

A guide to rabbit control in Marlborough



Background

Feral Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) have been a pest in Marlborough since the early plagues of the late 19th century. Through various forms national and local governance, rabbit control has always played an important part of rural Marlborough. Subsidised rabbit control ceased with the dissolution of the Pest Destruction boards in 1989. Aligning with the introduction of RHD in 1997 was the move toward a user pays system. All costs associated with rabbit control now lie with the land occupier.



The Regional Pest Management Strategy for Marlborough (2007) provides rules for the control of rabbits and other pests in Marlborough.

Rule 6.2.1.1 "Land occupiers shall maintain Feral Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) populations, on land that they occupy, at or below the maximum allowable level on the Modified McLean Scale...."

A breach of this rule will create an offence under section 154(r) of the Biosecurity Act and may result in default work under section 128 of the Biosecurity Act.

Rabbit Control Methods

Poisoning

Poisons are a cost-effective approach for reducing rabbit infestations. When applied correctly, poisoning can lower rabbit numbers by more than 95%. Methods include poisoning with Pindone or 1080. Low rabbit numbers can also be controlled effectively using suitable poisons. Successful poisoning requires good timing and sufficient good quality bait. Poison baits can be spread by hand, machine or aerial drop.

Pindone and 1080

Pindone is an anticoagulant chemical which is almost as effective as 1080. It has less effect than 1080 on non-target domestic species and has an antidote (Vitamin K1). Cereal Pindone pellets can be purchased from rural supply stores and laid by property owners or occupiers in bait stations. They can be brought to spread on the ground if you hold a Controlled Substance Licence.

Excellent results have been achieved with Pindone pellets from large 1000ha operations down to <100ha operations. The key is ensuring ground conditions are suitable (not too much moisture) and there is not a lot of other food



sources available i.e. fresh green pick. A good way to assess whether pellets may be suitable is to carry out a small trial of non-toxic pre-feed pellets and assess take. Pre-feeding over the entire block is not always necessary with Pindone pellets. The toxic application consists of two applications of 4-6kg/ha not more than 10 days apart. The pellets are readily available and are easy to handle.

Carrot bait can be expensive to source in Marlborough but if available, can be used to great effect and may be more acceptable than pellets in some situations. The bait needs to be clean washed carrot usually cut on-site with pre-feed going out once before two feeds of liquid Pindone carrot or two pre-feeds before a single 1080 carrot application. Depending on the level of infestation, 15-30kg/ha of carrot can be applied with the pre-feeds with the toxic rate determined by the level of take from the pre-feeds. The toxic should not go out within 7 days of the last pre-feed.



As preparing carrot bait involves the use of toxic liquid concentrates, only licenced operators with the appropriate Approved Handler and Controlled Substance Licences can prepare bait.

Fumigation

The main fumigant used on rabbits is Magtoxin®. Otago Regional Council has prepared a detailed information guide on its use and can be found on both on their website www.orc.govt.nz and on the Marlborough District Council website www.marlborough.govt.nz. Alternatively, a hard copy can be supplied from Council.

Shooting

Shooting should ideally be a secondary control method after a poisoning operation to mop up survivors. It can be a primary control tool with lighter rabbit infestations. The most effective shooting operations are persistent and cover the entire block. The biggest downfall with shooting, if not done correctly, is that the rabbits can become fractious making shooting harder over time. Shooting by foot in a 'quiet' manner, including the use of suppressed firearms can help in this respect.



Contact

Marlborough District Council

Senior Biosecurity Officer (Animals)

(03) 520 7400