

Working with contractors for effective rabbit control



Victorian
Rabbit Action
Network

You can employ an individual or a business to undertake or support you with rabbit control on your property. Having a reliable contractor with the right skills and equipment is important for effective control, and having some knowledge yourself of how to manage rabbits and what to expect from a good management plan will give you better results.

HOW DO I FIND A RELIABLE CONTRACTOR?

Ask neighbours or other nearby land managers for their suggestions. You can also contact your local Landcare or farming group, or your local council's environment team. Professional associations such as the Vertebrate Pest Management Association Australia may also be helpful: vpmaa.org.au.

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS AND LICENSES SHOULD CONTRACTORS HAVE?

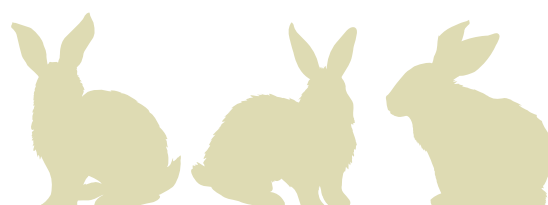
- A person or business that is paid to deliver rabbit control works involving baiting or fumigation needs to have a **Commercial Operators Licence (COL)** issued under the Agricultural and Chemical (Control of Use) Act 1992.
- They also need an **Agricultural Chemical Users Permit** with a 1080 / PAPP endorsement to undertake baiting and fumigation with sodium monofluoroacetate (1080) and aluminium phosphide (fumigant).
- To use explosives for implosion (i.e. controlled collapsing of burrows) requires a **Blasting Explosives License** approved by WorkSafe under Dangerous Goods (Explosives) Regulations 2011.

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK THE CONTRACTOR BEFORE EMPLOYING THEM?

A good contractor will be able to answer the following:

- What is their experience? Have they undertaken programs in the local area before?
- Are they authorised in Victoria to use chemicals e.g. do they hold an Agricultural Chemical Users Permit (ACUP) with a 1080 / PAPP endorsement?
- Have they completed recognised training in the use of 1080 products?
- Do they have protective clothing and equipment?
- Can they direct you to previous clients who will vouch for their work?

It is recommended if hiring a contractor, you encourage them to conduct a site inspection to obtain an accurate quote.



WHAT INFORMATION WILL THE CONTRACTOR NEED FROM ME?

Your contractor may ask:

- where and what is the damage
- location of rabbit feeding areas
- location of burrows
(see Figure 1 collecting this data with a GPS)
- location of any woody or spiny weeds
- whether the neighbours have rabbits
- rabbit numbers: small or large population
- what treatment you would like to use on your property
- where you want them to work on your property
- an indication of budget available
- location and type of wildlife on your property - such as birds of prey, kangaroos or wombats.

If you're unable to provide this information, the contractor may like to inspect the site to gather it. If they don't ask at least some of these questions, it is worth seeking additional quotes.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THE CONTRACTOR IS USING BEST PRACTICE RABBIT MANAGEMENT?

Refer to our publication BEST PRACTICE RABBIT CONTROL GUIDE or contact VRAN.

At a minimum, the contractor should be able to outline:

- a method for **initial knockdown** of rabbits (e.g. baiting)
- a method for **warren modification** (e.g. ripping, bulldozing, implosion) following initial knockdown.

They should also be able to inform you about:

- seasonally correct time to undertake control
- type of toxin (Pindone or 1080), bait types (carrots or oats)
- methods of laying bait (trail, broadcast or bait station), bait placement and the quantity of bait required
- the appropriate back-up works after warren modification (e.g. fumigation).

The contractor may also outline how to assess changes in active burrows, rabbit abundance, plant germination and recovery, spotlight counts, and before-and-after photo points.

WHAT IF THE CONTRACTOR SUGGESTS USING METHODS THAT AREN'T BEST PRACTICE?

If the contractor is relying on one or more of the following secondary methods to control rabbits, the results will be both ineffective in long-term reductions in rabbit impacts and an inefficient use of time and effort. Rabbit numbers may drop initially, but in the absence of warren modification (e.g. ripping), they will bounce back within weeks or months and then increase to similar or greater levels.

Secondary method	Result
Shooting; ferreting; long netting; dogging	Rabbit numbers drop initially but increase within weeks or months Burrows remain active Damage slows then increases again
Fumigation with no follow-up warren modification	Little change in rabbit numbers Ongoing damage Burrows reopened and active
Hand digging burrows or blocking burrows with sticks and rocks	Little change in rabbit numbers Ongoing damage Burrows reopened and active, or new burrows appear
Woody or spiny weeds not removed (e.g. boxthorn, blackberries, briars, gorse, hawthorn)	Little change in rabbit numbers Ongoing damage Burrows active underneath weeds Burrows constructed beyond weeds

HOW DO I KNOW THE CONTRACTOR'S RABBIT CONTROL WORK IS EFFECTIVE?

After your contractor has completed work on your property you should inspect the area. You can assess each method in a best practice management program using the following indicators:

Method	Indicators of success
Baiting	Rabbit numbers drop immediately by 90-98% Grazing stops Less diggings / scratching Less fresh dung Burrow entrances appear unused
Warren modification	Rabbit numbers drop immediately Burrows remain closed and inactive No breeding events (even in spring-wet summer) No young rabbits No damage on vegetation
Fumigation	Numbers drop immediately Burrows remain closed and inactive No fresh scratching or dung

You should also check that they have completed the work (e.g. treated all areas that you agreed to), cleaned up the site, and removed uneaten bait poison or carcasses (to lessen the risk to non-target species as per the product label).

HOW DO I DETECT IF RABBITS ARE RE-ESTABLISHING ON MY PROPERTY AFTER TREATMENT?

You will see evidence of active rabbit behaviour such as fresh new scratchings (freshly turned soil), fresh dung (black and shiny), reopened or new burrows created, vegetation attacked, and crops grazed (See Figure 1 & 2). In time, more burrows will be reopened or dug.



Figure 1: Damaged vegetation



Figure 2: Evidence of fresh rabbit dung

HOW CAN I KEEP TRACK OF THE WORK BEING UNDERTAKEN?

A GPS (Figure 3) can be used to record warren location and numbers, and to note the control measures required for each. The GPS data and map (Figure 4) generated from the GPS will guide contractors doing burrow modification (e.g. excavator, bulldozer or implosion). You can then use the GPS to track the works, ensuring all burrows are treated.



Figure 3: Collecting GPS data
GPS recording unique warren ID S028, number of burrows (7) and activity (O=open)

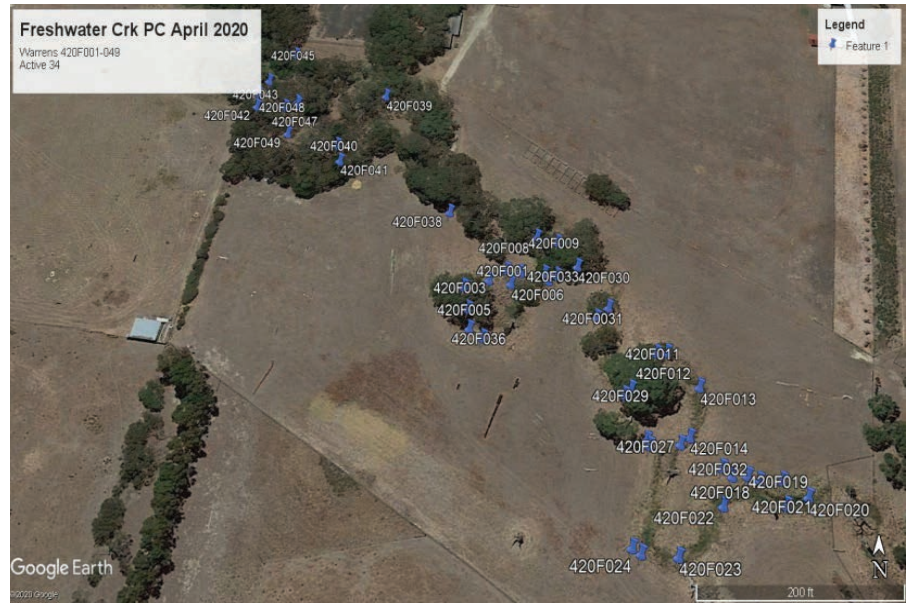


Figure 4: Mapping GPS data
Warrens (45) and burrows (52) along creek (3 ha)

WHO CAN HELP ME BETTER UNDERSTAND BEST PRACTICE RABBIT MANAGEMENT?

- The Victorian Rabbit Action Network: www.rabbitaction.com
- Your local Agriculture Victoria office: 136 186, agriculture.vic.gov.au/about-us/contact-us
- Your local council's environment officer
- Parks Victoria: 13 1963, parks.vic.gov.au/contact-us
- Your local catchment management authority: viccatchments.com.au/about-us/our-cma-regions/

More Information: www.rabbitaction.com

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