visit are still being negotiated.

I am disappointed to report that attempts to establish a partnership approach with the SA Native Vegetation Council to help it deal with rabbit impact on heritage agreement lands and other land parcels being revegetated have not yet been fruitful. The Committee has been briefed on the difficulties the NVC is having in managing rabbits but as yet there has been no project identified that might be jointly funded by the Foundation and NVC. We had hoped

that NVC might want to consider a project involving new or novel approaches to biological control but this has not happened as yet.

I am very pleased to report that RFA continues to be in a sound financial position, with our investment strategy working well in our favour. This places us in a good position to support research and awareness projects in accordance with our Constitution once such projects can be found and approved.

As always, I express my gratitude to the members of the Foundation's Committee, all of whom show willingness to assist RFA achieve its stated objects. As president I could scarcely wish for a better group of people. In addition, I am delighted to welcome new Committee member the Hon Peter Dunn, whose wisdom and experience is valued by other Committee members. There remains a vacancy on the Committee and we are considering who might best fill it to complement our work.

I also thank Executive Officer Mrs Edwina Grant for her support, interest and sense of humour.

This is my third year as Foundation president (I have had a three year term some years ago) and in the normal course of events, I would resign to allow regular succession. The Committee, with the membership's approval, amended the Constitution at last year's Annual General Meeting to allow a president's term to be extended if in its opinion that term should be so extended. As no other member has yet to nominate, I would not wish the office of president to be vacant and would be prepared to continue in the role for another year if that is the unanimous view of the Committee.

Nicholas Newland AM

President FRFA

1 November 2013