

1 DEC 2016



OIA16-0591

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Dear Gary Stephenson

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

I refer to your official information request on 8 October 2016 relating to the rabbit haemorrhagic virus (RHDV) and humane methods of wild rabbit control. You specifically asked:

How much money was invested in:

- 1. RHDV virus research to kill wild rabbits in the past 5 years?*
- 2. Other poisons to kill wild rabbits?*
- 3. Humane biological reproduction control of wild rabbits?*
- 4. Other humane controls of wild rabbits and what were they?*
- 5. How much was spent on ensuring that companion rabbits would not be effected by these measures?*

I shall answer your questions in the order that they were submitted.

1. How much money was invested in RHDV virus research to kill wild rabbits in the past 5 years?

In the last five years the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has provided funding to Landcare Research for one project and committed funding for a second project relating to RHDV. Extensive details of these projects were provided to you in the response to your previous Official Information Act (OIA) request on this topic (OIA16-0629), so I will provide only a brief summary of each below:

- 2012-2013 – *Rabbit Biocontrol Initiative – Better RHDV strains for improved rabbit control in NZ.*

MPI provided \$480,000 of funding to Landcare Research (working on behalf of Waikari Pest Management Liaison Committee) for this three year project. The funding was allocated from the Sustainable Farming Fund (SFF) initiative.

- 2016-2017 - *Release Strategy for improved RHDV Strains to maximise the benefits of rabbit biocontrol.*

MPI has committed funding up to \$240,000 of SFF funding to Landcare Research (working on behalf of Waikari Pest Management Liaison Committee) for the above project that is to span 3 years. None of the project funding has been paid to Landcare Research at this time.

2. How much money was invested in other poisons to kill wild rabbits?

In the last five years MPI has provided funding for the following two projects:

- 2012-2013 - *Refining operational practices for controlling rabbits on agricultural lands.*

MPI provided \$330,000 of SFF funding to Landcare Research (working on behalf of the Rabbit Co-ordination Group) for a three year project to refine rabbit control techniques using poisoned bait. The project aimed to optimise bait size, toxin loading levels and develop new sowing strategies to increase rabbit control efficiency. It also aimed to provide robust scientific data for high-level stakeholders and policy makers. The project was a collaborative research initiative driven by members of the New Zealand Rabbit Co-ordination Group, landowners, farmers and contractors that are represented by Federated Farmers High Country and regional councils. While research into alternative control methods (e.g. improving the effectiveness of the RHDV virus) continues, baiting remains a practical method for the control of rabbits at high densities. However, this method is expensive and the project aimed to substantially reduce the amount of bait used and associated costs for landowners. This project ran in parallel with the "Rabbit Bio-control Initiative" (as noted on the previous page) with the aim to develop better RHDV strains to help create long-term control strategies.

- Lincoln University requested funding from the Rabbit Co-ordination Group to run a rabbit trial using carrot bait coated with diphacinone and cholecalciferol. This funding was granted and split between various funding parties. MPI contributed a total of \$833 to this project. This funding was taken from the Long Term Incursion Management team budget.

3. How much money was invested in humane biological reproduction control of wild rabbits?

MPI has not provided any funding for this specific research in the last five years. However, MPI does provide support to other contestable science funds managed by other government agencies or private entities where advice and expertise is sought.

4. How much money was invested in other humane controls of wild rabbits and what were they?

MPI has not provided any funding for this specific research in the last five years. However, MPI does provide support to other contestable science funds managed by other government agencies or private entities where advice and expertise is sought.

5. *How much was spent on ensuring that companion rabbits would not be effected by these measures?*

MPI understands that Landcare Research are taking into consideration Australian information on research of the effectiveness of a potential RHDV vaccine. However, MPI does not hold an exact breakdown of Landcare Research spending on resources and costs for this part of their project. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the OIA, as this information is not held by MPI.

You have the right under section 28(3) of the OIA to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of our decision to refuse parts of your request.

Yours sincerely



Veronica Herrera
Director IDC & Response