

Dealing with Increasing Rabbit Numbers on Goolawah

Over the last few months many Goolawah members have reported increasing rabbit numbers around Goolawah hamlets. It is important to remember that this problem is a 200 year old problem, and one that requires ongoing controls ... there is no silver bullet quick fix. For anyone who is unaware of the devastating environmental impacts of rabbits in Australia, please see these links:

- <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/pest-animals-and-weeds/pest-animals/rabbits>
- <https://www.thoughtco.com/feral-rabbits-in-australia-1434350>.

Local Land Services provide a range of services for helping manage invasive pests, including cane toads, deer, pigs, rabbits, foxes and goats. For reducing rabbit numbers, there are basically three options that they suggest, and two they actively provide logistic support for:

1. **Poison.** LLS can provide carrots baited with Pindone. Pindone is a pretty toxic chemical, and while it is very effective on rabbits, a large number of native species are equally sensitive to it. Here on Goolawah we'd face the near-impossible task of having to ensure that Pindone baits were kept inaccessible to macropods/bandicoots/possums, etc. Plus, there is the additional risk of secondary poisoning of owls and raptors, etc. which might feed on poisoned rabbit carcasses. For these reasons, Pindone does not look a workable option for us.
2. **Virus.** LLS can provide carrots baited with RHDV, which is a strain of Calici virus (a naturally occurring form of rabbit flu). This has the clear advantage of being highly species specific – it only affects rabbits. However, it really only effectively kills adults – the kittens have natural immunity. If any Goolawah member has an approved Animal Management Plan for a pet rabbit, they'd need to keep it indoors while the virus went through its cycle.
3. **Traps.** It is possible to buy a 'Soft Catch Foot trap' which has rubber jaws. (see <https://traps.com.au/product/victor-1-1-2-soft-catch-foot-trap/>). According to LLS, these traps are too small to inadvertently catch wallabies. There are also 'Cage Traps' (see <https://traps.com.au/product-category/trapping-supplies/species/rabbits/rabbit-cage-traps/>). Both are intended to trap rabbits without harming them, but then obviously they need to be euthanised. LLS hire out some traps, and they can also be bought online (see traps.com.au).

The LLS Biosecurity Officer for our area, Mick Charlton, has recommended that a combination of RHDV and Traps is probably our best option. He is of the view that a RHDV program would be most effective in warmer summer months (insects are a major carrier), and that foot traps outperform cage traps. It is also the case that one Goolawah member would need to have official certification to handle RHDV-treated baits. That can be satisfied by a chemical handling certificate (like SpraySmart), so if any Goolawah member has that certification, and would be happy to lend their services to this cause – please contact me. If not, I would be willing to undertake

the free online Tocal 'Vertebrate Pesticide Induction' course (see <https://www.tocal.nsw.edu.au/courses/online-courses/vertebrate-pesticide>).

What to do next?

Firstly, it would be useful to gather some rough indication of how big the problem is through a simple survey. Over the next two weeks, please go out one night with a torch, scan your lot, and count any rabbits you see. Use Signal to send me a text saying something like "Lot 4, 3 wabbits". You only need to do this once.

Secondly, members will have a range of ideas about how we should proceed, and what options we should use to reduce rabbit numbers, so this issue needs community-wide discussion and input. I'll put this matter on the agenda for the Oct GM, so please come prepared for that, or in the meantime, add your voice in Comments below.

Nick Reid

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