

Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia Inc.

Strategic Plan: 2021-2025

Summary

Vision: Australian landscapes that are free of their worst feral pest – the European wild rabbit.

Mission: To promote the eradication of European wild rabbits from Australia by:

- Awareness. Raising awareness and understanding.
- Research. Supporting research and researchers.
- On-ground action. Encouraging on-ground control measures.

Our Emblem:

The Bilby (*Macrotis lagotis*) is an Australian native animal that has faced extinction due, in large part, to European wild rabbits.

Our Mascot:

The Easter Bilby champions the Foundation's cause – reclaiming the Australian bush for native plants and animals. The Foundation is the registered holder of the 'Easter Bilby' trademark, and is pleased to work with chocolate manufacturers and story-tellers using Easter Bilby to promote the rabbit control cause and a theme of 'bilbies not bunnies'.

Priorities: The Foundation is focused upon:

- Awareness – of the problems rabbits cause, and the need for research and on-ground action.
 - Communication
 - Knowledge management
 - Public relations
- Research – into rabbits and options for, and the benefits of, their control.
 - Biological controls
 - Rabbits and their impacts
 - R&D capacity
- Action – promoting the application of knowledge for effective rabbit control.
 - Integrated control programs
 - Community engagement
 - Social Licence.



Background

The Problem:

European wild rabbits are introduced, invasive pests throughout much of Australia, causing considerable harm to the natural environment and to primary production.

Their impact on native ecosystems includes:

- Competition for food and shelter,
- Selective grazing of preferred plant species, resulting in low or nil recruitment and subsequent ecological change,
- Maintaining fox and feral cat populations, resulting in increased predation of native animals and contributing to the extinction of some species, and
- Soil erosion and associated impacts on vegetation, wetlands and watercourses.

Their impact on primary industries includes lost production (crops and pastures, horticultural, viticulture and nursery plantings, and revegetation or commercial forestry seedlings) plus control costs, soil erosion and weeds.

Biological controls (myxomatosis, rabbit fleas, and RHDV) have proven to be the most cost-effective forms of rabbit control in much of Australia, generating benefits from improved vegetation condition, increased populations of small native mammals, and reduced incidence of feral cats to improving agricultural productivity. However, a production line of new bio-controls is needed to ensure the ready availability of new measures once existing controls becomes less effective. Given the long lead time for such research, it is an ongoing priority. Animal welfare principles must also be recognised, seeking humane measures to eradicate feral rabbits from Australia.

Integrated rabbit control programs are necessary to supplement biological controls. They should:

- Use a mixture of biological and physical methods,
- Target feral predators (foxes and cats) as well as rabbits, and
- Work across boundaries in well-timed and coordinated collaborations.

Foundation's Charter:

The Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia Inc. manages a fund to support research, raise awareness and encourage on-ground action to eradicate feral rabbits from Australia. It is Australia's only publicly-subscribed fund to focus its activities on ways to eradicate the continuing impacts wrought by European wild rabbits on our primary industries and our unique native biodiversity.

Aims:

The Foundation's Aims are to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of the nature and extent of harm caused by rabbits, the continuing threat they pose to Australia's economic, environmental and social values, and the need for research into integrated control measures.
- Support research, development and extension, including projects, researchers and research organisations, contributing to the eradication of wild rabbits in Australia.
- Encourage on-ground measures which contribute to the eradication of rabbits, such as integrated control programs applying the latest research results.

The Strategic Plan 2012-2025 provides direction for the activities of the Foundation for the next five years. The Plan will be reviewed periodically to ensure the Foundation's efforts are contemporary and outcome oriented.

Strategic Plan 2021-2025:

Aim 1. Awareness

To increase awareness and understanding of the nature and extent of harm caused by rabbits, the continuing threat they pose to Australia's economic, environmental and social values, and the need for research into integrated control measures.

Awareness priorities:

- **Communication.** Spreading the word about wild rabbit issues and being responsive to community ideas and information needs, focusing on:
 - A National Discussion. Consulting widely to determine how to best facilitate an ongoing national discussion about rabbits, including conferences, forums, interviews or events to publicise matters and exchange and ideas across Australia.
 - Website and social media. Providing up to date news and information, along with on-line opportunities for communication and the exchange of ideas and insights.
 - Media. Working with traditional media networks and social media forums to share information, especially about new initiatives and research findings.
 - Newsletter. Regularly publishing a newsletter, available to members and collaborators, with the latest information about Foundation activities and rabbit-related news.
 - Submissions. Presenting information and insights to relevant investigations and enquiries.
- **Knowledge management.** Collating, synthesising and sharing information for increased understanding of rabbit issues, research needs and control options, focusing on:
 - Foundation website. Ensuring the Foundation's website is up to date, includes an easily accessible data-base of references, and is a well-used source of information, especially for resource managers, students and potential investors or partners.
 - Books, guidelines and other media. Collating, promoting and encouraging the production of books, guidelines and other media that spread the 'rabbit story' and/or information on how to manage feral rabbits.
- **Public relations.** Developing and managing partnerships to enhance the operations of the Foundation and public awareness of the issues it champions, focusing on:
 - Members, sponsors and supporters. Developing and maintaining mutually beneficial, long-term relationships with members and key partners.
 - Easter Bilby. Ensuring the 'bilbies not bunnies' message is widely promoted and understood through Easter Bilby promotions and support for licenced Easter Bilby manufacturers.
 - Easter Bilby's Friends. Explore opportunities to develop new product ranges and new partnerships that promote the need to reclaim the Australian bush, and provide educational material about native plants and animals at risk due to rabbits.



Aim 2. Research

To support research, development and extension, including projects, researchers and research organisations, contributing to the eradication of wild rabbits in Australia.

Research Priorities:

- **Biological controls.** Research to enable better biological control of European wild rabbits in Australia, focussing upon:
 - Biological controls. Identifying, testing and planning the release of biological controls, including novel technologies and methodologies to support research and testing.
 - Transmission. Understanding how biological control agents are transmitted and how to optimise transmission and infection.
 - Susceptibility. Understanding what influences the varied susceptibility of rabbits to biological controls and how to optimise the effectiveness of control agents.
 - Genetic tools. Understanding which genetic tools may have a role to play in rabbit control, and the issues which may affect their application.
 - Host-Pathogen dynamics. Exploring any changes in rabbit susceptibility and/or disease virulence, including relationships between bio-control agents.
- **About Rabbits.**
 - Rabbit physiology & sociology. Understanding the features of wild rabbits that may be exploited to enhance their control.
 - Rabbit ecology. Understanding what influences the distribution and abundance of European wild rabbits, and the plants and animals that they subsequently influence.
 - Environmental & economic impacts. Understanding and quantifying the nature, extent and cost of rabbit impacts on primary production and natural environments, including:
 - Productivity and profitability of various primary production sectors, including social costs.
 - Native vegetation growth and regeneration at the species and community level, including following fire or other episodic events.
 - Relationships between rabbits, feral predators and native fauna.
- **R&D capacity.** Helping to ensure Australia has adequate research capacity, and that it is effectively and efficiently applied, to research into rabbit-controls, focussing on:
 - Science partnerships. Working closely with, and supporting, the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, universities, CSIRO, government departments and other research and development bodies, and their funders.
 - Supporting researchers. Providing small competitive, grants to support post-graduate projects, and for personal development and scientific exchanges for Australian and international researchers.
 - Science forums. Facilitating forums for the exchange of new ideas and research findings, and the analysis and promotion of research priorities.
 - Enabling technologies. Exploring new techniques to facilitate faster, more effective, and more cost-efficient research into rabbit control technologies, such as new laboratory or field sampling techniques.



Aim 3. Action

To optimise the application of knowledge and technology, regarding biological and physical options, for greater control of European wild rabbits in Australia.

On-ground priorities:

- **Integrated control programs.** Promoting integrated rabbit control programs; especially those which also control feral predators and re-introduce native wildlife, focussing on:
 - Coordination and technology. Advocating strongly for funds to enable education and training, and the appointment where necessary, of regional coordinators and technical service providers.
 - Regional coordination and delivery. Encouraging the development of integrated rabbit control programs, delivering coordination and training programs.
 - Recovery programs. Supporting initiatives which demonstrate how landholders can work together with agencies to eradicate wild rabbits and re-introduce native species.
- **Community engagement.** Supporting programs which work on-ground with individual, or groups of, landholders toward a common goal of rabbit eradication, focussing on:
 - Community organisations. Liaising with like-minded community organisations to promote synergies between our efforts.
 - Citizen science. Encouraging landholders and communities to be involved in programs (like *pestSMART*) that record information to learn about rabbits and their control, while also assisting those controlling rabbits on the ground.
- **Social Licence.** Understanding public sentiments and information needs, and facilitating appropriate responses, such as guidelines for humane control measures or research procedures.
 - Social research. Investigating what issues are important to maintain a social licence for rabbit control technologies and how to best address them.
 - Guidelines. Supporting the application of appropriate guidelines, and insisting upon it for any Foundation sponsored projects.



Thackaringa, front gate; 2000

Thackaringa, front gate; 2012

Strategic Plan - Detail

