



Leschenault
BIOSECURITY GROUP INC.

RHDV1-K5 RABBIT CONTROL PROGRAM 2019-2020

REPORT PROJECT

Project Report

RHDV1-K5 Rabbit Control Program 2019-2020

RHDV1-K5 (K5) is a naturally occurring Korean variant of the Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV). It was first released Australia-wide in 2017 with mixed results, however preliminary analysis showed an observed reduction of up to 36% in rabbit numbers at the release sites. Leschenault Biosecurity Group (LBG) began this program to assist landholders to obtain and release this virus, as a tool to control local rabbit populations.

The supply and use of K5 in WA to authorised users was enabled under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Regulations-Amendment 2017*. Under the regulations, anyone who will be handling and mixing the liquid suspension virus must complete on-line training to become authorised users of RHDV. This, along with the high cost of the virus vials and postage fees, makes it difficult for independent landowners to facilitate a release on their own. LBG can therefore assist landowners by purchasing the virus in bulk, subsidising the cost, and either laying the oats for the land holder, or teaching them how to do so. It is also beneficial to conduct coordinated, landscape scale release of rabbit biological control viruses, as this will maximise effectiveness and produce greater results than patchy, individual landholder releases.

Landowners need to complete at least 3 nights of pre-feeding to ascertain whether the rabbits will consume the oats. Once a feeding pattern is established, the oats are then inoculated with the virus and administered to the rabbits. Late Spring and Autumn are ideal conditions for deliberate releases of RHDV1 K5, when insect activity is high, but when there are also a low proportion of very young rabbits present. Thus, the project ran from October 2019 to April 2020, with weather dependant gaps. There was also a short break in releases due to restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In previous years, Leschenault Biosecurity Group (LBG) has run this program in a reduced form. However, in 2019 LBG became a fully funded Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG) thus, was able to undertake the program in a more strategic and supported manner.

For this project, LBG engaged Project Officer Julie Chapman to handle the administrative aspect of the project, and Terry Mundy as a contractor to undertake the field aspect of the program.

Landholders were engaged via social media, LBG website, LBG newsletter, local newspapers, radio, a story on ABC Southwest News, LBG workshops and word of mouth.

Landholders contacted LBG and their details were recorded. Terry Mundy also generated a large amount involvement by encouraging registered landholders to include their friends and neighbours. Local community groups were also engaged to organise community wide releases.

Honourable mentions to the Marshall Road Mob and the Yabberup Community.



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The Numbers

Initial interest in the project was high, with continued contact from landholders throughout the entirety of the project. Expressions of Interest were boosted specifically after radio interviews went to air and newspaper articles were printed. Three workshops were also held with excellent attendance. Many landholders were contacted directly by Terry using details from previous years. These numbers are not recognised in the Initial Expressions of Interest.

Over 70 people attend the workshops, with over 90 people registering their interest for the program.

Unfortunately, adequate detail was not collected from each release site to provide exact numbers on K5 release data. In some cases, only the organising landholders details were recorded when they were distributing the inoculated oats to neighbours.

Over 85 private properties were visited by LBG with an approximate total of 457 release sites. Around 250kg of inoculated oats were laid at these release sites.

It is important to note that many properties had a second release.

All Shires within the operational area were represented in the project, as well as several LGA's, DBCA, and other significant stakeholders.

Excellent representation was seen by landholders in the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup (50+), with Lower numbers in Shire of Capel (25+) and Shire of Dardanup (10+).

It should also be recorded that Terry noted the presence of the 'rouge' Calicivirus RHDV2 in 10 locations throughout this program (one rabbit sent to be tested and confirmed as RHDV2, one rabbit found 300m from release site tested and confirmed as K5), as well as one location where myxomatosis appeared present. There was no need to release K5 in these locations.

Costs

This project included dedicated hours from the three staff members of LBG, as well as Terry as vertebrate pest contractor. Costs included consumables such as oats, cost of the workshop and virus vials (plus freight).

The total cost of the project was approximately \$24 000.00



Notes for next time:

It was evident during this project that the best results were achieved when several neighbouring properties or community groups banded together to release the virus simultaneously across their small locales. This method is also more effective for LBG as these groups can manage the release internally thus are less reliant on LBG resources. One of LBG's aims is to empower landowners to take action independently, and this can be achieved here. This aspect of the project should be encouraged.

It is also worthy to note that many properties did not follow up K5 release with any other form of rabbit management. Integrated management is key to pest control and landowners need to be reminded that a K5 release will not yield long term management solutions. Future programs may need to focus on assisting landholders with a multi-faceted approach.

It is also evident that for future projects more care should be taken to collect accurate data from every release site, so that precise numbers are available for correct reporting. This includes landholder information and release information, as well as tracking staff hours dedicated to the project.

Footnotes following vertebrate pest sub-committee meeting 08/06/2020

- The sub-committee finds it important to note the fiscal volunteer contribution to this project. Terry Mundy contributed time voluntarily between July-October, as well as not charging LBG for time spent communicating with landowners on the phone, which was frequent and generally out of office hours. Other members of the board also contributed volunteer hours in the organisational stage of this project.
- It is also noted that Terry used his own mobile phone and absorbed these communication costs as a volunteer contribution to LBG. In future years LBG may need to purchase a mobile phone and plan to accommodate this, or hourly rate to a contractor would be increased.

Report prepared by LBG Project Officer Julie Chapman 10/05/20 and updated 25/06/20