

Wild rabbits are Australia's most widespread and destructive environmental and agricultural vertebrate pest. Females can breed at any time of the year if there is sufficient feed available; they can begin breeding at four months of age and may produce five or more litters in a year, with up to five young per litter.



Photo: Tarnya Cox

We're here to help - just ask!

Consult your nearest North Coast LLS Biosecurity Officer who has the knowledge and experience to assist you to manage wild rabbits and other invasive species by:

- providing advice
- supplying baits
- assisting with coordinating baiting programs
- becoming involved with other control techniques

Contact us 1300 795 299

Casino

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24-26 Mulgi Drive
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Kempsey

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Need more information on biosecurity?

northcoast.lls.nsw.gov.au
dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity
farmbiosecurity.com.au
feral.org.au/pestsmart

Subscribe to our e-newsletters
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Problems with Wild Rabbits?

North Coast Local Land Services can help you



Photo: Chris Cox

"Rabbits prefer to eat soft, short, succulent plants such as grasses and herbs"

Biosecurity - it's a shared responsibility



Local Land Services
North Coast

Economic impact

Wild rabbits are Australian agriculture's most costly vertebrate pest animal causing more than \$200 million in production losses each year.

They cause significant economic losses to agriculture by damaging crops and pastures and disturbing soils leading to erosion and loss of top soil. They graze on both native and introduced vegetation which can prevent seedlings from regenerating and reduce crop yields.

This competition with livestock may affect the carrying capacity on a property, resulting in:

- lower weight gain
- lower wool production
- reduced births

Rabbits damage native plants and directly compete with native wildlife for food and shelter.

It takes less than one rabbit per hectare to prevent the successful regeneration of many native trees and shrubs.



Photo: Neil Schultz

Control methods

Rabbits are dependent on warrens or other shelter so destruction of these will greatly reduce the local rabbit population. Rabbits are also highly susceptible to disease (myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease) and predators including feral cats, foxes and wild dogs.

Common methods of control include:

- baiting
- biological controls such as myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease
- fumigation
- shooting
- fencing
- trapping and dogging

Primary control for rabbit populations should be based on gaining the maximum reduction of the population. This is best achieved by carrying out a poison bait program using 1080 or Pindone, depending on the situation. There are three approved bait types:

- carrots
- pellets
- oats

Carrots are the preferred choice for North Coast situations.

Baiting program procedure

1. Contact your nearest North Coast LLS Biosecurity Officer to determine which poison best suits your situation.
2. Determine where the rabbits are feeding. This is not around the obvious buck dung mounds, but in areas of young, sweet growing grasses where scratching is evident.
3. Lay a bait trail; place a handful of small pieces of carrot, about 2cm in size, every 4-5 paces through the area where the rabbits are feeding. For larger areas, a bait layer can be used.
4. It is a requirement that rabbits are given at least three free feeds (unpoisoned) on alternate nights prior to the

poison bait being laid. This is to gauge the amount of poison that will be required and to ensure that even shy feeders are on the bait before poisoning.

5. It is important to monitor free feed uptake to ensure all rabbits have the opportunity to feed. Ideally, by the end of the third free feed, about 10% of the bait should be left the next morning. Free feed may need to be increased over the period as more rabbits access it.
6. After the baiting program, it is important that any carcasses, and remaining poisoned bait that can be found, is picked up and buried to reduce the risk of secondary poisoning of domestic pets and non-target animals.
7. Habitat destruction, including ripping of rabbit warrens and removal of above ground harbour, are an essential follow up to the control methods listed here. Explosives can be used in 'difficult to get at' areas for warren destruction. These methods may discourage any rabbit from taking up residence at that site.
8. Any remaining rabbits can now effectively be removed by shooting, trapping and dogging.

When to bait

The best time to bait is during a dry period, when rabbits are not breeding and there is little other feed available. This is not always possible and rabbits can be baited effectively at any time of year, provided that the free feeding process is carried out effectively.

Monitoring rabbit populations

Before deciding on control strategies, monitor rabbit populations using daytime observations and spotlight counts. Use the following standard rabbit density classifications to assess and map density:

High density	abundant active warrens, rabbits visible any time
Medium density	active warrens present, a fair amount of sign (scratches, dung heaps, feeding areas)
Low density	some sign, few holes
Zero	no sign