

27 FEB 2017

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



OIA17-0040

Gary Stephenson
Care of FYI website

Dear Gary Stephenson

OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT REQUEST

I refer to your official information request on 30 January 2017 relating to the New Zealand rabbit population and their influence on their natural habitat, further queries on the Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV), the health impact of the loss of a companion rabbit on its owner, and the illegal use of spreading infected rabbit carcasses across large expanses of land. You specifically asked:

- 1. Could you please provide the latest scientific and independently peer-reviewed report on the damage to native plants caused by wild rabbits?*
- 2. How does the damage compare to the damage caused by sheep, agriculture and other grazing farm animals in the same habitat?*
- 3. Has the effect and impact of wild rabbit control on companion rabbits and their owners been evaluated and what is the result of that evaluation?*
- 4. Has the health impact of the loss of a companion rabbit on its owner due to wild rabbit control been evaluated?*
- 5. How much is the control of feral rabbits driven by farming lobby groups and how many communications and monies from these lobby groups been received?*
- 6. What independent scientific and peer-reviewed report on the dangers on the release of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Virus (RHDV) into the environment has been undertaken?*
- 7. What controls are in place to uncover and eradicate the illegal use of cutting up and spreading infected rabbit carcasses (known as vitamix) across large expanses of land?*

For the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) to apply, the information must already be held by the agency concerned. With the exception of providing a response to a request for a statement of reasons about the request decision itself, there is no obligation on an agency to form an opinion or create information to answer a request in the form of questions or interrogatory (c/f Office of the Ombudsman). In accordance with this advice from the office of the Ombudsman, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) is not required to answer questions two, three, four and seven as

they do not specifically qualify as requests for official information. However, to reassure you, MPI has decided to address some of the questions you have asked for your information below.

In response to question one, the most recent reports commissioned by MPI (or its predecessor agencies) which include information on damage to native plants caused by wild rabbits, are available at the below links.

- *Economic Costs of Pests to New Zealand*
(<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/files/pests/surv-mgmt/economic-costs-of-pests-to-new-zealand.pdf>).
- *The Current State of Rabbit Management in New Zealand*
(<http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/files/pests/rabbit/rabbit-management-in-nz.pdf>).

Other more recent research is available publically, either within scientific publications or directly from science providers, such as Crown Research Institutes.

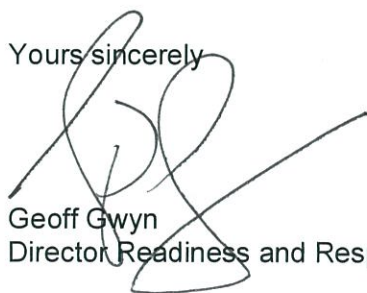
In response to question five, MPI does not receive money directly from farming lobby groups for the management of wild rabbits.

In response to question six, the information does not exist as MPI has not commissioned research on the effects of RHDV on the environment.

Over the course of the last year the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), the Minister for Primary Industries, and Associate Ministers for Primary Industries have provided you with a large number of correspondence and information relating to rabbits in New Zealand and issues around RHDV. Staff members from MPI have also spoken to you at length via telephone to address these matters. Further requests of this nature could be deemed as frivolous, trivial and/or vexatious in accordance with the Act. Therefore MPI may have to consider closing correspondence in the future on that basis.

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 your request.

Yours sincerely



Geoff Gwyn
Director Readiness and Response Services