



Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia Inc.
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Patron: Professor Frank Fenner AC,CMG,MBE, FRS, FAA

Chairman's Report 2010

It is with great sadness that the committee acknowledges the death of our recently appointed Patron, Emeritus Professor Frank Fenner. While being preeminent in the field of rabbit control he is remembered also as one of Australia's great scientists and citizens. It was an honour for RFA to have him accept the role as our patron earlier this year and we regret that we were not able to have a longer association with him. Nicholas Newland will speak later in the agenda on Prof. Fenner and his life.

This year has seen the easing of drought conditions virtually Australia wide and with the wet conditions has come a rise in reporting and concern of resurgence in Rabbits. As you are aware, RFA has a funding support role in the "RHD Boost programme". This is undertaking analysis of the remaining RHD virus strains in existence for use in Australia.

The most recent report from the programme manager Dr. Glen Saunders, states that 33 strains out of Spain have been collected, of which 10 strains have been found suitable for further investigation. Further, that tissue samples from 10 different locations in South Korea have been collected and of these 4 stains have been amplified for study. Talks about obtaining samples from France are progressing, while it was not possible to obtain samples from China and Russia.

It remains the hope of this programme to identify a RHD variant that is either more virulent than the existing Czech 351 RHDV or is able to better avoid the antibodies in rabbits in the higher rainfall areas where the RHDV-A1 has been present. The RHDV-A1 strain, as you will probably be aware, is thought to have already been with rabbits since they were introduced to Australia.

RFA has committed to fund 5 thousand dollars a year for three years toward this investigation. While this only a very small proportion of the programme funding of 1.5 million, it is an important contribution as it signals to Government that private NGOs are willing to commit to the science. This funding, made available through the "Caring for Country" programme, was not the entire amount sought in the submission. The original proposal was for a more thorough project at the cost of 5 million. It is telling that this was whittled down to 1.5 million for a potential control programme for a pest, that costs agriculture alone, 250 million a year. It will be among RFA's continued roles to keep pressure on the Government to maintain a financial commitment toward the rabbit.

The committee is pleased to announce that we have approached two new members to join the committee. Both are from institutions that RFA has worked closely with. Firstly, Simon Humphrys, who is the Commercialization Manager for the Invasive Animals CRC and secondly Simon Habel,



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Director of Zoos SA. We are delighted to strengthen our connections with the I.A. CRC and the ZOO and we hope that we have much to offer and of course, much to gain from these associations.

As it is 5 years on from RFA's successful national workshop held in Adelaide, the committee has decided it is time to once again bring together the best minds in rabbit control and research with a workshop to be held in Canberra, March 2011.

Much committee time has been spent on developing this idea and bringing it to reality. In this workshop we have decided to broaden the invitee list to include those from Government as well those from organizations that are directly impacted by rabbits or share the same environmental aims as ourselves. These workshops are extremely valuable in keeping the knowledge alive; especially as the Government funding for researchers and field officers has continued to deteriorate around Australia.

The intention of this workshop is to discuss developments in the rabbit problem within Australasia. By involving, and we hope, educating stakeholders and decision makers, we intend to focus them on the future control of Australia's scientifically acknowledged No. 1 feral pest. The message is, that there is no one fix outcome, for the rabbit and that to halt the damage to our agricultural and environmental future, we need to reinvest in continued biological control. History has proved this, witness the initial and continued impact of Myxomatosis, brought through the team headed by Professor Frank Fenner and the later identification and release of RHD Callici Virus. I would argue that in the terms by which government programmes are judged as value for money, these two would have to rank highest.

RFA has been successful in recruiting Edwina Grant as our new Executive Officer. Edwina has been thrown in at the deep end and is "swimming strongly"! She has shown great organisational skill in drawing together the threads that frayed whilst I was responsible after the departure of Keryn.

As this is the end of my term as Chair, I would like to thank the committee for their considerable contribution in keeping the foundation's work going. We also owe much to our advisers who provide the real life, in field experience, especially as this committee operates in addition to their normal professional roles. On behalf of the committee, we would like to thank our members who have certainly stood beside the foundation through thick and thin over a considerable time. I thank you for the privilege of Chairing this committee and being a small part of this most important issue.

Timothy J. G. Rogers

25th November, 2010