

Foundation for Rabbit Free Australia, Inc.

President's report for 2011/12

I hereby submit to members my report of activities of the Foundation over the last twelve months.

In my report for the previous year, I referred to the continuing difficulty in securing greater interest and commitment from the public and private sectors in tackling the continuing threat the European wild rabbit poses to primary industries and to the natural environment. As this calendar year draws to a close, it is not unreasonable to say that little has changed. This situation is partly explicable given larger global problems with the economy and in the environmental and resource use area, the continuing debate about carbon management and the implications of climate change.

These larger questions place small, single focus groups such as RFA in a dilemma. One might be forgiven for concluding that the role of the Foundation may have run its course given such questions. However, without maintenance of effort and focus on pest organisms, whether they be rabbits or some other invasive species such as carp in inland waterways, the attrition of environmental quality and further loss of species diversity will be of regret both for our generation and those who follow us. These and other related arguments are the reason for entities such as RFA to remain viable and to be ready to capitalise on opportunities as and when they arise.

The audited accounts presented at the AGM for 2012 show that the Foundation's financial position is quite sound, given its size and its current membership base. Prudent expenditure by the Committee and careful management by the Executive Officer have contributed to this position. It is also underlined by continuing commitment from Haighs Chocolates to support the Foundation with its annual financial contribution for use of the Easter Bilby as a premier chocolate product.

Indeed, a meeting with Haighs CEO Mr Alister Haigh has confirmed the company's intention to maintain its involvement with the Foundation on an ongoing basis. We are exploring ways whereby that involvement may be of greater mutual benefit, noting that this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Haighs and RFA relationship. I hope to be able to report further developments to the membership at the next AGM.

RFA is keen to continue supporting the Canberra based Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre as the only entity in Australia with (among other things) a national mandate and focus on rabbits and their control. The Foundation is pleased to have contributed financial resources and physical support over a three-year period for the RHD Boost project investigating how to make best use of rabbit calicivirus across those landscape types where rabbit damage is evident. The RFA Committee would be keen to explore other ways where it can assist the CRC and its research projects, particularly with other and new biological control opportunities.

On a more local basis, the Foundation has been consulting with the South Australian Native Vegetation Council (NVC) whose responsibilities include the restoration and re-establishment of native vegetation in parts of that state that are available for this purpose. It is not surprising that one of the key barriers to effective re-establishment of native vegetation is unwanted grazing pressure from herbivores, particularly rabbits. The Committee has been corresponding with the NVC on this aspect and I was fortunate to meet several weeks ago with NVC presiding member Mr Dennis Mutton to discuss how RFA might assist. While options are still being explored, it is understood that the NVC would consider making a financial contribution to a project that would materially advance successful re-establishment of native vegetation where rabbits are known to be the major impediment. This may be a jointly funded project involving NVC, RFA and the CRC as funding partners, with the CRC being the project manager and provider. RFA

would be keen to be part of such a project, particularly if its findings assist vegetation re-establishment in other state and territory jurisdictions as well as in SA.

The Foundation is fortunate at present to have a Committee that includes a broad range of expertise. However, as with all voluntary groups, it is important that the Committee is refreshed on a periodic basis with new members with more new ideas. Both the Committee and I will be on the lookout for individuals with the experience and interest to add to our deliberations. We are particularly interested in gaining landholder Committee members and hope to secure at least one such person over the coming year.

During the year in review, the Committee has put effort into considering the content of the Foundations Rules as an incorporated association. The Rules are largely unchanged since incorporation in 1992 and there is a need to revise them to update the name change among other things. We are hoping to have a revised set of Rules available for members to consider at the upcoming AGM.

Before its incorporation, the Foundation was advised of a plan by Rotary to establish its own entity to concentrate on the wild rabbit problem in conjunction with the farming community. The Australian Campaign for Rabbit Eradication or ACRE has been working largely with farmers on practical forms of control and has developed an award system for effective efforts brought to its attention. RFA applauds these efforts and for many years had an ACRE representative on its Committee. The RFA Committee has been in recent communication with ACRE to explore how the two groups can once more work together as both groups know that there is plenty to be done. We look forward to further developments

In conclusion, the effectiveness of not-for-profit entities such as RFA is dependent on those who volunteer to serve on the Committee. We are fortunate to have a significant repository of expertise and commitment on the Committee and I thank those members and advisers for their efforts and support. I also thank our Executive Officer, Mrs Edwina Grant for her work and positive approach to task at hand.

The Committee is grateful to Dr Brian Cooke OAM for his role as Foundation patron and his efforts over many decades in undertaking and encouraging research on efficacious ways of controlling and managing rabbits.

We are always looking for new members to support RFA. Our annual fee is still modest and the cause is worthy of your attention and possible involvement. The application form for joining is easily accessible on the RFA website at www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au, or you can write to RFA at PO Box 1045, Collinswood SA 5081 and ask for one to be posted to you.

Nicholas Newland AM

President RFA

November 2011