



# RABBIT CONTROL ON YOUR PROPERTY

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Can I shoot rabbits on my property?**

If you want to use a firearm for vermin control you will need a firearm licence and landholder's permission. The size of your property will determine the firearm maximum calibre size you can use. Shooting of rabbits should only be performed by skilled operators who have the necessary experience with firearms and hold the appropriate licences and accreditation.

Shooting can be a humane method of rabbit control if carried out by experienced, skilled and responsible shooters; the animal can be clearly seen and is within range; and the correct firearm, ammunition and shot placement is used. Achieving a humane kill with a single shot can be difficult as rabbits are a small target. Wounded rabbits should be located and dispatched as quickly and humanely as possible.

Shooting is a common method used in rural areas but in semi-rural areas this technique is deemed inappropriate. It is not considered to be an effective or efficient rabbit control technique. Shooting is not suitable in the vicinity of human habitation.

### **Where do my contributions to the Waggrakine Rural Residential Plan go?**

Monies are collected as Cash-in Lieu and/ or Bonding fees which will contribute to conservation projects to maintain and/ or increase biodiversity within the Waggrakine locality.

Due to the slow property subdivision uptake the monies held in the trust account are minimal and not enough to undertake large scale revegetation projects. The City is monitoring the trust account and when funds allow the City will start developing projects to maintain and improve biodiversity outcomes in the Waggrakine Rural Residential area. Future revegetation projects may include supporting treatment for pest and weed management.

In May 2010 the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) endorsed the Geraldton Regional Flora and Vegetation Survey (GRFVS) as a key information source to help minimise the environmental impact of future housing developments in the Geraldton Region. The Waggrakine Rural Residential Plan, CGG 2011, was designed to facilitate landowners' intentions to subdivide whilst ensuring there is no net loss or degradation of regionally significant vegetation identified in the (GRFVS).

### **What about absentee owners?**

Landowners that are not undertaking management of declared pests can be notified and infringement notices issued by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD). However, due to the high level of rabbit infestations across the State, and the ability of rabbits to spread across a wide geographic area this is practically impossible to enforce.

Declared Pest species listed on the Western Australian Organism List under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 (BAM), Section 30 states that management of declared pests is to be undertaken by landowners/managers.

The City encourage a high level of collaboration between landowners, community groups, local government, conservation organisations and pest management agencies. Rabbits, unfortunately, do not understand tenure boundaries such as fences, borders, and land-use type. Therefore, we encourage land managers to work together to manage rabbits on their properties. The City provides information and advice on best practice rabbit control management and regularly undertake pest control measures on City managed natural areas with high environmental value. These include the Chapman Regional Park, Chapman River Estuary, Chapman River Wildlife Corridor and Greenough River.

## **Where does the City undertake rabbit control and why there?**

The City engages a licensed contractor to undertake rabbit baiting programs in City Reserves of high conservation value such as Chapman River Regional Park and Greenough River Reserves. The rabbit control program is designed to reduce the rabbit population only. We cannot eradicate rabbits as they are too widespread.

An assessment of the City's Natural Areas was undertaken in 2020 as a part of the development of the Natural Areas Management Strategy. 51 areas were identified then prioritised based on environmental, recreational and cultural values. Given the limited City resources a strategic approach is required to prioritise management activities that will achieve our conservation goals.

## **Is rabbit control undertaken on City managed verges?**

The City manages 4460 kilometres of sealed and unsealed roads, that's a lot of road verges. The City does not have the capacity to undertake rabbit baiting on all those areas. The City must take into consideration children, domestic pets and other users frequent road verges. It is not practical to undertake pindone baiting on road verges.

## **Can I trap rabbits on my property?**

You can trap rabbits on your property. Any traps used must meet animal welfare and ethics standards (e.g. steel jaw traps are illegal in most states). Any traps other than a cage trap will require a permit from Department of Agriculture and Food – forms are available from their website. Under the Animal Welfare Act (2002) and Animal Welfare Regulations (2003) rabbits caught must be handled and killed humanely.

Trapping rabbits can be effective in smaller scale, targeted areas where other techniques are not practical such as small, fenced areas. However, it can be labour intensive, time consuming and requires some skill. Trapping is only suitable as a control method when there are low rabbit numbers. There is a potential risk of trapping non-target species so any traps should be monitored, and any non-target species released immediately.

## **How do we manage non-target species?**

The City undertakes baiting programs when non-target species typically are not active and follows set procedures to minimise risk to non-target species. Compared to other baits, Pindone is less likely to lead to secondary poisoning plus an antidote (Vitamin K) is available from veterinarians.

The baits are laid at night and baiting sites are checked the following morning with any dead rabbits being removed. Grain eating animals such as sheep, kangaroos and most birds are active during the day. Nocturnal birds of prey, such as owls, are carnivorous so won't be eating the baits directly. The baited oats are dyed green which birds find unattractive. Birds also discard the husk, which is where the poison is coated on, and eat the seed. Sheep, possums, and horses are reasonably resistant to Pindone, whilst cattle, goats, chickens, cats and dogs are less susceptible compared to rabbits.

Pindone is a First-generation anticoagulant rodenticide (FGARs), also known as a multi-dose anticoagulant, so it takes several feeds to build up a lethal dose. FGARs break down in target species quicker than Second-generation anticoagulants (SGARs such as Bromadiolone), reducing the chance of secondary poisoning. Free feeding is done several days prior to baits being laid, enabling the contractor to gauge the number of rabbits in the area to prevent excessive amounts of bait being used. Most rabbits return to their warrens once lethal doses are achieved, this reduces secondary poisoning of non-target species.

The City baiting program is carried out within Chapman River Regional Park away from private property. Signage is placed at the boundaries and within the baiting locations. Kangaroo's are present in the park but in small numbers and active during dusk and dawn. Baits are laid at night and checked early the next morning.

If you are wanting to pindone bait on private property it is recommended the use of a baiting station which restricts non-target species from accessing baits, such as fencing around the bait stations with gaps that only allows rabbits through or a mesh canopy over the bait station that prevents larger grazing animals from taking it.

## **What if my dog/cat eats a poisoned rabbit?**

A dog must eat multiple poisoned rabbits over time for it to become a toxic dose. A cat would need to eat a whole rabbit over several days for it to become lethal. However, if a dog or cat should directly eat the poisoned bait, they may become poisoned. An antidote is available from veterinarians.

If walking your dog in Rabbit Control areas, please keep your animals leashed to avoid poisoning. Signage will be placed in all baiting areas.

In the event of a domestic animal showing poisoning symptoms, an antidote is available from City Veterinarians. It consists of an injection of Vitamin K, (1 mg/kg live weight) which counteracts the effects of Pindone in the body by increasing the blood clotting abilities.

#### *Symptoms of poisoning:*

- Excess salivation
- Vomiting
- Bloody fluid in the mouth
- Blood in the faeces
- Progressive general weakening

Pindone is a multi-dose anticoagulant, meaning the baits need to be consumed multiple times over several days for a lethal dose. It also breaks down quicker in rabbits than other poisons, such as second-generation anticoagulant rodenticide (SGARs), limiting the chance of secondary poisoning occurring.

### **How can I stop rabbits eating my new plants?**

Exclusion is the best method.

There are several exclusion techniques you can use to prevent rabbits accessing areas of vegetation.

#### *Some options are:*

- Tree guards (commercial or wire mesh)
- Fencing off areas of vegetation
- Eliminating potential rabbit habitat through removal of extensive weed growth and waste piles

These are ideal for small scale rabbit control and preferable if you would like to undertake more humane methods to control rabbits, however this depends on the extent of the vegetation you want to protect and rabbit numbers. Any fencing should be constructed to rabbit-proof standard, for example with mesh buried under the ground to prevent rabbits digging under the fence, and plant guards tall enough to stop rabbits nibbling on vegetation growing over the top of the guards.

#### *Benefits of exclusion include:*

- More humane method of rabbit control
- Provide long-term protection of smaller areas or high value crops (such as garden beds, vegetable patches, newly planted trees).

#### *Drawbacks of exclusion include:*

- Labour intensive,
- Expensive (materials and labour cost) depending on size of area to be protected
- will need to be constructed to a standard that will effectively exclude rabbits
- Require regular maintenance
- Rabbits will need to be removed from within the fenced area to ensure they are not fenced in, therefore not always practical on a larger scale

### **Do you use 1080 to poison rabbits?**

No, the City of Greater Geraldton do not use 1080 poisons to control any pest species within its boundaries. 1080 is highly toxic to non-target species, pets and humans so is not used within rural-residential areas.

Baiting of rabbits with 1080 can only be carried out under a special permit issued by the Australian Pesticides & Veterinary Medicines Authority. It is a restricted chemical product only used by authorised operators.

### **Why doesn't the City use the Calicivirus or Myxomatosis?**

Myxoma virus is no longer commercially available, and RHDV1 (Calicivirus) is currently out of stock worldwide. The RHDV1 virus release requires a coordinated effort across tenure and needs to be carried out late Summer, early Autumn to be most effective. The City is currently investigating a coordinated virus release next year.

Both Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV1, formerly Calicivirus) and Myxoma Virus (which causes Myxomatosis) have been used in rabbit control for decades and now occurs naturally in the wild. Because both viruses have been around for several decades, some rabbits have started developing natural resistance to them, reducing their effectiveness as a method of control.

RHDV (Calicivirus) is not a silver bullet that can be used in isolation, as they work best when supported by other control methods such as baiting and warren destruction.

**For further information please email  
[environmentalplanning@cgg.wa.gov.au](mailto:environmentalplanning@cgg.wa.gov.au)**