

Rabbits

REDUCING THEIR IMPACT IN THE NORTHERN AND YORKE NRM REGION



Rabbit warren with cover

Why are Rabbits a problem?

European rabbits have spread throughout the temperate zones of Australia, including the Northern and Yorke NRM region. Their successful establishment is attributed to their ability to survive without free water, their remarkable capacity to breed and the use of warrens to provide protection from predators and extreme weather conditions.

Where plants have at least 60% moisture content, rabbits do not need to drink. When food and water is scarce, rabbits respond by eating less and losing weight (they can lose up to 50% of body weight before dying). This enables them to survive extended droughts periods. They have small manoeuvrable mouthparts which allow them to be selective feeders and to graze plants to ground level.

Rabbits will breed as soon as conditions are favourable. It is not unusual for populations to increase five-fold during an average breeding season

What is their impact?

Even in low numbers, rabbits can suppress vegetation regeneration and growth. The grazing impact of twelve rabbits is equivalent to one dry sheep (Dry Sheep Equivalents or DSE). Vast areas can be denuded of vegetation, reducing the sustainable stock grazing capacity and often leading to increased erosion, especially in areas with light sandy soils.

Rabbits also provide a food source for foxes and feral cats. This enables these pest animals to maintain high numbers with an associated impact on native animals and stock.

What can you do? - Some methods of control

Rabbit control is about overcoming the rabbits' overwhelming breeding potential and not about killing rabbits. The number of rabbit warrens and rabbits remaining after implementing your program (those left to continue breeding) is the measure of successful rabbit control.

Rabbit control is best done in summer when numbers are naturally lower and feed is not abundant as this leads to good bait uptake. Also, as rabbits are not breeding and the soil is dry, warrens are more likely to collapse when ripped. Without the protection of the warren, rabbits are more susceptible to heat stress and dehydration and also predation.

Your rabbit control program is made up of 5 steps:

- Plan
- Poison (to further reduce numbers)
- Rip warrens
- Fumigate (as follow up)
- Monitor effectiveness (re-rip and
- Re-fumigate if necessary).



Plan

Seek assistance of the N&Y NRM Officers to help you plan. Plan in advance as timing is critical. Include an assessment of warrens and number of active holes and mark them clearly.

Poison

Only the Northern & Yorke Natural Resources Management Board (N&Y NRM Board) can supply 1080 treated oats. 1080 is a naturally occurring substance that is highly toxic to rabbits and relatively safe for native wildlife. **WARNING:** 1080 is toxic to dogs. There is no antidote available for 1080. Directions for use must be followed carefully. Remove all livestock before baiting.

Pindone is an alternative poison which is less toxic to dogs and an antidote is available.

Train rabbits to take the feed by applying at least three feeds of untreated oats (free feeds) in a trail along a shallow furrow of disturbed earth.

The Board has a baitlayer available for use. Lay the trail where rabbits are active and feeding, three or four clear days apart. Lay the 1080 poisoned oats at 2.8kg per km in the late in the afternoon. Collect any carcasses the following morning and bury them.

Rip warrens

Start the program a few days after poisoning. Complete the ripping in as short as time as possible and to a depth of at least 90cm. Ensure that full width of the warren is ripped to ensure destruction of the entire warren structure. Cross ripping is considered to be the most effective method.

Native vegetation clearance approval is required if any vegetation is to be destroyed in the warren ripping process.

Fumigation

Any re-opened holes can be fumigated as follow up.

Monitor effectiveness

Check for reopened holes for at least 6 weeks after ripping. The open holes can be fumigated.



1080 poison laid warning sign

For more information

Natural Resources Centre - Clare (head office)

155 Main North Road

Clare SA 5453

Ph: (08) 8841 3400

Hours: Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/northernandyorke



Natural Resources
Northern & Yorke



Government
of South Australia