

5.23 Rabbits – feral (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

Why are they a threat?

The feral rabbit is a small to medium sized herbivore that originates from Europe. Feral rabbits were released in New Zealand in the late 1700s and 1800s as a food source. They quickly adapted to New Zealand's conditions and have thrived in our environment.



High feral rabbit population levels:

- a) Affect soil and water quality;
- b) Have a detrimental impact on economic production; and
- c) Increase the risk of soil erosion.

Factors such as topography, climate, aspect and altitude all contribute to the variation in the feral rabbit population.

Certain parts of Marlborough are highly prone to feral rabbits building to high population levels. These areas include the mid to upper Awatere Valley, Molesworth Station, Avon/Waihopai Valley, mid-Wairau Valley and coastal Ward. In other parts of the district, feral rabbits can also build up in small pockets creating smaller-scale nuisance.

5.23.1 Objective

Over the duration of the RPMP, control feral rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) in the Marlborough district to a population trend that is level or reducing to minimise adverse effects on economic wellbeing and the environment.

Intermediate Outcome:

Exclusion	Eradication	Progressive Containment	Sustained Control	Site-led
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Principle measures to achieve the objective

1) Requirement to Act

Land owners and/or occupiers or other persons may be required to act where rules or statutory obligations dictate:

- a) Pests are to be destroyed.
- b) The presence of pests is to be reported.
- c) Pests are not to be spread (high risk activities, bred, sold or distributed).

2) Council Inspection

Inspection by Council may include staff or contractors:

- a) Carrying out inspections to ensure occupiers are meeting obligations.
- b) Visiting properties or doing surveys to determine whether pests are present.
- c) Monitoring effectiveness of control.
- d) Carry out control using administrative powers of the Biosecurity Act 1993, if necessary.

3) Advocacy and Education

Council may:

- a) Provide general purpose education, advice, awareness and publicity activities to land owners and/or occupiers and the public about pests and pathways (and control of them).
- b) Encourage land owners and/or occupiers to control pests.
- c) Promote industry requirements and best practice to contractors and land owners and/or occupiers.
- d) Encourage land owners and/or occupiers and other persons to report any pests they find.
- e) Facilitate or commission research.

5.23.2 Rules**Rule 5.23.2.1**

Occupiers shall destroy feral rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), on land that they occupy, to ensure population levels are not maintained higher than the respective Maximum Allowable Levels (see Table 2) for a period of time greater than 12 months.

A breach of this rule will create an offence under section 154N(19) of the Biosecurity Act.

Table 2: Maximum allowable rabbit populations

Sub-Regions		Maximum Allowable Population Level Modified McLean Scale (see Appendix 3, page 109)
Upper Awatere/Clarence	Map 10 (page 67)	Level 4
Remainder of area within district		Level 3

Explanation of the rule:

The purpose of Rule 5.23.2.1 is in accordance with section 73(5)(h) in that all occupiers that have rabbits on land they occupy are being required to take specified actions to prevent the pest increase to levels affecting productivity or neighbouring properties.

Council as the management agency will administer these rules.



Map 10: Rabbit Programme – MAL 4 Area