

Minister for Primary Industries and Water
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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Mr Carlo Di Falco MP
Member for Lyons

17 APR 2026

C/- Laura.Ross@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Mr Di Falco

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carlo".

In Parliament on 25 March 2026, you asked the following question on behalf of your constituents:

Residents are dealing with a severe and escalating rabbit infestation. Local sporting grounds, including community ovals, have been significantly damaged and the problem is now spreading beyond paddocks and bushland into residential areas due to the sheer number of animals. Can the minister outline what immediate and long-term measures the government will take to control the rabbit population and prevent further damage to community infrastructure and private property, and will you consider alternative approaches such as bow hunting with appropriate safeguards?

Firstly, thank you for the question on behalf of your constituents. I acknowledge the increased numbers of rabbits at this time of the year and the impact they have on surrounding environments. Rabbits are notoriously difficult to manage, and their numbers are strongly linked to environmental conditions.

European rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are an introduced pest species that, unfortunately, thrive in Tasmanian conditions. The environmental impacts of wild rabbits are significant and include competition with native species for food and shelter, changing native plant community composition, degrading land and promoting weeds, and causing the decline in numbers of many native plants and animals.

Eradication of European rabbits from Tasmania is not possible but the most effective and cost-efficient method of controlling rabbits occurs when a system of integrated pest management is used, including long-lasting methods of rabbit control such as baiting, warren-ripping, surface harbour removal, and exclusion fencing.

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus (RHDV), also known as calicivirus, is an additional tool for rabbit control. It is a highly contagious virus that causes rapid disease and death in European rabbits. The effectiveness of a calicivirus release in any given year depends on multiple factors, and it should therefore be used as part of an integrated pest management program rather than as a standalone solution.

Calicivirus has been available for use in Tasmania since 1997. Where conditions allow, Biosecurity Tasmania releases calicivirus to assist with localised rabbit control, helping to protect both agricultural and natural assets from rabbit impacts. I am advised that Biosecurity Tasmania has now commenced its 2026 calicivirus program to assist landowners in the control of rabbits.

Landowners and managers who wish to report a rabbit infestation and/or register interest for a possible calicivirus release on their property are encouraged to use the on-line form on the NRE website – www.nre.tas.gov.au

It should also be noted that while biological control tools such as myxoma virus and calicivirus have been successful in suppressing rabbit populations, these tools become less effective over time, and immunity to these agents will naturally build up in rabbit populations. I have recently written to the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to seek an update on what work is currently underway at the Commonwealth level to develop or assess the next generation of biocontrol agents, including research and anticipated timeframes. Tasmania is supportive of strategic, coordinated national investment in development of new rabbit controls by Australian national research and invasive species bodies.

The management of invasive pests, such as rabbits, is a shared responsibility. Biosecurity Tasmania recommends that landowners and managers experiencing problems with rabbits on their property develop a rabbit management plan incorporating the application of more than one control method, to the same population of rabbits, in succession. Studies show this is the most cost effective and efficient way to reduce rabbit numbers when timed at specific points in a rabbits breeding cycle. Management plans will also be more effective when working together with neighbours where rabbits occur.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania can provide support to landowners for the control of wild rabbits on their land. This includes providing advice, conducting property inspections, and, where the property is suitable and the risk to non-target species is low, offering a Pindone poisoning service. This service can be accessed via the Invasive Species Branch at 1300 368 550 or invasivespecies@nre.tas.gov.au.

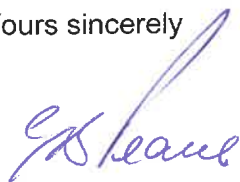
The *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* prohibit a person from using or having in their possession any weapon, including a bow and arrow, for the purpose of taking protected wildlife without an appropriate authority. Protected wildlife includes both native and non-native game species.

All potential game species, being vertebrate animals, are subject to the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* that requires that a hunting activity must be done in a 'usual and reasonable manner and without causing excess suffering'. If not the provisions of the Act relating to cruelty to animals, aggravated cruelty and baiting and shooting limitations would apply. Penalties for failing to adhere to the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* are significant.

Any consideration of alternative approaches to managing rabbits would therefore need to consider a range of factors including animal welfare concerns, community safety and potential to have a measurable impact on rabbit numbers.

Thank you again for raising this matter on behalf of your constituents.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G Pearce', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Hon Gavin Pearce MP
Minister for Primary Industries and Water