

Managing rabbits after bushfire

Fact sheet



The European wild rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) is one animal that might not be too adversely impacted by bushfires.

As burrowers, rabbits avoid much of the direct fire damage and soon find themselves at least temporarily free from many of their predators. As a result, rabbits have the potential to inflict more damage on the landscape after devastating bushfires.

Rabbits will get by through feeding on the small remnants of vegetation remaining after the fire has passed through. They will be the very first to pick the new green shoots that emerge after rain. They will also dig to get access to the roots of perennial plants and this can kill many plants.

Post bushfire in the summer months is an important time to implement control measures on rabbits before the breeding season recommences in the autumn.

Control techniques and best practice

There are many techniques available to control rabbits. However the techniques that are permitted to control rabbits may vary based on where you live.

Rabbit control should aim to reduce the damage caused by rabbits while also reducing their numbers. Critical to the success of a control program is knowing where rabbits occur. Most landholders will be aware of their rabbit sites and warrens are generally easy to spot after a fire.

When undertaking a control program, the best approach is to use a number of techniques. These can include:

Chemical

- ground baiting (1080 or Pindone)
- fumigation of warrens.

Note: In the Adelaide Hills 1080 cannot often be used as a ground baiting control method due to distance restrictions to the nearest dwelling. The only chemical control method therefore available to most land holders in the Adelaide Hills is pindone.

Mechanical

- warren destruction by ripping with a small tractor or bulldozer
- trapping
- fencing to prevent rabbit entry
- removal of surface habitat (such as pest plants blackberry and gorse).

Biological

- Myxomatosis (Myxo)
- Rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV) otherwise known as calicivirus).

Pindone techniques and best practice

Pindone is an anticoagulant used to reduce rabbit populations in areas such as urban/residential and semi-rural areas where it is impractical or unsuitable to use 1080.

It is used because it has a shorter half-life than other anticoagulant poisons and rabbits are also more susceptible to pindone than many other species. It is an anticoagulant that can be applied on carrots or oats and then fed to rabbits.

Pindone works by preventing the formation of Vitamin K1 in the body of the rabbit for about four days after ingestion so the rabbit draws on reserves stored in its body. Initially the animal will continue to behave normally until three or four repeat feeds have been provided and the rabbit runs out of its Vitamin K1 reserves and dies.

Pindone is **not designed** to work as a single dose. However, the sodium salt of pindone degrades in the carcasses of poisoned rabbits, making it less risky for off-target poisoning.

Pindone techniques

Free feeding

It is important to accustom rabbits to feeding on the bait type used for two reasons:

1. Rabbits may need some time to become accustomed to eating oats or carrots (bait material) and this may take a matter of days or in some cases weeks. A free-feed phase at the start encourages rabbits to eat the bait material before pindone is applied.
2. It is important during the free-feed phase to work out how much oats or carrots, in grams, the rabbits are eating in any one feed. If insufficient bait material is laid, the dominant rabbits may prevent shy feeders from gaining full access to the bait material, and if too much remains the next morning it is wasteful. There should be a small amount left after each feed about 5-10 per cent.

If the rabbits are not taking your free-feeds after a week try one of the following:

- The oats or carrots may be too close to their home. Try moving it further away to where you see them feeding.
- Try purchasing rabbit pellets from a fodder store and mixing it in with the oats or carrots. When the rabbits start feeding on the bait material remove the pellets before placing out the pindone-treated oats or carrots. *(It is illegal to mix the pindone on anything but carrots or oats.)*

Always put the feed out in the evening just before rabbits become active and, if necessary, collect any that remains first thing next morning.

Allow approximately 30 grams of oats per rabbit per feed or approximately 60 grams of diced carrots if using carrots.

Baited feed

After the free-feed phase, and when you are certain that rabbits are eating your bait material and you know approximately how much they are eating, contact your local Landscape Officer to collect the pindone.

1. Baits will need to be placed out every three or four nights for about 14 days. Avoid wet weather or sprinklers as pindone washes off relatively easily.
2. DO NOT place the carrots in one heap. Place carrots where rabbits are feeding, you may see scratching marks on the surface. You can also disturb the soil, as rabbits are attracted to this activity.
3. On subsequent mornings check to ensure that there is a small amount of bait material left. If all carrots are being eaten in any one area by the first morning after baiting, the rabbits are being underfed. Alternatively if there are many carrots remaining on the second feed, they are being overfed. Adjust subsequent feeds accordingly.
4. The rabbits should succumb to the treatment 12 to 14 days after the first poisoned feed is laid.
5. Wash any equipment, including gloves and buckets, with water after use (pindone biodegrades in the soil).

Safety to other animals

Whilst the risk of poisoning dogs and other animals is extremely low, care should still be taken. Do not distribute bait material in situations where non-target animals will have access and are likely to consume raw diced carrots. This includes livestock, kangaroos and native animals, or pets that eat vegetables. If in doubt, feed earlier in the day and observe. If an accidental poisoning occurs a Vitamin K1 injection is an effective antidote. It is possible to place a small cage over the bait areas that will allow rabbits access but restrict access to kangaroos and other larger animals.

Further information

Post-fire information is available through the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board.

Mount Barker: (08) 8391 7500

Willunga: (08) 8550 3400

Email: hf.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au



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