

From the Chairman

From the Chairman	1
AGM Notification	2
From the Chairman (cont)	2
New viruses offer hope for improved rabbit biocontrol	3
Introducing New Committee Members to be elected at	4
Membership Form	Insert

RFA Supported by:



Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia Inc.

PO Box 145

Collinswood SA 5081

Tel: 0407 721 195

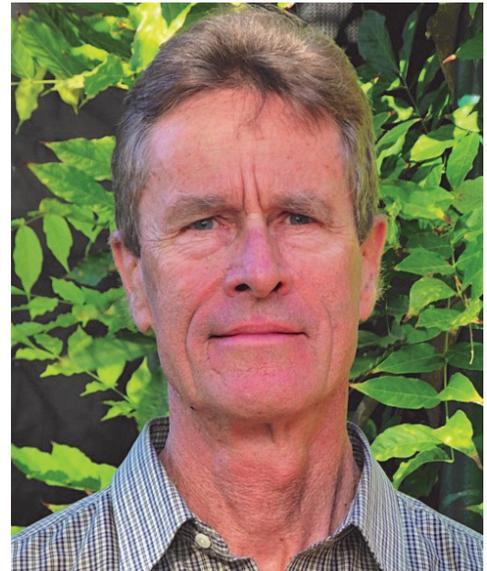
Email:

admin@rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au

Web: www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au

I am preparing this report a week or so after our last Committee meeting. There continues to be much to do for RFA as wild rabbit numbers generally recover from the release of rabbit calicivirus (RHDV) in 1995. While wild rabbit numbers fluctuate due to seasonal influences, the general trend is not encouraging. The wild rabbit still remains as Australia's worst vertebrate pest despite effort over one hundred or more years. So RFA's role continues as the only single focus not-for-profit entity raising funds and advocating for research into this big problem for Australia's land managers, and also as important, the nation's biodiversity. In order to do this effectively we continue the search for membership and I continue to be disappointed that we struggle maintaining membership numbers across Australia to around fifty. Why is this so? Conclusions that it is possible to draw are that we do not promote ourselves enough to attract attention, or what we are trying to do does not resonate with land managers at large. Our capacity to attract research funds and to advocate is, in my view, directly related to membership numbers. So if you are not a member, please look at the membership form at the back of this newsletter. If you are a member, please renew your membership and attempt to get at least one other person to join.

One aspect of RFA's business that is working well is our Committee, whose names are given within this newsletter. We also have been successful in attracting at least two new Committee members, whose collective experience and wisdom will add greatly to Committee deliberations. Profiles on these new Committee members are included as well. With the AGM coming up in November, some of us are required by the Constitution to retire, including me. New ideas and approaches are critical to organisations such as this and I am hopeful that we will be able to announce a new chairman soon.



A very important matter that has taken much of the Committee's time is the proposal to release a new rabbit calicivirus next autumn. The NSW DPI is the proponent on behalf of NSW and other jurisdictions including the Commonwealth for release of RHDV K5. Most of the background research for K5 has been undertaken in NSW, largely at the DPI Orange office and at the Elizabeth McArthur Research Institute. While RFA supports this work effort, the Committee is concerned that the relatively recent arrival in Australia of another rabbit calicivirus, RHDV2, appears not to have been given sufficient attention. This is despite the fact that RHDV2 is now in NSW, ACT, Victoria, SA and as I understand it, in NT. Surely it is only a matter of time before it is in WA and Tasmania. We believe it is not clear where RHDV2 will spread to and how it might affect any formal release of K5; for example will planned monitoring arrangements be adequate to know what is the most effective biocontrol and what might be done to make the most of the arrival of RHDV2? On your behalf, we have written to the chief executive of the Invasive Animals CRC expressing our disquiet and asking him to draw the attention of the CRC Board to that disquiet.

FOUNDATION FOR RABBIT FREE AUSTRALIA Annual General Meeting



Notice is hereby given that the **TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** will be held at The Santos Conservation Centre, Plane Tree Drive, Adelaide Zoo on **THURSDAY 17th NOVEMBER, 2016** at 2:00 pm.

New Members and Visitors are welcome.

Membership and donation form is included in your Newsletter.

Membership fees for 2016/2017 are due by the AGM.

*For catering purposes, we would appreciate it if you could let us know
if you plan to attend the AGM.*

*RSVP to Edwina Grant on
mobile 0407 721 195,
e-mail: admin@rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au*

From the Chairman (cont)

Mr Glanznig has spoken to me over the phone about this matter and we look forward to his considered reply.

Committee member Dr Bruce Munday is well advanced in preparing his book on the history of wild rabbits in Australia and their impact. I have seen an edited draft of the text and it promises to be the best offering on this subject due to the detail it contains and Bruce's engaging writing style. There are some embarrassments Bruce has recounted in the book; nothing to do with content, just some of the silly decisions that have been made about the problem over a long period.

As always, Haighs Chocolates have remained steadfast supporters of RFA and we are most grateful for that continuing interest and long may it continue. Some might think the relationship between what I think is the best chocolate maker anywhere and wild rabbits is somewhat obscure. Yet the Easter Bilby and what has happened to so much of Australia's natural environment because of wild rabbits says it all.

Nicholas Newland AM

Chairman

New viruses offer hope for improved rabbit biocontrol

About 6 years ago, two things happened that may ultimately lead to better biological control of rabbits in Australia.

RHD Boost (K5)

The first one was a plan developed by Australian rabbit researchers to look for new strains of rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV or calicivirus) in Europe and Asia. It was known that some RHDV strains that had been causing problems to rabbit meat producers overseas for 20 years were not present in Australia. The research program, called RHD Boost, introduced new strains of RHDV for testing at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute near Sydney. In particular, the research aimed to see if any of the overseas strains might be more effective in the higher rainfall areas of south-eastern Australia, where rabbits are partially protected from RHDV by a related, benign calicivirus called RCV-A1. RCV-A1 was present before RHDV was introduced and rabbits that have been infected by RCV-A1 they are less likely to die when infected by RHDV. A Korean RHDV strain (K5) was identified that killed a high proportion of rabbits with antibodies to RCV-A1 and it has been approved for release, probably in autumn 2017. About 600 landholder groups have signed up to be part of the national release program. RHD Boost may provide some benefit in the hot, dry areas where RCV-A1 is less common, but that is less certain.

RHDV2

At about the same time as RHD Boost research began, another new strain of calicivirus, RHDV2, emerged in Europe in 2010 and rapidly spread through France, Spain and Portugal. It was discovered in Canberra in May last year. How it arrived in the country is unknown but it has also been detected in pet rabbits in Canada. The Australian strain is genetically similar to a strain from Portugal.

RHDV2 spread within 1 year to much of New South Wales and Victoria, probably aided by flies and mosquitoes, but possibly also through people moving infected pet rabbits, or contaminated equipment or food. It was detected in South Australia in December 2015, and has spread gradually through almost all the agricultural districts and into the southern pastoral zone.

RHDV2 has been killing some pet rabbits that have been vaccinated against RHDV, and can overcome immunity in wild rabbits that have survived infection in previous RHDV outbreaks. In agricultural areas and areas of high biodiversity, it is hoped that the new strain might provide another significant knockdown of wild rabbit populations for some years. In France, Spain, Portugal and Scotland where RHDV has also been active 20-30 years, rabbit populations have been severely depleted by RHDV2 in the past 5 years.

We need your dead rabbits

We expect that RHDV2 will continue to spread in South Australia but want to discover how it competes with the existing field strains, and when might be the optimum time to release the K5 RHD Boost strain. The virus can only be identified reliably in the liver or bone marrow of rabbits that have recently died from the disease. Samples are urgently needed to monitor RHDV2 spread. Please call us if you see dead rabbits. Freeze them and we will organise the rest. Samples will help determine which strains are most effective, and at what time of year and where these strains are active.

More broadly, data from rabbit samples can be used to assess the effectiveness of the various rabbit biocontrols currently in existence and to argue for further research to find new biocontrols to benefit Australia's agricultural industries and the environment.

In the event RHDV2 does take hold in the South Australia, it may significantly enhance the effectiveness of standard rabbit control measures, with less rabbits around to survive a control program and reinfest properties. This is a great opportunity to get long term control of persistent rabbit problems.

Further information

Greg Mutze, Research Officer, Biosecurity SA, 8303 9505, greg.mutze@sa.gov.au

HOW TO PROVIDE A SAMPLE

Look out for dead rabbits that otherwise look healthy. This may be evidence of an RHDV or RHDV2 outbreak. Collect a carcass (or its liver or hind leg) and store it, with its source location and date, in a plastic bag in the freezer.

Record any observations. For example: "I used to count 50 rabbits driving from the gate to the house and in the last week I have seen none" or "I found a number of dead rabbits but there still seems to be heaps of live rabbits about".

Once you have a rabbit sample in the freezer, please contact us **8303 9504** or **8303 9505** to arrange collection or drop-off of the sample for testing at Biosecurity SA in Adelaide, or at CSIRO in Canberra.

Land managers will be advised of the results, which could confirm RHDV or RHDV2 activity in their area.

Introducing New Committee Members to be elected at the 2016 AGM:

Prof Wayne S Meyer



Wayne is currently the Adjunct Professor of Natural Resource Science after 9 years at the University of Adelaide. He is the Director of the Landscape Futures Program that is part of the Environment Institute at the University.

Wayne is a product of rural South Australia, a graduate of the University of Adelaide, with research experience in Texas, USA and South Africa. He is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology and a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

His research career has included 27 years in CSIRO as an irrigation scientist, systems modeller and sustainable agriculture research manager. He was the founding CEO of the CRC for Irrigation Futures that supported 50 postgraduates contribute to the irrigation industry. He initiated and guided the Lower Murray Landscape Futures program and Envisioning Landscape Futures project that has assisted communities plan for changes in future climate and market conditions.

His current research builds on his experience in making science more influential in managing our soils, water and vegetation. His aim is to help people and communities find new ways to use land and water that is productive and conserves Australia's natural plants and animals.

In recent years he acquired a small holding in the Murray mallee of SA and is in the process of revegetating it with endemic species amid rampant weeds and pest animals. He and Nancy are restoring the 1900 paddock limestone cottage on the property. Among other interests Wayne maintains a

family interest in beekeeping, woodwork and fixing things, especially those with heritage value.

Peter Alexander



Peter Alexander has a deep affinity with the Australian agricultural and natural landscapes and has made an ongoing contribution in the field of environment and natural resource management and education and training sectors. Peter grew up in rural Victoria, has spent most of his adult professional life in various parts of South Australia and now lives in Hawthorn, SA, with his wife Pat and has two independent adult children.

Peter worked in the environment and natural resources field for a number of decades and has achievements which include:

Director – NRM integration project

Manager – South East Region DEWNR

Deputy Director Science and Conservation

Chair – National Working Group on Biodiversity Decline

Manager – Wildlife Management and Biodiversity Conservation South Australia

Leadership and management of : SA's Kangaroo Management program, Flinders Ranges Bounceback Program, Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby recovery and a range of issues including wildlife trade controls, hunting seasons, and community NRM projects.

Peter has extensive experience providing leadership in a range of roles within the

South Australian government sector including delivery of front line services and development and implementation of policy, planning and reform initiatives. Peter's career focus was on environment, wildlife and natural resources management, sustainability and communities. His work history includes experience in national parks and ecosystem management, pastoral land management, ecotourism, horticulture, adult learning and indigenous youth development.

Peter was a member of the South Australian Government Executive Service from approximately 1998 to 2013 and holds a Masters Degree in Business Administration from Adelaide University, a Bachelor of Science Degree from Flinders University and a Certificate 4 in Training and Assessment from TAFESA. Peter is currently a part-time lecturer with TAFESA, undertakes a number of voluntary roles, retains a connection with the family farm in Western Victoria and enjoys semi-retirement through travel, trail walking and visiting some of the fantastic natural areas Australia and the world have to offer.

The Current Committee:

Patron
Dr Brian Cooke

Chairman
Mr Nicholas Newland

Treasurer
Mr William Morgan

Members
Dr Bruce Munday (retiring)
Mr Deane Crabb
Mr Peter Dunn
Mr Peter Day
Ms Julia Harris
Mr Dean Rasheed

Advisors
Mr Greg Mutze
Mr Richard Downward

Executive Officer
Mrs Edwina Grant

Support the Foundation for Rabbit Free Australia - become a member:

Forms can be downloaded at: http://www.rabbitfreeaustralia.org.au/membership_form.html