



## Rabbit legislation in Australia

**Introduction:** Wild European rabbits are one of Australia's most widely distributed and abundant pest animal species. They cause severe damage to the natural environment as well as to agricultural production areas. Controlling rabbits is often difficult because of the large areas that need to be treated, issues with coordination of broadscale control programs and the costs involved. On a national scale, rabbit legislation is important in allowing state and federal governments to facilitate integrated management of the rabbit problem.

Competition with native animal species and land degradation by feral rabbits are listed as a key threatening process under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). With the help of the states and territories, the Australian Government has also developed the *Threat Abatement Plan for Competition and Land Degradation by Feral Rabbits* (TAP)<sup>1</sup>. This plan lists 156 threatened species that can be adversely affected by rabbits and provides a framework to make the best possible use of the resources available for wild rabbit management.

“ Rabbit control is a major responsibility for land managers ”

**Legislative framework:** Rabbits are defined as a pest animal in all Australian states and territories. Private and public landowners are required to take reasonable actions to control rabbits on their land. 'Control' is defined as taking action to minimise the species' impact and limit its spread. Landowners need to note that legislation for rabbit management can vary between different states and can change when Acts are amended. A summary of state and territory legislation on rabbit management is shown in Table 1 (see [www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au) for complete copies).

**Control options and the law:** The most common rabbit control options aim to eliminate rabbits using poisons, fumigants or other specialised methods (eg warren ripping, shooting or trapping)<sup>2</sup>. Rabbit control techniques must be humane and comply with animal welfare legislation. There are guidelines available ([codes of practice](#) and [standard operating procedures](#)<sup>3</sup>) to help ensure control is humane, target-specific, cost-effective and safe for operators and the public. Control operations must also comply with related laws, such as Work Health and Safety, and nature conservation Acts (eg clearing of native vegetation or disturbance of significant sites when warren ripping). Penalties may apply for damage to environmental values, including sites of Aboriginal or archaeological significance.



Image: NSW DPI

**Poisoning or fumigating:** Many of the poison and chemical products used to control rabbits are subject to restricted supply (ie high-risk chemicals such as 1080), restricted use, or both. Restricted supply substances are determined by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) and have special regulations to restrict their availability, possession, storage and use. Restricted-use chemicals are agricultural chemical products (eg fumigants containing methyl bromide or aluminium phosphide) that are Schedule 7 dangerous poisons<sup>4</sup> and contain dangerous chemicals. Permits to use these products may be required in some states.

**Table 1. Summary of state and territory legislation on rabbit management**

State	Legislation	Declared pest animal	Must be controlled	Can keep domestic breeds as pets	Farmed rabbits allowed
ACT	<a href="#">Pest Plants and Animals Act 2005</a>	✓	✓	✓	✓
NSW	<a href="#">Rural Lands Protection Act 1998 (RLP Act)</a> , <a href="#">Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002</a>	✓*	✓	✓	✓
NT	<a href="#">Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2006</a>	✓	✓	✓	X
Qld	<a href="#">Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002</a>	✓	✓	X	X
SA	<a href="#">Natural Resources Management Act 2004</a>	✓	✓	✓**	✓
Tas	<a href="#">Vermin Control Act 2000</a>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vic	<a href="#">Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</a>	✓	✓	✓	✓
WA	<a href="#">Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976</a>	✓	✓	✓	✓

\* Rabbits living in the wild are declared “game animals” for the purpose of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002.

\*\* Except on offshore islands.

All chemicals need to be used carefully, in accordance with the label directions and the relevant legislation. Acts and regulations can change regularly so it is important to check online at [www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au) for the most up-to-date version. There are heavy penalties for misuse and if non-target species are affected (on purpose or by mistake), the penalties are high. These can include heavy fines and, in some cases, even imprisonment.

**Shooting, trapping and hunting:** Recreational hunting and shooting in Australia is regulated separately by each state government. This has led to a variety of regulations and laws as well as different fees, charges and licence requirements, depending on the method to be used (eg firearms, dogs, ferrets) and the location (public or private land)<sup>5</sup>. Generally, rabbits may be hunted at any time provided that hunters comply with local laws and have the appropriate licence and permission. Those wishing to shoot or hunt rabbits on private or public land need to contact the relevant authority in that area before proceeding. Steel jaw traps are prohibited in most states, as they are inhumane and can catch animals other than rabbits. However, live capture cage traps and leg-hold (soft-jaw or padded) traps can still be used in some jurisdictions. Trappers are advised to consult the latest version of the relevant legislation in each state, as laws can change regularly. Captured rabbits must be killed humanely

(eg by shooting or cervical fracture). Non-target animals must be released unharmed at the site of capture. A summary of state and territory legislation governing rabbit control is available at [www.feral.org.au/pestsmart/rabbits](http://www.feral.org.au/pestsmart/rabbits).

### Further information:

1. Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA, 2008). [Threat Abatement Plan for Competition and Land Degredation by Rabbits](#). DEWHA, Canberra.
2. Williams K, Parer I, Coman B, Burley J, Braysher M (1995). [Managing Vertebrate Pests: Rabbits](#). Bureau of Resource Sciences and CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
3. Sharp T and Saunders G (2004). [Model Code of Practice for the Humane Control of Rabbits and Standard Operating Procedures for the Humane Capture, Handling or Destruction of Rabbits in Australia](#). Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra.
4. Australian Government Department of Health and Aging Therapeutic Goods Administration (2011). Australian State and Territory Regulatory Controls on Schedule 7 Poisons. <http://www.tga.gov.au/industry/scheduling-st-schedule7.htm>
5. Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (2011). State and Territory Hunting Regulations. <http://www.ssa.org.au/hunting/state-and-territory-hunting-regulations.html>