

COUNCIL POLICY



Rabbit Management	Document No:	DO NOT USE
	Approval Date:	
	Approved By:	
	Review Date:	
Responsible Officer: Environment Coordinator	TRIM Reference #:	
Authorising Officer:	Chief Executive Officer	

1. Purpose

To outline Council's commitment and approach to best practice rabbit management in Surf Coast Shire, in partnership with the community and land management agencies.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- rabbit management works undertaken by Council or at Council's direction on Council owned and managed land, including rural roadsides, recreation reserves and nature reserves; and
- how Council interacts with the community to achieve best practice rabbit management across the Surf Coast Shire.

3. Application

This policy applies to Council, its employees and all contracted service providers.

4. Rationale

Council has committed in the Council Plan 2013 – 2017 to improve pest plant and animal management as a priority and has allocated significant additional budget to support this commitment. Council is responding to environmental opportunities with its Towards Environmental Leadership program, which focuses on sustainability themes including land use and wildlife.

Rabbits cause considerable damage to the natural environment and agriculture by competing with livestock for pasture, grazing of crops and native vegetation and causing soil erosion. Rabbits are well adapted to climatic conditions in much of Australia and occur in all states and territories. Rabbits, along with foxes and cats at large, are considered to be Australia's most serious vertebrate pests and severely affect native flora and fauna, vegetation communities, landforms, geomorphic processes and sensitive sites, as well as primary industries. This situation continues despite the availability and application of chemical and physical control methods, and the release of the biological control agents myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease. Competition and land degradation by feral rabbits are listed as a key threatening process under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and pose a threat to a large number of native species.

The European rabbit is declared under the Victorian *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act) as an 'established pest animal', which means that it is already established in the wild in Victoria and is unlikely to be eradicated. Under the CaLP Act, all land owners (including council) have a legal duty to prevent the spread of, and as far as possible eradicate, established pest animals. Coordination of rabbit management activities across the landscape between the community and other land managers is absolutely critical for effective, long term rabbit control. Council also has additional legal responsibilities under the CaLP Act regarding pest plant and animal management on municipal rural roadsides.

From time to time, the release of a new biological control measure (like the K5 strain of the calici virus) provides the opportunity to increase land holder and land manager return on investment in rabbit management, especially through a coordinated, best practice approach.

This policy has been developed directly from the results of two rabbit management workshops hosted by Council (24 May and 1 August 2016) with representatives from local Landcare groups, community groups, the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources and the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (see Workshop Reports - Attachments 1 & 2.) The policy also reflects legal advice received by Council regarding the use of poison baits on Council owned and managed land.

5. Definitions

- Baiting – laying of poisoned oats or carrots
- Best practice rabbit management – the use of a variety of recognised techniques, in a coordinated manner, and implemented at the landscape scale which reflect humane treatment and limit impact on non-target species
- Fumigation – introduction of toxic fumes into a warren where it is inhaled by rabbits
- Implosion – targeted use of explosives to destroy/collapse rabbit warrens in areas inaccessible to or inappropriate for ripping
- Pindone – an anticoagulant causing fatal haemorrhages. Antidote is Vitamin K1
- Rabbit – refers to feral or wild populations of European rabbits (*Orytolagus cuniculus*), a declared 'established pest animal' under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.
- Rabbit harbour – shelter above-ground, usually prickly woody species, rock piles or logs
- Ripping – destruction of warrens using machinery
- Warren – a collection of burrows
- 1080 – Fast acting poison compound Sodium fluoroacetate.

6. Council Purpose and Direction

This Policy is consistent with Council's purpose to 'help our community and environment to thrive' and helps deliver on one of Council's organisational directions 'to be an innovative and flexible leader and a constructive partner'. Strategic partnerships with the community, community groups, land management agencies and land holders are integral to the successful delivery of this Policy.

7. Policy

Council's policy is to:

- meet its legal obligations regarding rabbit management;
- use best practice rabbit management on Council owned and managed land;
- help our community to achieve best practice rabbit management on land that is not Council owned or managed; and
- develop and maintain partnerships with the community and land management agencies.

Council also supports the development of a community led rabbit management plan for the Shire which reflects the following community vision and community aspirational goal, developed at two rabbit management workshops hosted by Council with representatives from local Landcare and community groups, relevant state government departments and the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority:

- Community Vision
The Surf Coast Shire community leads the way in integrated best practice rabbit management.
- Community Aspirational Goal
To reduce rabbits to less than one active burrow per hectare at a timeline that can be defended by the land manager.

8. Guiding Principles

The following principles, which have been developed with input from the two community rabbit management workshops, are adopted by Council in the management of rabbits in Surf Coast Shire:

- Community led – recognise the inherent strength of the community. The primary role of local government is to assist people to achieve their goals, while recognising this must not be at the expense of the broader community. Sometimes this involves Council leading, other times standing alongside or removing unnecessary barriers;
- Long-term commitment and continuous improvement – successful rabbit management requires an ongoing commitment and regular monitoring and evaluation of program effectiveness;

- Strategic partnerships – coordination of control works with the community, community groups, land management agencies and land holders is essential to effective ‘no boundaries’ rabbit management;
- Best practice management with a focus on harm minimisation – use a variety of recognised techniques, in a coordinated manner, implemented at the landscape scale which reflect humane treatment & limit impact on non-target species;
- Efficient, effective, results oriented asset protection – target efforts where the best results can be achieved and defended to protect key environmental, economic and social assets.

9. Management Approach

The most efficient and effective way to control pest animals, including rabbits, is by using a variety of techniques, in a coordinated fashion in partnership with the community and land management agencies, and implemented at the landscape scale. To the extent possible, Council will deliver its rabbit management activities in accordance with all the guiding principles listed above.

To achieve the most effective results, Council will, subject to site specific constraints, a site risk assessment and the baiting requirements noted below, deliver its rabbit management with reference to Agriculture Victoria’s recommended approach:

- Allow biological control and natural mortality to reduce the rabbit population;
- Bait to reduce numbers prior to ripping;
- Remove surface harbour (above ground shelter) and destroy warrens;
- Follow up with fumigation and further warren destruction; and
- Be persistent, remain vigilant and monitor regularly.

Control Techniques

Baiting

There are two approved poisons for baiting rabbits – Pindone and 1080. If conducting baiting on Council owned or managed land, Council will generally use Pindone because an antidote, Vitamin K, is available. The poison 1080 will generally not be used on Council owned or managed land that is open to the public, as no antidote is available.

Baiting will only be used on Council owned and managed land in accordance with verbatim legal advice received by Council from Russell Kennedy lawyers in April 2016, namely:

- Council is legally able to use poison baits for the control and eradication of pest animals on land owned and/or managed by Council, where it is considered to be an appropriate pest control measure in the circumstances;
- A uniform approach of widespread poison baiting across the municipality should not be adopted. Any baiting undertaken should be location specific and conducted only after a risk assessment for the location has been undertaken by a qualified expert or contractor to determine whether or not poison baiting is suitable at the particular location;
- Any use of poison baits must be in accordance with the product label, any standard operating procedures and in accordance with best practice methods;
- All reasonable precautions to prevent the bait being ingested by non-target species must be taken; and
- Baiting should always be undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced pest control operator.

Above-Ground/Surface Harbour Removal

Removal of above-ground harbour destroys surface shelter for rabbits, facilitates and increases the effectiveness of warren removal and deters recolonization of warrens. Harbour used by rabbits may, however, also be important habitat for native wildlife and/or significant native vegetation.

In assessing harbour removal, Council will consider the benefits for rabbit management against the risk to native wildlife and vegetation, especially in conservation areas. Where removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation is required for harbour removal, Council will consult with relevant adjoining land holders and remove the vegetation in accordance with the exemption for pest animal burrows under the Surf Coast Shire planning scheme. This approach minimises the amount of native vegetation removed and avoids the need for a planning permit, the development of a native vegetation offset management plan and purchase of offsets by Council. Where appropriate, Council may, in consultation with the Department of Environment,

Land, Water & Planning, apply for a planning permit to remove native vegetation beyond the scope of the exemption for pest animal burrows.

Warren Removal

Warren removal is integral to successful rabbit management and is achieved by ripping or use of explosives (implosion).

Council will conduct warren removal using equipment appropriate to the local conditions. Implosion or excavation may be used to destroy warrens in areas that are inaccessible to ripping or where ripping is undesirable due to risk of soil erosion, cultural heritage issues and/or sensitive native vegetation.

Fumigation

Fumigation is best used as a follow up technique to poisoning and warren ripping, but may also be effective where ripping cannot be done, in situations where poisons cannot be used and when treating small areas or isolated rabbit populations.

Council will use fumigation on sites where the site risk assessment indicates baiting is inappropriate, the site constraints preclude ripping or implosion, the rabbit population is isolated or low in number and/or the site is small in area. Fumigation will only be undertaken on Council owned and managed land by suitably qualified and experienced pest control operators.

Other Management Options

In addition to the rabbit management options of biological control, Pindone baiting, warren and surface harbour removal and fumigation, Council may also consider, where appropriate, the following management control options on Council owned or managed land:

- Exclusion fencing
- Shooting
- Ferreting

10. Rabbit Hotspots

Council will help develop and maintain a prioritised list of rabbit 'hotspots' in the Shire, in partnership with the community, Landcare groups and land management agencies. The list will be developed using agreed criteria.

For rabbit hotspots located on Council owned or managed land, hotspots will be assessed according to the agreed criteria and prioritised. A site management plan will be developed for each prioritised site by Council officers in partnership with relevant community groups and land management agencies. Independent expert advice will be obtained where appropriate for the site. Development of site management plans will be staged according to available resources.

The plans will be reviewed annually in partnership with relevant community groups and land management agencies until rabbit numbers reach acceptable levels. Independent assessment of the effectiveness of particular plans may be sought where appropriate.

11. Policy Review

This Policy will be trialled for a period of 12 months after adoption by Council. The implementation of the Policy will be reviewed in consultation with key stakeholders and a report provided to Council. The report will record reported deaths of non-target species that could be associated with Council's rabbit management program. Council will take steps to understand if any the deaths of any non-target species were caused by its rabbit management program.

This Policy will be reviewed in three years or earlier if warranted by changes in best practice rabbit management.

12. Records

Records shall be retained for at least the period shown below.

Record	Retention/Disposal Responsibility	Retention Period	Location
Policy	PROS 0701 13.1.1	Permanent	Electronic

13. Attachments

- Workshop Report – Surf Coast Shire Council Rabbit Management Policy Workshop 24 May 2016
- Workshop Report – Surf Coast Shire Council Rabbit Management Policy & Hotspots Workshop 1 August 2016

14. References

- PestSmart Standard Operating Procedures (www.pestsmart.org.au)
- *RAB004: Ground baiting of rabbits with pindone*;
- *RAB005: Diffusion fumigation of rabbit warrens*
- *RAB006: Rabbit warren destruction by ripping*
- *RAB007: Rabbit warren destruction using explosives*
- *Biology, ecology and management of vertebrate pests in NSW*, NSW Government: Department of Primary Industries 2013
- Threat Abatement Plan for competition and land degradation by rabbits (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage & the Arts 2008)
- Background document for the threat abatement plan for competition and land degradation by rabbits (Department of Environment, Water, Heritage & the Arts 2008)

Surf Coast Shire Council documents

- Surf Coast Shire Council Plan 2013 - 2017
- Pest Plant & Animal Strategy 2016 (*under development*)

External Documents

- www.agriculture.vic.gov.au
- Victorian Rabbit Management Collaboration Initiative (2014), Invasive Animals CRC

Attachments

- Workshop Report – Surf Coast Shire Council Rabbit Management Policy Workshop 24 May 2016
- Workshop Report – Surf Coast Shire Council Rabbit Management Policy & Hotspots Workshop 1 August 2016

24 May 2016

SURF COAST SHIRE COUNCIL RABBIT MANAGEMENT POLICY WORKSHOP

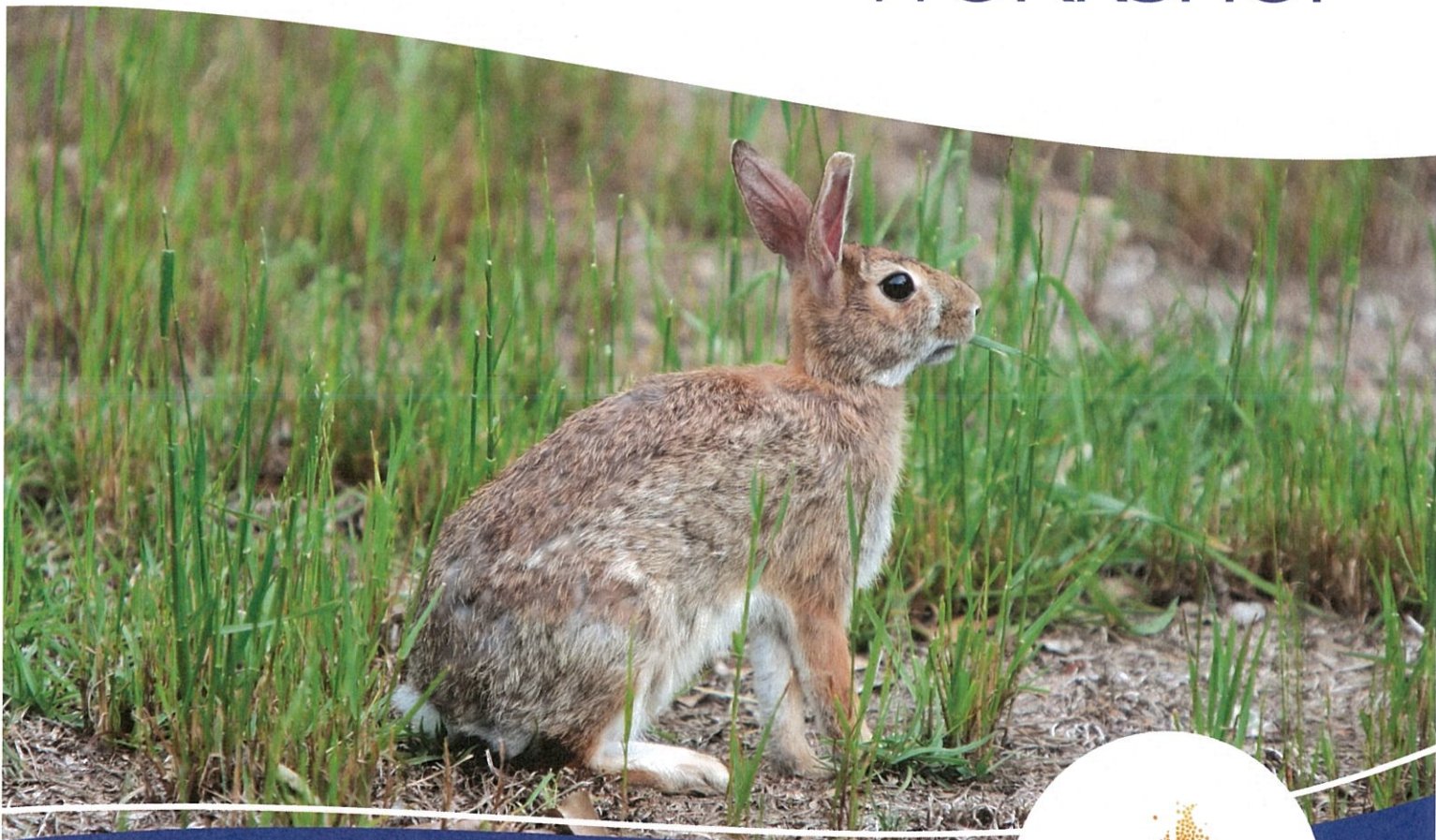


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Fire Light Consulting specialises in community engagement, risk communication, strategy, facilitation, mediation, negotiation, leadership and project management.

Limitations of Use

The sole purpose of this report undertaken by Fire Light Consulting is to provide Surf Coast Shire (SCS) with a report of the feedback and outputs from the workshop held on the 24 May 2016

In preparing this report, Fire Light Consulting has relied upon the information provided by participants at the workshop. The notes have been transcribed as the participants presented them. No analysis of these comments was made. Only minor adjustments have been made to ensure readability.

This report has been prepared on behalf of and for the exclusive use of SCS. SCS can choose to share and distribute this report as they see fit. Fire Light Consulting accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for or in respect of any use of, or reliance upon this report by any third party.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Surf Coast Shire Council held a meeting in Winchelsea at the Globe Theatre on the 24 May 2016.

The purpose of the meeting was:

- To understand and explore all perspectives surrounding rabbit management across Surf Coast Shire including those from landowners, agencies and interested community groups
- To identify key principles and management approaches for inclusion in a Rabbit Management Policy for Surf Coast Shire Council
- To confirm and prioritise key 'hotspots' for rabbit management in Surf Coast Shire

Please note that the third objective was not achieved and instead the group wished to focus on the engagement objectives and approaches that would assist in meeting the goals of rabbit management in the shire.

Attendees:

The following people attended the workshop:

Ann Bullen	SCIPN	Rod Stone	Winchelsea Land and Rivercare
Sharon Marshall	SCIPN	Pat Crosbie	Winchelsea Land and Rivercare
Colin Cannard	SCIPN	Stewart Mathieson	Winchelsea Land and Rivercare
Simon Faulkner	SCIPN	Tim Bloomfield	Expert
Fiona Cummings	SCIPN	Jani Demetrious	Corangamite CMA
John Welsh	Landholder	Ryan Cooke	DEDJTR
Christa Jones	Barrabool Hills Landcare Group	Kate Sullivan	Surf Coast Shire Council
Justin Rankin	The Sands	Rowan McKenzie	Surf Coast Shire Council
Alex McDonald	GORCC	Kate Smallwood	Surf Coast Shire Council
Evan Francis	GORCC	Leanne Rolfe	Surf Coast Shire Council
Doug Rolfe	SCEG	Cr Heather Wellington	Surf Coast Shire Council
Helen Tutt	ANGAIR	Cr David Bell	Surf Coast Shire Council
Peter Forster	ANGAIR	Cr Carol McGregor	Surf Coast Shire Council
Jan Calaby	Barwon Valley Pony Club	Dale Smithyman	Golden Plains Hire
Mandy Baker	Upper Barwon Landcare Network	Nicole Hunter	Fire Light Consulting (Facilitator)

Apologies:

The following people were apologies for the workshop:

Jim Lidgerwood	Winchelsea Land and Rivercare
Cr Margot Smith	Surf Coast Shire Council
Jennifer Morrow	East Otway Landcare Group
Mike Robinson Koss	East Otway Landcare Group
John Matthews	DEDJTR
Elissa Ashton-Smith	Geelong Landcare Network
Dr. Kaye Rodden	Barrabool Hills Landcare Group

2 WHAT ONE THING DID PARTICIPANTS WANT TO GET OUT OF THE DAY FOR IT TO BE A SUCCESS?

- Help land managers with resources (e.g. funding for baiting).
- Tackling urban rabbit problem and its impact on the environment.
- Council to adopt a Best Practice Rabbit Management Policy that leads to efficient and optimal rabbit eradication and implement it.
- Other land managers being engaged by council and working cooperatively to solve the problem.
- Best practice without boundaries (everybody).
- How we engage reluctant "rabbit managers" e.g. Crown land and Vic Roads?

3 ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES?

ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
Budget issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How big is the bucket and how do we spend it and the transparency of all of this? • Competition for budget and funds- there are other issues to manage. • Wasting money? 	Budget opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritising where you spend money and leveraging this with local landowner actions (asset and environment focus) • Identify hot spots based on agreed principles "bang for buck" • Money is spent efficiently and effectively
Evaluation of current rabbit management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all landholders and government agencies are participating – what is the answer? • Baiting not being done over the last few years. • Who is responsible for the rabbits? • No clear direction from state government. • "Rabbits come from Crown Land" • Lack of coordination. • Poor communication or engagement with locals. 	Management opportunities Council role in management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council where rabbits were 1st released becomes leader in rabbit management Incorporate into Best Practice Management the consideration of target impacts and humane treatment • Being clearer about the trade-offs that need to be made in decisions about rabbits. Monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a robust monitoring, reporting program and framework that provides the data Framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating an effective framework that all landholders buy into

ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
Management techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fumigation – waste of time and money. • Carrots vs Oats which works better? • Need to ensure management is humane to the rabbits. • Need to ensure non target species are not affected. 	Management techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council is open to including baiting in the mix • Focus on and agree on principles for rabbit control • Consider rabbit management without land boundaries • Agreement on the 'recipe' or Standard Operating Procedures
Native vegetation & Environment issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will removal destroy the environment? • How far can we go with native vegetation removal? • Too reluctant /conservative to remove native vegetation if it repairs environment into the future 	Native vegetation & Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on landscape and how you want it to be "A Vision" • Prioritise actions based on protecting environmental and social assets.
	Communities' role and engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work together to solve a complex problem • Getting rid of rabbits can actually help bring communities together. • Community driven and action demand (with council alongside). • Align rabbit control with strong community value of protecting the landscape and environment • Building the fabric of our society around an issue. People connecting getting to know one another, bringing people together. • Knowing and tapping into people's triggers and educating our communities • Increasing engagement and community coordination will increase efficiency of the money spent • Increase understanding across the community about the impacts of rabbits on the environment and agriculture and recreation space. • Good and regular communication and engagement can reduce angst

4 MANAGEMENT OPTIONS / PROS AND CONS

1) Rabbit Management Options – Exclusion Fencing

Option Description

- Involves constructing a fence around a rabbit-prone area to exclude rabbits.
- Requires use of fencing material specifically designed for the purpose of excluding rabbits.

Pros

- Fences should last up to 20 years with proper maintenance (AgVic).
- Can provide a largely permanent exclusion of rabbits from areas of high value crops and plantings (NSW DPI).

Cons

- Rabbit proof fencing is expensive and requires regular maintenance (AgVic).
- Extra time and expense are required to bury netting and rabbit-proof stays and gateways (NSW DPI).
- Regular checks and maintenance will be needed to maintain the effectiveness of any rabbit-proof fence (NSW DPI).
- The movement of native animals may be limited by rabbit-proof fencing (AgVic).

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can protect individual high value trees• Where there are high value assets to protect, may be the only long term option and therefore justifying the expense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very expensive• Public access – won't shut gates property• Interferes with wildlife movement



2) Rabbit Management Options – Above-ground Harbour Removal

Option Description

- Removal of above-ground shelter that provides rabbits with protection from the elements or predators.
- Above-ground harbour can include patches of woody weeds, heaps of debris and some forms of native vegetation.

Pros

- Long-term control can be achieved by removing or destroying the shelter that rabbits depend on for survival (PestSmart).
- Removing above-ground harbor at the same time as ripping will increase the effectiveness of ripping (PestSmart).

Cons

- Harbour such as native vegetation, logs and briars that are used by rabbits may also be important habitat for native animals. The benefit of rabbit harbour removal should be assessed against the risk to native wildlife especially in conservation areas (SOP RAB007).
- The movement of native animals may be limited by rabbit-proof fencing (AgVic).

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective if maintained• Effective and allows regrowth of native understorey plants and grasses etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rabbits under local school• Buildings - not able to remove harbour in urban areas

3) Rabbit Management Options – Fumigation

Option Description

- Fumigation involves the introduction of toxic fumes into a warren where it is inhaled by rabbits leading to their death.
- Aluminium phosphide is the most commonly used fumigant – it comes in a tablet form and releases poisonous phosphine gas when activated by moisture. It is a restricted chemical product which requires a permit and special precautions in handling, storage and use.
- Fumigation is best used as a follow-up technique to warren ripping and poisoning, but may also be effective where ripping cannot be done, in situations where poisons cannot be used and when treating small areas or isolated rabbit populations.
- Fumigation is only effective on rabbits that are in the warren. Dogs should be used to roam the area and flush rabbits into the warren prior to fumigation.

Pros

- Can be effective control measure where ripping or poisoning unsuitable (SOP RAB005).
- One of the most target-specific means of rabbit destruction and will have little impact on non-target species if used correctly (SOP RAB005).
- Appears to be no significant risk of secondary poisoning if carcasses of gassed animals are consumed by non-target species (SOP RAB005).

Cons

- Considered to be less humane than poisoning with 1080 (SOP RAB005).
- Can only be used for warren dwelling rabbits. It is not effective against surface dwelling rabbits (SOP RAB005).
- Time to death can be highly variable. The precise nature and extent of suffering of rabbits after inhalation of phosphine is unknown.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very good way of keeping numbers low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only culling/harvesting rabbits• Hard for non-qualified person to administer• Kill not targeted to the species in burrows• Unless focused on single targets is too expensive

4) Rabbit Management Options – Biological Control

Option Description

- Viruses specifically developed to kill rabbits.
- The two main viruses are myxoma virus (myxomatosis) and Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (also known as RHDV or calici virus). There are various strains of RHDV.
- Myxomatosis is transmitted to rabbits by biting insects such as fleas and mosquitos.
- RHDV/Calici virus is transmitted to rabbits through direct contact.

Pros

- Viruses specifically developed to kill rabbits.
- The two main viruses are myxoma virus (myxomatosis) and Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (also known as RHDV or calici virus). There are various strains of RHDV.
- Myxomatosis is transmitted to rabbits by biting insects such as fleas and mosquitos.
- RHDV/Calici virus is transmitted to rabbits through direct contact.

Cons

- Viruses specifically developed to kill rabbits.
- The two main viruses are myxoma virus (myxomatosis) and Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (also known as RHDV or calici virus). There are various strains of RHDV.
- Myxomatosis is transmitted to rabbits by biting insects such as fleas and mosquitos.
- RHDV/Calici virus is transmitted to rabbits through direct contact.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More research and education to public needed	

5) Rabbit Management Options – Warren Removal

“Destroy the warren and you will destroy the rabbit. Warren destruction is the key to long-term control

Option Description

- Warrens are destroyed using ripping, or in rocky or inaccessible areas, explosives.
- Warren removal is a critical component of rabbit control programs.
- With ripping, warrens are destroyed using a tractor or bulldozer fitted with single or multi-tined rippers. The technique used will vary depending on local conditions such as soil type, warren position and available equipment.
- Blasting is used to destroy warrens in areas that are inaccessible to ripping or where ripping is undesirable because of risk of soil erosion.
- The aim of ripping and blasting is to destroy the warren, not to kill large numbers of rabbits.

Pros

- Since rabbits do not readily dig new warrens, rabbit populations do not persist in areas where warrens are effectively destroyed and re-colonisation is made less likely (SOP RAB006).
- Because ripping and blasting give long term management of rabbit populations, the need for repeated control operations is reduced (SOP RAB006, SOP RAB007).
- Where warrens are the principal shelter for rabbits, warren destruction is the most cost-effective and long-lasting method of control (SOP RAB006, SOP RAB007).

Cons

- Explosives are extremely hazardous and should only be used by suitably qualified and accredited operators (SOP RAB007).
- Blasting is relatively expensive; however, it does provide long-term control (SOP RAB007).
- Ripping and implosion can kill or injure non-target species and have a negative impact on non-target species that use the warren for shelter. Warren removal may involve clearing of native vegetation or disturbance of sites with aboriginal or archaeological significance. A permit may be required. (SOP RAB006, SOP RAB007).

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good/best value for money• Only as good as the operator but still very effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good/best value for money• Only as good as the operator but still very effective

6) Rabbit Management Options – Baiting

Option Description

- Initial control method used to reduce high rabbit populations, where rabbits are mainly surface dwelling or where too difficult to rip warrens (SOP RAB002)
- Two main types of baits – 1080 and Pindone.
- There is an antidote for Pindone (Vitamin K1) but no antidote for 1080.
- 1080 is a restricted poison and can only be used by authorised people.
- Pindone is a registered rabbit poison in Victoria and may be bought as either pre-mixed carrot or oat bait.
- 1080 and Pindone must be used in accordance with bait label directions.

Pros

- Initial control method used to reduce high rabbit populations, where rabbits are mainly surface dwelling or where too difficult to rip warrens (SOP RAB002)
- Two main types of baits – 1080 and Pindone.
- There is an antidote for Pindone (Vitamin K1) but no antidote for 1080.
- 1080 is a restricted poison and can only be used by authorised people.
- Pindone is a registered rabbit poison in Victoria and may be bought as either pre-mixed carrot or oat bait.
- 1080 and Pindone must be used in accordance with bait label directions.

Cons

- Other animals may be vulnerable to Pindone and 1080 poisoning by eating the bait or dead/dying poisoned animal. 1080 toxic to wide range of species, especially dogs and mammalian carnivores. Pindone thought to be 'moderately toxic' to a range of species (SOP RAB004, SOP RAB002).
- With Pindone, discomfort and pain from haemorrhages in internal organs, muscles and joints typically lasts for several days before death (SOP RAB004). Time to death with 1080 is usually around 3 – 4 hours after ingestion but precise nature and extent of suffering unknown (SOP RAB002).
- 1080 use is restricted in areas where there is a high risk of poisoning domestic stock and wildlife (SOP RAB002).
- Must be followed by warren and harbour destruction to be effective.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cheap and effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some won't bait i.e. all people in an area must be involvedUnable to bait in urban areas• Potential "off target" damage (e.g. hawks taking carcasses and they are a rabbit control method)• Emphasis and education on how important warren and harbour destruction is as a follow-up process• Animal suffering to a degree that's unacceptable to many

7) Shooting (Particularly for urban rabbit removal)

PROS	CONS

8) Ferreting (Particularly for urban rabbit removal)

PROS	CONS

5 SURF COAST SHIRE COUNCIL BEST PRACTICE RABBIT MANAGEMENT POLICY

Vision:

- The Surf Coast Shire community leads the way in rabbit management.
Surf Coast Shire means the place and everyone, not just SCS council

Goal:

- To reduce rabbits to less than 1 per hectare in our landscape and to decrease the environmental impacts¹

¹N.B. the group was unsure whether to place a timeframe within which the high level goal should be met

6 PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLES	DESCRIPTIONS (INDIVIDUAL IDEAS)
Commitment to the long-term and to continuous improvement in rabbit management	
Undertake good community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an effective communication and education process that increases community awareness and participation. • Active community engagement Rabbit Action Coordinator.
Build on existing community strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources to support existing communities with "Best Management Practice".
Focus on where we get the best results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise on agreed criteria (define assets)
Utilise Best Practice Management with a focus on harm minimisation	
Ensure all-inclusive participation (no boundaries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure agency co-ordination • Rabbit control is "tenure blind"
Community led action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive policy that empowers all • Working cooperatively and effectively with government, community and landowners (all stakeholders)
Maximise the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset based protection • Rabbit control used to improve the environment • People management comes first!
Coordinated partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships and relationships
Create a strategy for obtaining future funding support	



7 POLICY DOCUMENT INCLUSIONS

“This is a living document”

- **Background**
 - o why?
 - o the history
- **Vision and Goals**
- **Principles**
- **Best Practice**
 - o overall - the process
 - o in detail (e.g. options) and risk mitigation for each management option
- **Overall priorities as result of the above**
 - o medium term plan
 - o updated regularly
- **Monitoring and Assessment**

8 WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS?

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| • DELWP | • Contractors/consultants |
| • Land owners | • Landcare |
| • Land managers | • National Trust |
| • Land users – clubs/environmental/sport/community | • DEDJTR |
| • Urban residents | • Politicians |
| • GORCC | • Media |
| • Parks Victoria | • Schools (Department of Education) |
| • Vic Roads | • Cemeteries Trust |
| • VicTrack | • Barwon Water |
| • Local Government/ Surf Coast Shire Council | • Corporations (Boral) |
| • Philanthropists | |



9 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

What do we want to achieve?

- Communicate "CALP" Act and responsibility and how to land owners
- Build appreciation for the value of a rabbit free environment
- Community education – provide reasons and understanding for the rabbit policy
- Educating the youth
- Develop a shared understanding of rabbit control
- Community "hot spot" groups
- Increase public awareness of the threats and damage
- Maintain a long-term commitment
- Participation

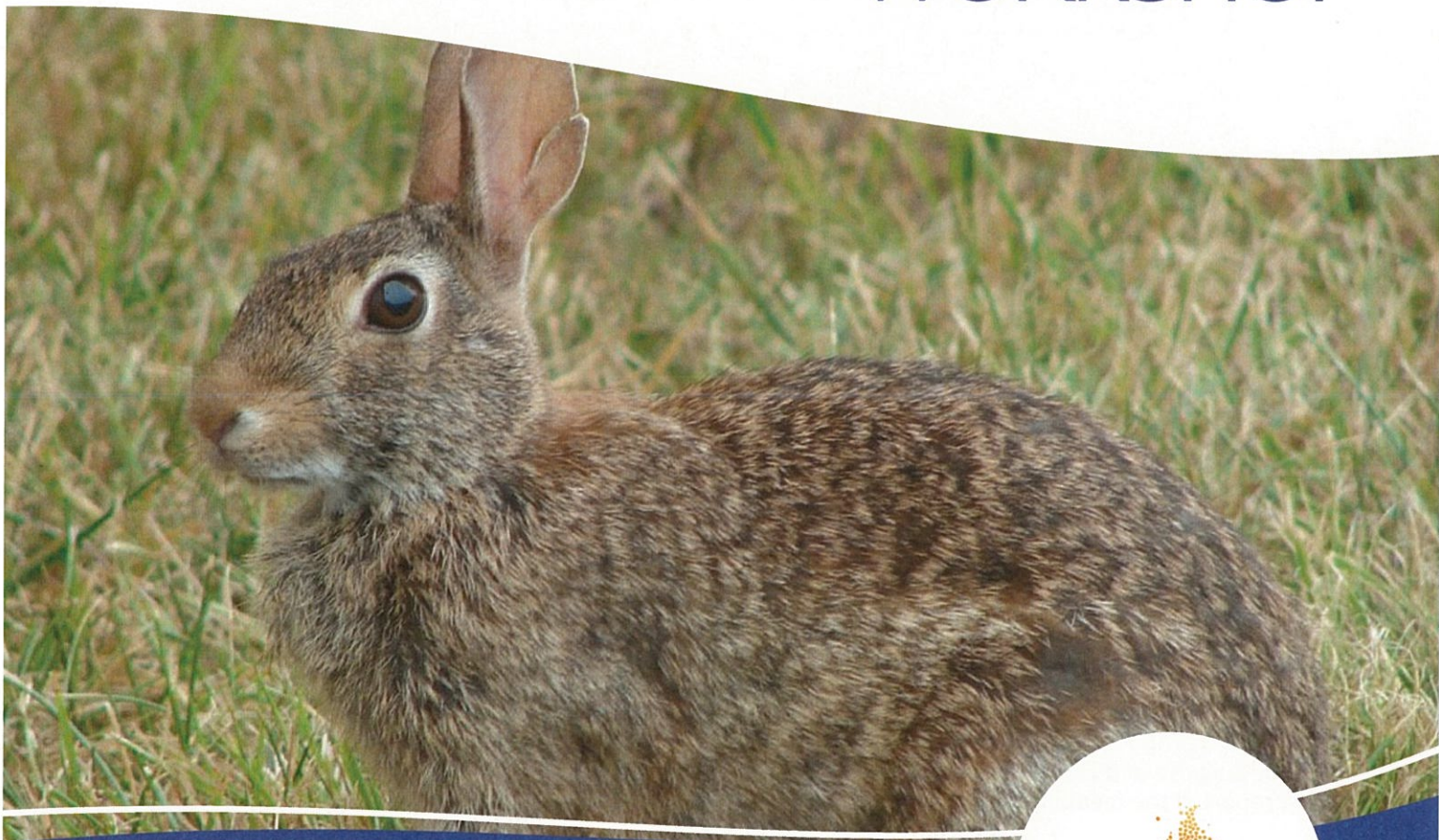
How can we achieve it?

- Formation of cluster groups with champions (for participation)
- Media flyers, meetings, facilitators and networking
- Visual representation – site visits; success stories; before and after, and facts
- Dissemination of information
- R.A.G. Local Group Facilitator to educate and support members
- Community mapping of source of warrens and natural assets
- Target schools
- School campaigns and club campaigns
- Trigger people to become involved at all levels



1 August 2016

SURF COAST SHIRE COUNCIL RABBIT MANAGEMENT POLICY WORKSHOP




firelight
CONSULTING

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Fire Light Consulting specialises in community engagement, risk communication, strategy, facilitation, mediation, negotiation, leadership and project management.

Limitations of Use

The sole purpose of this report undertaken by Fire Light Consulting is to provide Surf Coast Shire Council (SCS) with a report of the feedback and outputs from the workshop held on the 1st August 2016

In preparing this report, Fire Light Consulting has relied upon the information provided by participants at the workshop. The notes have been transcribed as the participants presented them. No analysis of these comments was made. Only minor adjustments have been made to ensure readability.

This report has been prepared on behalf of and for the exclusive use of SCS. SCS can choose to share and distribute this report as they see fit. Fire Light Consulting accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for or in respect of any use of, or reliance upon this report by any third party.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Surf Coast Shire Council held a meeting in Winchelsea at the Eastern Reserve Community Bank Room on the 1 August 2016.

The purpose of the meeting was:

- To confirm the criteria for assessing hotspots
- To explore and understand key 'hotspots' for rabbit management in Surf Coast Shire
- To review the DRAFT Surf Coast Shire Council Rabbit Management Policy
- To start the conversation about developing a community-led rabbit management plan (initial ideas only)

This report is a verbatim record of the feedback provided by participants at the workshop.

Attendees:

The following people attended the workshop:

ANGAIR	Peter Forster (President)	SCEG	Doug Rolfe
ANGAIR	Helen Tutt	Surf Coast Rabbit Action Network	Ann Bullen
Barrabool Hills Landcare Group	Kay Rodden (President)	Surf Coast Rabbit Action Network	Colin Cannard
Barrabool Hills Landcare Group	Christa Jones	Surf Coast Rabbit Action Network	Simon Falkiner
Barwon Valley Pony Club	Jan Calaby	SCIPN	Murray Johns
CCMA	Jani Demetrious	Surf Coast Shire Council	Rowan Mackenzie
CCMA	Tracey McRae	Surf Coast Shire Council	Kate Smallwood
DEDJTR	Alex Thorp	Surf Coast Shire Council	Leanne Rolfe
DELWP	Craig Clifford	Surf Coast Shire Council	Cr Heather Wellington
Expert	Tim Bloomfield	Surf Coast Shire Council	Cr David Bell
Facilitator	Nicole Hunter	Surf Coast Shire Council	Cr Margot Smith
GORCC	Evan Francis	Surf Coast Shire Council	Cr Carol McGregor
GORCC	Scott Hives	Upper Barwon Landcare Network	Mandy Baker
Landholder	John Welsh	Winchelsea Land & Rivercare	Stewart Mathieson

Apologies:

The following people were apologies for the workshop:

DEDJTR	John Mathews	Surf Coast Shire	Kate Sullivan
Golden Plains	Dale Smithyman	Surf Coast Shire	Cr Clive Goldsworthy
GORCC	Georgie Beale	The Sands	Justin Rankin
SCIPN	Sharon Marshall	Winchelsea Land & Rivercare	Rod Stone
SCIPN	Fiona Cummings		

2 HOTSPOT CRITERIA REVIEW

Participants were asked to review the current hotspot criteria that was used recently by most (if not all groups) to map the priority areas of action in each Landcare/Rabbit Action group area.

The following is a list of what the participants were concerned about with the criteria and how they thought they could be improved.

WHAT CONCERNS YOU ABOUT THESE CRITERIA?	WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THEM?
Partnership approach and integrated land management.	Combine the criteria. Score up to 4. (1-4) This affects the community's capacity to respond and be in it for the long haul – this is important
The clarity of impact can be lost in a set of criteria e.g. high biodiversity vs high/low recreation.	Refer to dot point 3. On back. Break it down to 3 parts.
Importance of being good neighbor.	Refer to dot point 2 on back.
'Extent of modification' criteria is confusing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most productive farms can be highly modified. • Some of the criteria fights against others. 	Potentially remove this criteria – it only applies to biodiversity.
Still concerns that numbers of rabbits /worst infestations is not included as a criterion.	Add worst infestations as a criterion. Add defendability as a criterion linked to partnerships. High weighting. The hotspot criteria could be a second criteria.
Limited resources and established problem.	The first criteria could be about suitability for rabbit's habitat and control. Should be a criterion for rabbit habitat.
Biodiversity significance – adopt the "adjacent" surrounding site.	Use a measure – State Government Biodiversity Strategy.
Expand definition of 'Community Value'.	Use the word community "asset" – assets of community value and significance.
Agree with splitting criteria in 3 sections	3 key areas Production, Environment, Biodiversity
Agree with "investment in site" inclusion	
"Landscape Health Significance" proposed	Up in the biodiversity score (State Government new Biodiversity Strategy includes landscape health)

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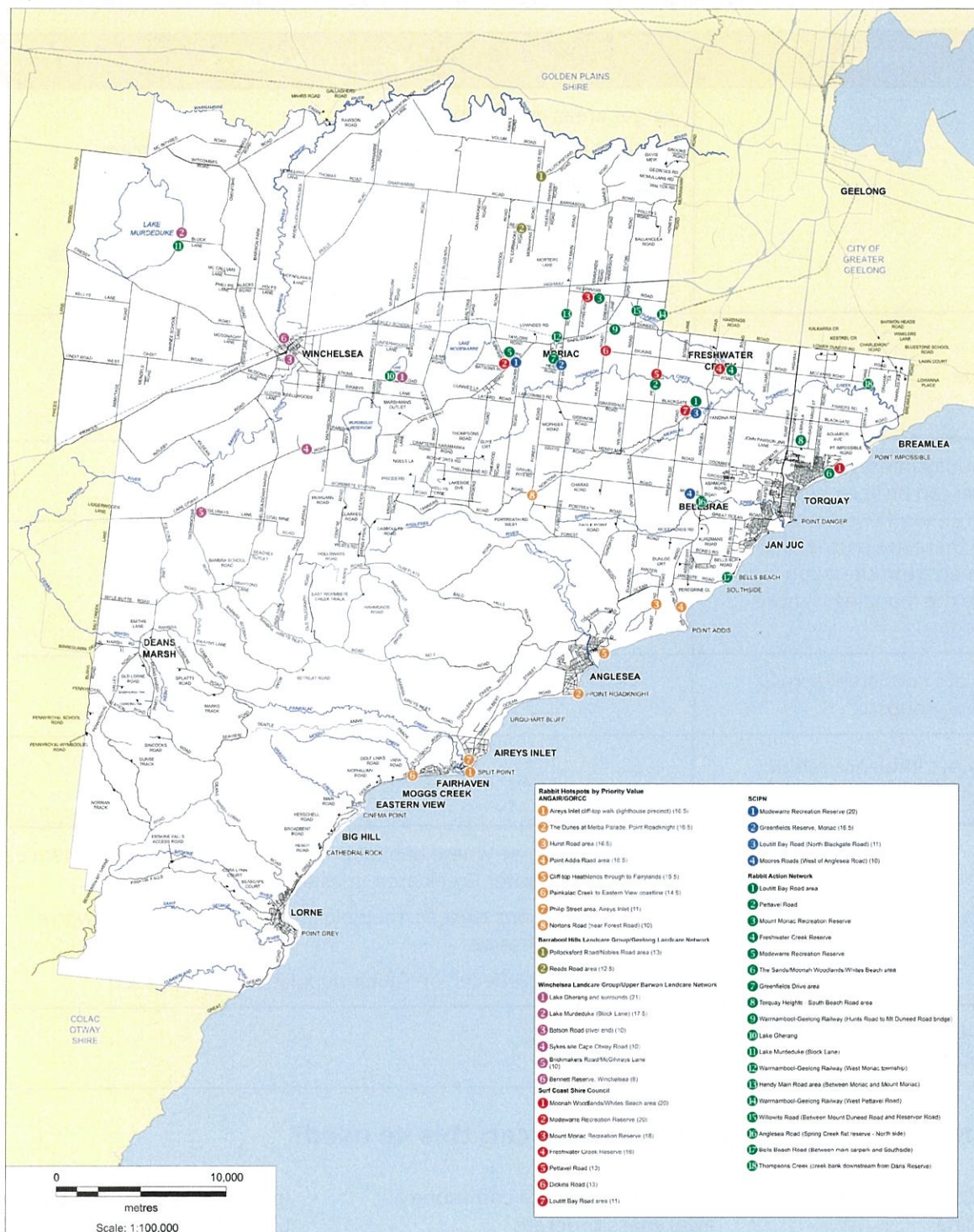
WHAT CONCERNS YOU ABOUT THESE CRITERIA?	WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THEM?
Broader definition of Biodiversity significance.	Link to regional plans.
Which site is defensible on an ongoing basis?	Add as criteria.
If there is an OH&S issue at the site, should be assessed	This should be addressed regardless. Rabbit management capacity of the land manager Affects safe use - should be an automatic issue dealt with by council/land manager (take out of the criteria) Need a "base standard" for rabbit management for council – above which criteria are used Use CALP Act and OHS as basis for these Include dot point i.e.: recognition of investment not high weighting.
Community use – not just recreational, passive/active use.	Call this community/public use.
Partnership approach/ is the work part of integrated group. Capacity to be able to respond to the problem is linked to the partnership approach	Could be combined into one and put 3 levels.
Potential to source external / additional funding (or leverage) could be added.	No potential for grants to high potential –
Previous investment in site is not seen as a high priority. Thought the partnership approach more important and has greater value.	
Community engagement key factor, embedded in "what is a cluster"	
Social perception is community engagement – community commitment of long term investment. Social ability to respond.	3 key areas: Production, Environment and Biodiversity
Equal weighting to the 3 assets. Community to come together to respond	
Important: method of rabbit management is not a reason for priority, not a criterion, apply criteria.	

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WHAT CONCERNS YOU ABOUT THESE CRITERIA?	WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THEM?
Landscape management is important.	
Give equal weighting to environment, economic and social assets. Where social is human capacity to respond.	Weightings of criteria could vary by user e.g. Council scoring different to Landcare group. Split into sections (to compare scores). 3 Sections: Assets Protecting, Damage to these, Potential to Fix
Core / worst rabbit infestations	Score based on input
Split criteria into clear sections – on-ground status, community value and use and community engagement and involvement	Definition of these 3 is key –triple bottom line.
Score each criteria equally (suggestion on the back)	Will skew results if all the same weight. Partnership approach more important
Investment in site by land manager/Landcare/ Government	Acknowledge this but not key criteria

3 INSIGHTS FROM THE HOTSPOT MAPS

Participants were provided with the hotspot maps for the whole Surf Coast Shire as identified by the individual Landcare and Rabbit Action Groups. The following image depicts the map provided.



'The Place of Wellbeing'

1 MERRILL DRIVE
PO BOX 359
TORQUAY, VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA 3228
PHONE: +61 3 5261 6060
FAX: +61 3 5261 4523
INTERNET: www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au
E-MAIL: info@surfcoast.vic.gov.au

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therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or consequences which
may arise from your relying on any information contained in this material.

Surf Coast Shire Rabbit Hotspots by Priority Value

Print Date: 29/7/2016
Page Size (A1)



This map is produced on the Geocentric Datum of Australia (GDA2011).
GDA2011 supersedes the Australian Geodetic Datum (AGD84).
Surf Coast Shire uses the Map Grid of Australia (MGA54) Zone 50 projection.

The following are a list of the insights from reviewing this map:

THEME	SPECIFIC INSIGHTS
Map	<p>Larger areas not mapped</p> <p>The map is very coarse, 1st pass illustration of the problem</p> <p>Would be interesting to overlay the map with Rabbit Scan</p> <p>Excludes private land hotspots</p> <p>Needs to be landscape scale approach, include shire boundaries</p> <p>Forested areas appear to not be a problem on the map ?</p>
Soil type	<p>Influences rabbit populations</p> <p>Shows where soil type is conducive for rabbits</p> <p>Spread of hotspots relates to soil type and rainfall</p>
Community interest in rabbit removal can be seen on the map	
Where there are partnership agreements (on sites) you can see the mapping is more prevalent	
Scores are consistent across different groups	
Waterways influence rabbit populations	
Rabbits and People	<p>Rabbits are worse where habitat is ideal and people can see them eg. Moriac, Freshwater Creek area, coastal clusters</p> <p>Some connections exist i.e. multiple interests such as Modewarre Recreational Reserve</p> <p>"Coastal Towns effects" on rabbit populations can be seen</p>
There are tracts/areas that don't have problems	

What next for the hotspot map? How can this be used?

- It's a starting point for planning
- Need to overlay the habitat conducive for rabbits
- Privacy issues re: hotspots on private land.
- Could be used for a community awareness program
 - o How to identify the problem
 - o Fill out the map
- Link to CCMA NRM planning portal or Rabbit Scanner tool (CRC)
- Who is custodian?
- Identify a couple of key areas in Landcare group areas – get some resources and target hotspots and evaluate
- Inform the development of cluster groups and leaders - Where to knock on doors

4 SCS DRAFT RABBIT MANAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW

Participants were asked to review the DRAFT Surf Coast Shire Council's Rabbit Management Policy. This was first done in 'sectional' groups (each group with one section of the document) and then shared/cross sectional groups. The second pass was to check some thinking, learn from each other and gather up agreed changes in intent that should be captured.

The following table outlines this detailed feedback:

Section 1: Page 1 of policy

WHAT PEOPLE LIKED	SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS
1. Purpose Is good	Amend purpose to add 'and approach' after 'commitment'.
2. Scope Might need work. a) is ok	b) & c) could be shifted to management approach/the how section. a) add in partnership with local land managers. Remove b) and put in 8. Retain c) Amend the scope to read "This policy defines the way in which; (i) Council will manage rabbits on council owned and managed land; and (ii) Council interacts with the community to achieve best practice rabbit management."
3. Application Is OK	
4. Rationale Generally ok subject to some changes	Increase emphasis on the impacts that rabbits have, environmental, economic, social. Refer to EPBC Act. Threat abatement plan for rabbits. Possibly remove the 4th para but it doesn't point to the timing to invest being important, need to explain better. Remove identification of K5 insert 'biological control agents'. Broaden to latest research in rabbit control. Could include environmental leadership commitment. Final paragraph – keep it in. Change 'reduce rabbit numbers' (K5 calci virus description) to 'reduce environmental damage' 2013 – 2017 Make more general not specific to the K5 calci virus

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Section 2: Page 2 of policy

WHAT PEOPLE LIKED	SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS
5. Definitions	<p>Remove 'weed' from rabbit harbor, it could be 'native vegetation'</p> <p>Replace 'tractor' to 'machine'</p> <p>Remove 'antidote' from 1080</p> <p>'Ripping' – change to 'warren destruction'</p>
6. Council purpose and direction Like the specific focus on strategic partnerships in point 6	<p>Review organizational direction – add something re good governance and compliance.</p>
7. Policy	<p>Specify that rabbit control is part of an integrated approach to sustainable land management</p> <p>Differences of opinion whether a time frame needed or appropriate in a policy document.</p> <p>Amend policy, broken into;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal compliance • Best practice rabbit management • Supporting and promoting community rabbit management. • Partnerships engage in relevant partnerships
7. Community Vision	<p>Change to 'Surf Coast Shire community leads the way in integrated best practice rabbit management'</p>
7. Community Aspirational Goal	<p>Change to measure to less than 1 active burrow per hectare at a timeline that can be defended by the land manager. Amend goal to say "leads the way in integrated best practice rabbit management".</p>
7. Guiding Principles	<p>Expanded to include 'defendable'</p> <p>Clarification statements are required for the guiding principles. Include statement on integrated land management.</p> <p>'Undertake good community engagement' is not aspirational enough – maximize protection of all assets.</p> <p>Delete 'natural and build environment' with 'assets.'</p> <p>Define community engagement.</p>

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Section 3: Page 3 of policy to end of 'Other Management Options'

WHAT PEOPLE LIKED	SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS
8. Management Approach In accordance with Agriculture Victoria's dot points	To achieve the most effective rabbit control, in the following order. Include a statement about the sequencing. Disagreement over order of management approach – application of techniques should be chosen as applicable. 2nd para change 'in accordance with' to 'with reference to'
8. Control Techniques Risk of methods addressed but greater detail may be needed.	Above ground harbor and native vegetation removal in practice should be only done where absolutely required. Other methods may be financially ineffective. All techniques should be applied in consultation with land managers and neighboring properties. Needs communication plan. Put dot points in order of management procedures. Delete "council acknowledges" Dot points should be 1 – 5 management approach. b) and c) from page 1 should go under Control Techniques.
8. Baiting	The preferred baiting technique? Revisit the use of 1080 and reference. Preferred baiting method is Pindone remove all reference to 1080 Must do OH&S assessments. Remove restriction to use 1080 – that there are two registered chemicals can be used – subject to site assessment. Remove comment on 'not using 1080' to broaden to call it 'poison baiting' in line with "SOPS". Check and follow suggested guidelines to reduce impact on non-target species.
8. Above Ground/ Surface Harbour removal	In consultation with appropriate land manager (DELWP) and to the minimal extent where necessary. Expansion re cultural heritage issues in light of new legislation Last sentence needs to be consistent with planning permit. Native vegetation removal – add ability to remove vegetation with planning permit
8. Warren Removal	Expand cultural heritage reference in line with new legislation. Cultural heritage issues need to be clarified and who you manage them. Define implosion

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Section 4: Section 9 and 10

WHAT PEOPLE LIKED	SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS
9. Rabbit Hotspots Like the idea of a hotspot data	Who will maintain the database? The criteria need to be further developed and agreed. Who will lead and resource?
9. Rabbit Hotspots Like that there is a plan for each hotspot managed by Council	Needs to be a specific site management plan. The plans need to be simple and not take too much time and input to produce. Collaboratively produced. In partnership with community needs to MER of actions - who will resource? Needs to be interpedently assessed. The management and governance between council and community. Accountability of council works and plans, evaluation of effectiveness. Change 'a rabbit management plan' to a 'site management plan'.
10. Policy Review Good to have review of work.	Possibility of establishing a formal interaction between Council and community - sub-committee - ERAP role. Independently reviewed by ERAP.



5 INITIAL IDEAS OF HOW TO START A COMMUNITY-LED RABBIT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Participants were asked to write down one idea (from their experiences) that would help get a community-led rabbit management plan started. The following is a prioritized list of ideas based on some initial sharing and agreeing on the importance.

TO CREATE A COMMUNITY-LED PLAN FOR RABBIT MANAGEMENT THE FIRST THING WE SHOULD DO IS....	PRIORITISATION SCORE
Get the facts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ground truth • get out maps • talk to people 	26 ¹
Identify someone with a passion and will be able to drive/inspire the program	25 ²
Engage all stakeholders	23.5
Key stakeholders meet to understand better how we can evaluate and monitor the problem	21
Communicate with existing Landcare groups	20
Invite everyone in for a cup of tea. Open the communication.	20
Council to collaborate with Landcare groups to identify who will lead, coordinate and develop the plan.	20
Confirm who is leading/coordinating development of the plan.	19.5
Raise community awareness of the extent of the rabbit issue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social • Economic • Environmental with examples of successful rabbit programs in public presentations. 	19

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¹Please note: this idea was only rated out of 30 when it should have been out of 35.

²Please note: this idea was only rated out of 30 when it should have been out of 35.

TO CREATE A COMMUNITY-LED PLAN FOR RABBIT MANAGEMENT THE FIRST THING WE SHOULD DO IS....	PRIORITISATION SCORE
Include all landowners and management organisations, having all on the same page.	19
Talk to your neighbours	17
Define community-led	17
Communicate with neighbours	17
Identify <u>who</u> the community is	16.5
Set a target area	16.5
Listen to others' perspectives	16
Communicate the plan to stakeholders	16
Try to understand why not all community members are interested	16
Identify you have a rabbit problem	15
Define community-led	15
Talk face to face with groups, people etc. about the plan	14.5
Involve as many people as you can in your community	14.5
Urban areas – like Anglesea and Aireys Inlet. Probably need to be with GORCC to “discuss community involvement”	11
Define community-led (community telling or community doing?) and define management by whom?	11

6 NEXT STEPS

The following next steps were identified by Surf Coast Shire at the end of the meeting:

#	TASK	DATE
1	Prepare and distribute workshop report	August 2016
2	Finalise draft Council Rabbit Management Policy	August 2016
3	Council briefing and meeting to review Council Rabbit Management Policy and progress on rabbit management works	September 2016
4	Further work on hotspot criteria and hotspot list	Sept-Nov 2016
5	Development of a community-led rabbit management plan (potential Workshop to develop community rabbit management strategy)	2016 - date TBC



