

Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

The European Rabbit flourishes in a wide variety of environments. It is found extensively through the coastal plain of the Wollongong local Government Area (LGA).

Legislative Requirements

The *Rural Lands Protection Act 1998* lists rabbits as a declared pest and obliges land managers to continually control and suppress rabbit populations on their land.

Environmental Impacts of Rabbits

Competition and grazing by the feral European Rabbit is listed as a Key Threatening Process under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. Endangered Ecological Communities known to be impacted by rabbit populations include Swamp Oak Floodplain Forest, Swamp Sclerophyll Forest on Coastal Floodplains and Illawarra Lowlands Grassy Woodland. Rabbits have been found to be damaging revegetation activities and natural regeneration of Endangered Ecological Communities in the Wollongong LGA.

Community Impacts

Rabbits have been found to damage playing and walking surfaces creating a hazard for pedestrians. Rabbits damage garden vegetation through eating plants and digging soil. Rabbits eat and dig at the edge of degraded patches of grassed areas. This promotes erosion leading to loss of topsoil and creates bare patches.

Rabbit Control

The methods currently available for rabbit control in Wollongong are:

- 1 Pindone poisoning;
- 2 Shooting using low powered rifles at close range;
- 3 Trapping using cages; and
- 4 Habitat modification by reducing the amount of shelter provided by vegetation or other materials.

An effective rabbit control program will use a combination of these methods across a large enough area so that the rabbit population is reduced to a very low level. The most effective and humane time of year to do this is the winter months, when there are low numbers of young rabbits and new growth of vegetation is at a minimum. A control program must be sustained over several years if the benefits of control are to be realised.

Pindone poison is controlled by the *Pesticides Act 1999* and must be used within the guidelines of this Act and the directions on the label. The poison can affect animals other than rabbits and is dangerous to handle, so it needs to be used within tight guidelines.

Shooting of rabbits has advantages in that there is little chance of affecting non-target animals. However, shooting is considered a follow-up measure from Pindone poisoning as it is generally not able to control large numbers of rabbits. There are also risks associated with the use of firearms which need to be considered and managed. Shooting can be used as a primary method of control where numbers are relatively low and rabbits may be safely targeted.

Rabbits are believed to be a food source for foxes and feral cats and therefore control of these other animals should be considered at the same time as rabbit control. Programs of rabbit control using ground-based shooting have the advantage of being able to target foxes concurrently with rabbit control.

Council Coordinated Rabbit Control

Council has a Pest Management Plan for rabbits which requires a coordinated control program across a number of Council managed sites.

Once a site is selected, a program is designed to treat as broad an area as is feasible and adjacent landowners other than Council are notified of the program. Police are also notified prior to the commencement of rabbit control activities at Council sites. This approach is aimed at making rabbit control more effective and humane as rabbit populations decrease to levels where management is less intensive.

Disclaimers

This information was believed to be correct at the date of its publication.

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