



**MP for West Coast-Tasman**

Minister of Agriculture

Minister for Biosecurity

Minister for Food Safety

Minister for Rural Communities

Minister of State for Trade and Export Growth

MinOIA18-0165

20 NOV 2018

Gary Stephenson  
fyi-request-8746-77353065@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Gary Stephenson

## RELEASE OF OFFICIAL INFORMATION

I refer to your official information request of 14 October 2018 relating to Rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV2).

Under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) I shall quote and respond to each part of your request below

1. *What actions have been taken and what are the interim results of the investigation to ascertain how RHDV2 arrived in New Zealand given that MPI has previously stated on numerous occasions that Biosecurity measures will ensure that RHDV2 will not enter New Zealand?*

A Pathways Assessment was conducted on 13 June 2018. It concluded that the route of entry is unknown and unlikely to be determined. No extra import measures were determined to be necessary at this time.

2. *Have any people been interviewed to ascertain any illegal role in the entry? (knowing that the original virus was illegally introduced) How much time has been allocated to finding the source of entry?*

Due to the fact that reporting is voluntary, interviews have been limited to disease investigation. There have been no cases of non-compliance associated with this incursion. Any information or evidence of potentially illegal activities around the introduction of RHDV2 would be referred to The Ministry for Primary Industries' (MPI's) Compliance Group.

3. *Why are the supplies of the vaccines not made available free of charge to all those affected, some 130,000 pet rabbits, given the cost of the vaccine to MPI is negligible compared to funding given to farmers affected by a virus?*

Vaccine supply in New Zealand is primarily a commercial arrangement. MPI imported limited amounts of a vaccine to give time for rabbit owners to protect their animals. The decision to vaccinate companion animals is the owners.

4. *What efforts or investigations have taken place to eradicate the virus?*

It was determined, based on expert technical advice, that eradicating this virus is not feasible without eradicating all New Zealand wild rabbits.

5. *When will the Filavie vaccine be fully registered in New Zealand?*

To date, I have not received an application from any commercial company to register a vaccine which will give protection against the RHDV2 virus. The current situation remains where 'Filavac VHD K C+V' is available to veterinarians for use in their rabbit patients. This can be purchased from AsureQuality.

6. *Now that we have seen that Biosecurity measures currently in place have failed to stop the RHDV2 Virus, what further measures are being implemented to stop another RHDV virus given this is a serious animal welfare and biosecurity issue?*

All legal import pathways have been re-examined following the discovery of RHDV2 virus in New Zealand. These import pathways include healthy pet rabbits from Australia, laboratory rabbits, clean equipment, rabbit meat from specified countries and veterinary medicines and pet food for rabbits. No increased risk mitigation measures were deemed necessary for these import pathways. Other pathways such as house flies or biting arthropods that carry infective viral particles on inbound ships and aircraft, or the illegal smuggling of infective material also exist, and are already highly managed.

You have the right under section 28(3) of the OIA to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of my decision.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Damien O'Connor', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Hon Damien O'Connor  
**Minister for Biosecurity**