

## Use of bait for rabbit control has been dramatically reduced by the introduction of rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD).

Farmers use 1080-treated oat baits to control rabbit numbers as the first stage of conventional rabbit control programs, usually followed by warren destruction and fumigation of any burrows that reopen. The demand for rabbit bait across South Australia varies enormously depending on seasonal conditions, hitting a peak when rabbit numbers increase after bumper seasons like 1993 and 2011, but typically being low after natural events like drought (e.g. 1982) or disease reduce rabbit populations.

After RHD spread through SA in the late 1990s rabbit numbers were reduced so much that the average demand for poison decreased by about 60-70%. When the new strain of RHD virus, RHDV2, spread through SA in late 2016 rabbit numbers were again greatly reduced and that has been reflected in further reductions in demand for bait.

The total cost of baiting programs is about \$15-\$20 per kilogram of bait used, once the cost of unpoisoned free-feeds, equipment and labour have been taken in to account. So, as the figure below shows, last financial year, 2016/17, SA farmers would have spent more than \$50,000 on baiting programs to lay 3.5 tonnes bait. That is approximately 1/20<sup>th</sup> of the bait used each year before RHD arrived in 1995 (by a total of around 1,000 landholders), which translates into a saving of about \$1 million for the year. Let's hope the effect of RHDV2 lasts for a few more years!

