

Chairman's report to Members; Annual General Meeting – November 16, 2017.

This past year has been one of change for the Foundation and for the success of our mission. As I present my first report as chairman, we find ourselves in an environment that engenders both optimism and concern. Optimism, because for the first time in our history, we have a number of rabbit biological controls circulating at the same time and interacting in such a way as to bring about a much needed and more realistic opportunity to achieve significant control of wild rabbits. Concern, because despite a community-based role out of the latest biological control agent, the science and community understanding of the importance of our mission is, if anything, retreating.

Working against this assessment is a real highlight for our Foundation and its mission through the release by RFA member, Bruce Munday, and Wakefield press of “Those Wild Rabbits: How they shaped Australia” and the ensuing interest from the media and community. This book and Bruce’s communication skills did much to raise the profile of the issue and of the work of many committed land managers, scientists and community groups involved in managing wild rabbits.

The year also saw completion of the Invasive Animals CRC, which achieved much in relation to improved rabbit control technologies during the past decade and the start up of a new, Canberra based Centre for Invasive Animal Solutions. This new centre in conjunction with the NSW Department of Primary Industries continues to monitor the impact of recent release of the RHDV1-K5 rabbit biological control agent and reports a decrease in rabbit populations averaging 42% across the several hundred release sites monitored.

The Foundation for a Rabbit Free Australia remains the only not-for-profit entity in Australia raising funds for research, awareness raising and improved management of wild European rabbits, acknowledged as Australia’s worst vertebrate pest.

Environmental outcomes for the 2016/17 financial year include contributions to the following projects:

- Publication and launch of a new book outlining the history of wild rabbits in Australia and their impact on Australia’s natural environment and primary industries: Bruce Munday and Wakefield Press - \$5,700
- Support for a PhD project titled An Integrated Pest Management Approach to Invasive Rabbits in Australia: Emily Dufresne, University of Adelaide - \$4,000
- Koonamoore Native Vegetation Reserve Appeal: Dr Russell Sinclair, University of Adelaide- \$4,800
- Using flies for the monitoring of RHDV activity: Dr Adam Croxford, University of Adelaide – \$10,000.
- Investigating rising rabbit genetic resistance to RHDV: Dr Amy Iannella – University of Adelaide – final report.

- Specialist support to preparations for the national release of the RHDV1-K5 strain: the first new biological control release for two decades.
- Lobbying for and support of additional research into the unplanned arrival and impact of a new viral disease of rabbits in Australia, RHDV2.

Our modest but sound financial position at the end of the financial year was slightly stronger than at the same time last year. This outcome was achieved thanks to: continuing support from our sponsor, Haig's Chocolates whose long-term commitment makes a real difference to improving environmental outcomes and improving the welfare of native animals; generous support for new research projects via significant donations from Mutooroo Pastoral Company and Jumbuck Pastoral Company; the support of our committed members, membership fees and associated donations; and finally our investment returns.

As a charitable foundation, we rely heavily on the continued support of our members and your promotion of the important ecological and economic consequences of our work as opposed to the impact of uncontrolled wild rabbit populations.

I would especially like to thank the Foundation Committee members and acknowledge their experience and wisdom that guided me through this year. Peter Day deserves a special mention for his work on keeping our website up to date with fresh and interesting content. Executive Officer Edwina Grant also deserves special thanks for her ongoing efforts in managing the administration of the Foundation, getting out two newsletters a year to our members and keeping the Committee on task.

The very worst impacts of rabbits on the Australian environment are most dramatically visible during horrendous rabbit plagues. However, the real work to overcome this destructive force occurs at times like these when sustained effort is required to capitalise on a window of opportunity for long-term gains. Sustained support is required for strategic research, for innovative management and for improved public awareness. If this support is well targeted it will also help a new generation of champions emerge who share our vision to eradicate rabbits from the wild in Australia.

The Foundation's Committee will continue to work towards these goals and a future that is not marred by out of control rabbit numbers and their fundamental disruption of ecological processes and economic well being.



Peter Alexander
Chairman
Foundation for a Rabbit Free Australia
November 2017