

Otago Regional Council

Lake Hayes Neighbourhood Rabbit Management

Notes from the Second Workshop, 14 July 2021

Overview

While the Otago Regional Council does not undertake rabbit pest control, which is designated the responsibility of landowners in the Biosecurity Act 1993, ORC has a leadership role to play in coordinating and facilitating better rabbit management.

Last year, ORC trialled a few collaborative approaches to rabbit management, and are looking to reproduce a similar approach in other rabbit-prone areas around Otago. Specifically, this approach will involve working with public organisations and private landowners to develop a coordinated control effort. This will be supported by providing better education for private landowners on how best to control rabbits on their properties and exploring community appetite for longer-term solutions such as the establishment of community owned entities to undertake (or contract out) consistent rabbit control on an ongoing basis.

Our intention is to work with the Lake Hayes community to identify options for long-term rabbit management. This includes the public and crown land around Lake Hayes, and not just the privately-owned land.

Regional Pest Management Plan Rules

Rule 6.4.6.1 of the Regional Pest Management Plan requires that occupiers of land within Otago must control feral rabbit densities on the land they occupy to at or below Level 3 on the Modified McLean Scale. This same rule applies to land owned by QLDC. A similar rule applies to DOC and LINZ, in that they must control rabbits within 500m of the property boundary where the occupier of the adjoining property is also controlling feral rabbit densities.

Where a property is found to be non-compliant, the ORC can issue a Notice of Direction requiring the landowner to control the rabbits on their land. If that is not followed, then the ORC has the ability to undertake the works and recover the costs from the landowner.

Please note that the Modified McLean Scale has been designed for use on larger, rural properties. Applying this scale on smaller, more maintained properties can be challenging, and so ORC are currently exploring options for a regulatory tool that can be applied more readily on smaller properties.

Notes from the Q&A Sessions

- Eradication of rabbits is not feasible using currently available methods. Sustained Control is, therefore, the management approach taken for rabbits.
- Successful, sustained control of rabbits in Lake Hayes requires a high level of collaboration, communication, and participation amongst a high proportion of landowners in the area.
- Diverse viewpoints about solutions were expressed in the meeting, by community members and contractors.

- Frustration was expressed about perceived lack of effort by public and crown entities.
- The 2013 poison operation was a reactive approach and had limited success due to a number of factors. A different approach is required, which may include poison, but which cannot rely on only one control method.
- A successful control programme will require careful planning.
- This is a complex problem, which will require a complex solution. There is no quick fix.
- This will be an ongoing challenge for this community, and it will take a lot of hard work and determination to get on top of rabbit numbers, but it's not impossible it has been achieved in some areas.
- Some local landowners are already undertaking a lot of work (including fencing) and they're managing to get on top of the rabbits on their properties.
- The owners/administrators of the crown and public land around the lake (DOC, LINZ & QLDC) are very much part of this conversation and will be expected to meet their statutory obligations.
- The virus has been released in the area in the past, but indications are that there is a high level of immunity amongst the population.
- Poison and/or the virus will not eradicate rabbits, and so ongoing secondary control is required to get, and keep, the remaining population down to an acceptable level.
- Ongoing control is still required even when the population doesn't seem to be causing an issue.
- The community can help with monitoring, which will allow for more responsive action.
- Different control options will be more appropriate in different areas.
- Fences need to be part of the solution, but they are only effective if they:
 - Are well designed;
 - Are regularly maintained;
 - Include a secure gate, which is kept closed, even during the day; and
 - Are followed up with control work within the fenced area.
- Alternatives to Pindone are being explored at a national/international level, but it is currently the most commonly used toxin for rabbit baiting in urban areas in Otago.
- In terms of control options available, landowners are urged to invest in options that assist with long-term control (e.g. fencing) rather than spending money on short-term gains that are quickly undone through reinvasion.
- Landowners are urged to consult with their neighbours before undertaking any work, for several reasons:
 - If neighbours are interested in doing the same work, then there may be cost savings from engaging a contractor collectively.
 - Neighbours may be interested in investing in fencing around the wider area rather than having to do each individual property.
 - Control work undertaken on one property can compromise efforts being undertaken on a neighbouring property.
 - There may be risks, such as risk of harm to children, pets and stock, which need to be managed.
- The scope of the control area is yet to be determined, but opportunities to work within natural or man-made barriers should be explored.
- Indications suggest that there are enough contractors out there to do the work.
- The idea of targeted rates was suggested, whereby ORC staff undertake all of the necessary control work using collected funds. However, the cost and feasibility of this

has not been assessed at this stage, and no consultation with the community has been undertaken.

- ORC needs to ensure that there are adequate resources available online, such as guidance on how to install and maintain an effective rabbit proof fence and gate, best time of day or year to do certain control methods etc.
- ORC is keen on hosting “How To” workshops.

Engaging a Contractor

Advice on engaging a contractor has been provided on the following website:

<https://yoursay.orc.govt.nz/hayes-rabbits>

Fencing Law

The Fencing Act 1978 details landowner liabilities for work on a fence. The following website helps to explain the law: <https://www.consumer.org.nz/articles/fencing-law>

Please note that the Fencing Act 1978 does not apply to the following (see section 3 of the Act for full definitions):

- a) Roads
- b) National Parks
- c) Te Urewera Land
- d) Land held for railway purposes
- e) DOC marginal strip land
- f) Esplande reserve