



Strategic Plan

2025 – 2029

**Over 130 years of protecting Queensland's economy and environment
from the impacts of rabbits**

Foreword

The Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB) has been in existence in one form or another for over 130 years. Our role in protecting Queensland's agricultural productivity and environmental values is as important today as it was in the 1890s.

So much of our productive and natural landscapes have changed since then, but the impacts of rabbits, or the threat of their resurgence has remained constant. The rabbit fence has stood for 120 years, creating a physical and strategic barrier preventing the establishment of rabbits in Queensland at levels seen in the southern States. The introduction of biological controls have seen plague-like rabbit populations crash, only to once again flourish thanks to the unique ecology of the rabbit and its ability to breed, adapt and survive. We have learnt that the most effective way to control rabbits is to destroy their warrens and remove their harbour. There is no silver bullet and we continue to educate and encourage land managers to adopt these best practice methods.

We know from scientific research that the fence continues to work and we know biological controls are vitally important. Similarly, a regulatory compliance framework that places responsibility on all land managers to control wild rabbits on their land, and that prohibits the ownership of pet rabbits is critical.

These three factors hold the key to ensuring the impacts of rabbits are suppressed in the DDMRB area and beyond in Queensland.

1. The rabbit fence must be maintained in a rabbit proof condition, in its current extent, noting its importance where rabbit pressure is high and its strategic value as an insurance policy where rabbit pressure is currently low, but would see a resurgence should any or all of these other factors be allowed to decline.
2. Continued funding into biological control research must be assured. History tells us that bio-controls can work extremely well, but also that rabbits have the capacity to overcome them.
3. Continued support from all levels of government is needed to ensure a contemporary regulatory compliance framework is in place. Land managers, regardless of the tenure of their land must be held to account and assisted to remove rabbits where they exist. This must be backed by best practice control measures. The risks posed by ownership of pet rabbits must be acknowledged and countered by unwavering support for the prohibition on pet rabbit ownership.

Like the Boards that have gone before us, we are committed to ensuring the impacts of rabbits in Southern Queensland and beyond are kept to a minimum and that we do so through the effective delivery of operational and strategic plans. We acknowledge the support of our partner local governments and strive to provide value for money in our operations and transparency and collaboration in our approach. The rabbit is arguably Australia's most damaging invasive pest and effective partnerships are needed to continue to successfully manage its impacts.

Cr Duncan McInnes OAM



Chair

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Introduction

History of Rabbits

The European Rabbit arrived in Australia with the first fleet in 1788 and extensive feral populations had established in Tasmania by 1827. Twenty-four rabbits arrived on mainland Australia in 1859 and by 1866 they had become a significant problem for landholders in Victoria and South Australia. By 1900 rabbits had spread to Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The rate of advance varied from 10 to 15 kilometres per year, but deliberate releases assisted the rapid spread of rabbits to all states in Australia. The spread of rabbits throughout Australia was the fastest rate of any colonising mammal anywhere in the world.

The Threat

Rabbits cost the Australian economy and environment (natural and built) \$2 billion annually (Bradshaw et al, 2021). They compete with native animals, destroy the landscape, cause erosion by preventing the regeneration of native vegetation, reduce pasture availability for livestock, and impact on predator numbers. Therefore rabbits pose a constant threat to the sustainability of our natural resources and the economic viability of highly productive agricultural land. Rabbits have been listed by the Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage as a “key threatening process”.

Creation of the Darling Downs–Moreton Rabbit Board

When rabbits first reached Queensland from the southern States in the 1880s, a fence was quickly constructed along the border in an attempt to keep them out. Unfortunately, the rabbits had already invaded some districts before the fence was complete. Some of the district rabbit boards that followed had inadequate financial and technical resources to cope with the problem.

In 1930, all existing rabbit boards were abolished except for Leichhardt, Darling Downs and Moreton. In 1963 the Leichhardt Rabbit Board closed and the Darling Downs Rabbit Board took over their 80 km fence. In 1964, the two remaining boards merged to become the Darling Downs–Moreton Rabbit Board.

Our Role

The Darling Downs–Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB) is an Invasive Animal Board established under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and is responsible for maintaining managing European rabbits in the **operational area** (Figure 2).

The DDMRB employs 15 staff to provide a rabbit control and compliance service to 8 local governments and their rate payers within the 28,000 km² rabbit district (the board’s operational area) of southern Queensland. The delivery of this service is achieved through the maintenance and upgrade of the 555km rabbit-proof fence, and the provision of expertise and technical information to assist landholders to control rabbits on their land.

The DDMRB is a statutory body of the Queensland Government under the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries. The DDMRB’s operations are funded by the eight local governments that comprise the DDMRB operational area.

The DDMRB area is a significant part of Australia encompassing a substantially sized, highly productive agricultural area that is ideal for rabbits, but has not yet suffered the impact of large numbers of rabbits. The value of horticultural and cereal crop production in the area exceeds one billion dollars per annum. Outside the DDMRB area, plants and animals experienced incredibly high grazing pressure from rabbits particularly up until myxomatosis arrived.

Fox and feral cat numbers are generally highest where there are rabbits and these introduced predators have caused considerable damage to native small mammal populations. By keeping rabbits out, the DDMRB has probably protected native animals from introduced predators. We suspect there are more healthy populations of native mammals in the DDMRB area, and to the north east of the area, because rabbits have been prevented from establishing properly.

The value to agriculture of keeping rabbits out is considerable and has been estimated to be many millions of dollars per year. Although rabbit infestations are discovered within the DDMRB area they have not been allowed to properly establish large warren systems. Without large warren systems in Queensland, rabbit populations are unlikely to survive.

DDMRB's role can be considered one of *prevention*, as it relates to the economics of the biosecurity invasion curve (Figure 1). The extent to which rabbits are established in Queensland is very low when compared to their potential distribution. Current impacts are therefore very low when compared to the impacts that would be felt should rabbits establish in Queensland to potential levels. The Centre of Excellence for Biosecurity Risk Analysis contends that biosecurity investment should be guided by economic return (Kompas, 2023). The return on investment in preventative rabbit control is high.

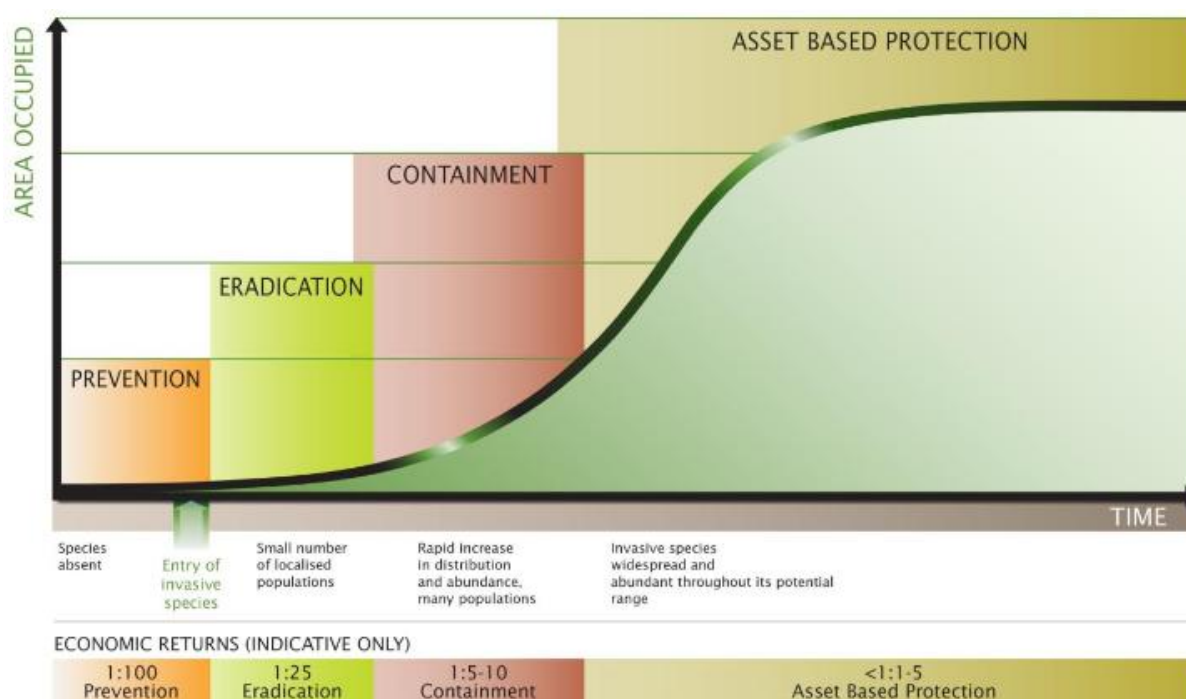


Figure 1 Biosecurity Invasion Curve

Powers and responsibilities

Rabbits are restricted animals (Categories 3, 4, 5 and 6) under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*.

The Act, and the *Biosecurity Regulation 2016* (the Regulation), provides powers for the management of declared pests in Queensland. Specific provisions include powers for the DDMRB to maintain the rabbit fence, and to appoint authorised persons who in turn have the powers to inspect land, seize declared pests, and require landholders to undertake rabbit control.

Linkages

This plan is consistent with:

- *Biosecurity Act 2014* and the *Biosecurity Regulation 2016*
- *Human Rights Act 2019* – we respect, protect and promote human rights in everything we do
- Queensland Biosecurity Strategy
- Queensland Pest Animal Strategy
- Queensland Rabbit Control Strategy
- National Threat Abatement Plan for Rabbits

- Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032

Key Stakeholders

- Biosecurity Queensland (BQ), Department of Primary Industries (DPI)
- Local governments (within and adjoining the DDMRB area)
- Landholders – adjoining, and within protected area
- Regional NRM bodies
- Queensland and NSW national parks and forestry services, other agencies
- Centre for Invasive Species Solutions
- Foundation for Rabbit-Free Australia
- Universities and research agencies
- Industry organisations
- Community groups

Core Principles

- DDMRB is in the business of prevention; the biosecurity approach with the greatest economic return.
- Wild or domestic European rabbits remain a major threat to the Australian economy and environment. Continued enforcement of compliance with legislation requiring their removal from land, regardless of tenure, and their ownership as pets is critical.
- The DDMRB's operational area is the premier agricultural region in Queensland and also contains diverse and unique biodiversity and natural areas.
- The ongoing commitment of DDMRB, its partners and other stakeholders is essential to protecting southern Queensland and beyond from the impacts of rabbits. This includes continued funding for research into biological controls.
- The rabbit fence remains a vital asset in providing a physical barrier to the incursion of rabbits into south east Queensland and beyond. It is also an important strategic barrier to wild dogs, other invasive animals, exotic animal disease outbreaks and fire management.
- The DDMRB recognises that funding is provided by ratepayers through their local governments and as such we strive to provide value for money in our operations.
- The DDMRB recognises the strategic value in partnerships and seeks to establish and build on relationships with organisations where they will contribute to the achievement of our objectives.
- The DDMRB will respect, protect and promote human rights in its decision-making and actions.
- The DDMRB is committed to environmentally sustainable practices and has adopted an Environmental Sustainability Policy.

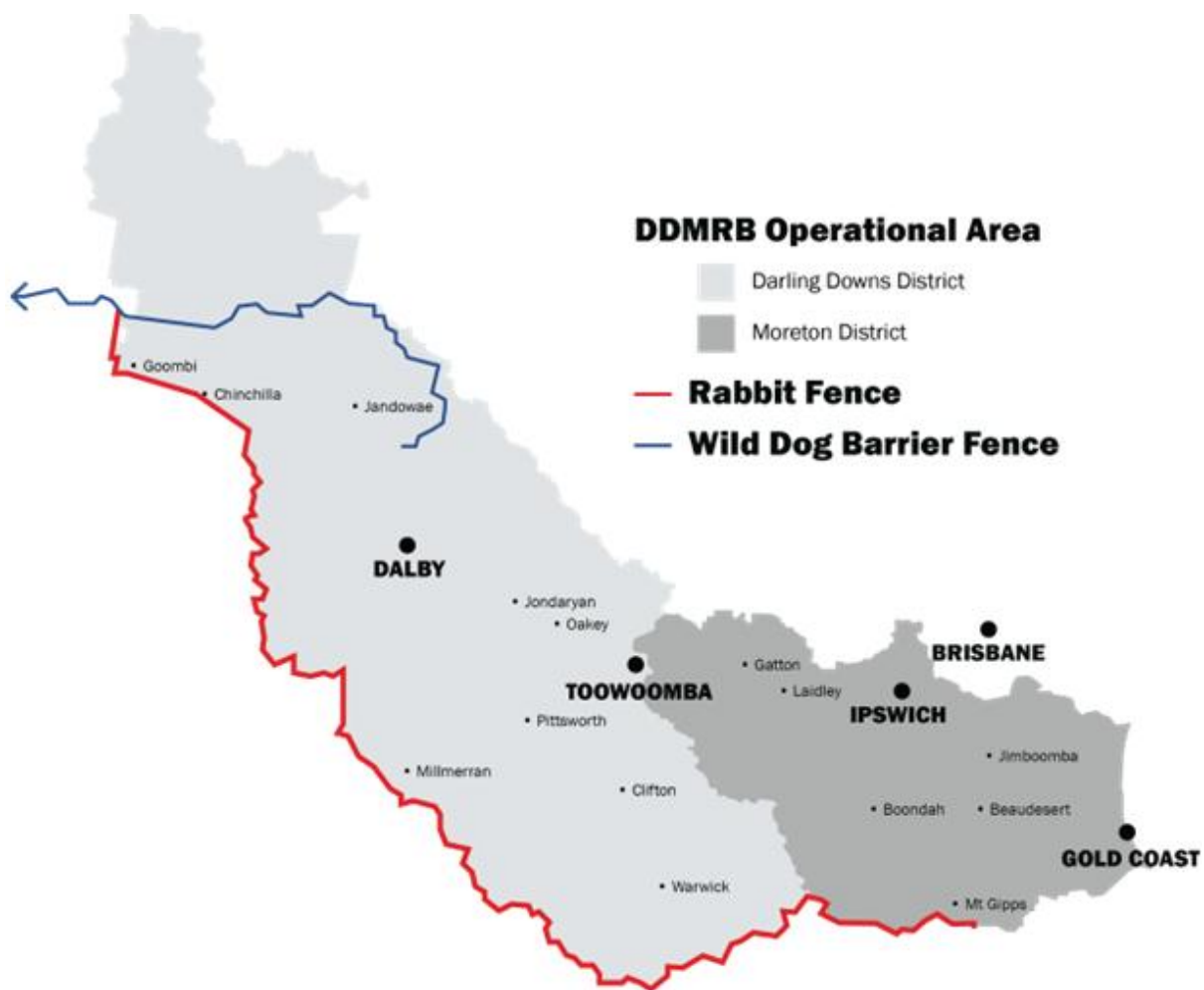


Figure 2 - DDMRB Fence & Operational Area

Vision

Enabling our productive and natural landscapes and our residential and recreational spaces to be free from the impacts of rabbits.

Mission

To control the impacts of rabbits by promoting the adoption of best practice control measures, efficiently managing our assets, and effectively communicating with our stakeholders.

Agency purpose

The DDMRB plays a strategic role in reducing the spread of rabbits into and within Queensland by maintaining the rabbit fence and educating and assisting land managers to remove rabbits from their land.

Agency objectives

1. To successfully suppress the economic and environmental impacts of rabbits
2. Communicate the value of best practice rabbit control that encourages consistent support from landholders, local government and other stakeholders
3. To maintain the infrastructure which has successfully mitigated the environmental and economic impact of rabbits for over 130 years

Queensland Government's objectives for the community

The DDMRB supports the Government's objectives for the community:



- The day-to-day work of DDMRB staff directly supports Queensland agriculture by safeguarding high value production areas from the impacts of rabbits.
- DDMRB supports regional communities by maintaining its workforce in regional centres and small towns, as well as aspiring to exceed a 90% local spend rate.

A plan for Queensland's future



Planning for Queensland's future, by building the roads and infrastructure needed for a growing population – including a safer Bruce Highway, putting more teachers in safer schools and preparing young Queenslanders for the future, conserving our pristine environment that draws visitors from across the world, improving water security, and delivering a world-class Olympic and Paralympic Games that leaves a positive legacy for Queenslanders .

- The work of the DDMRB directly contributes to biodiversity protection; rabbits impact upon 322 threatened native species.

Timeframe

This plan has a four year timeframe; from 2025 to 2029. It is reviewed annually, with a comprehensive review to be undertaken at least every four years. A comprehensive review was undertaken in 2025.

Relationship with other plans

The strategic plan guides the actions and performance indicators of the organisation in the annual operational plan. These actions align with the strategic themes and actions in the strategic plan and largely serve to operationalise the strategic plan. There are a number of strategic actions listed in **Table 1** that do not have corresponding actions listed in the operational plan, as these are tenets of good governance. Such strategic actions have their own performance indicators listed.

Strategies

Strategic Themes	Strategic Action Focus Areas	Performance Indicators
Governance	Leadership	- Communication channels, including regular meetings are in place to enable staff (and Directors) to be informed and have opportunity for input. - The Board's strategic importance is advocated to all levels of government and other stakeholders in building relationships through participation at relevant forums as opportunities arise. - Advocate for continued rabbit biocontrol research funding. - Annual performance reviews reveal high job satisfaction levels among staff.
	Risk management	Risks and strategies for their mitigation are identified and regularly reviewed.
	Policy & planning	- The policy suite is reviewed annually and as required, in response to changing legislation, risk and other relevant factors. - Budget, operational plan and strategic plan are regularly reviewed for achievement of performance indicators. - Strategic, collaborative rabbit control is promoted via participation in other agencies' planning processes. - Maintain data on the extent of rabbits within and beyond the DDMRB operational area, and the beneficiaries of our work.
	Accountability	- Annual reporting and audit requirements met. - Emerging issues communicated to the Board and included in the risk management framework.
	Workforce capability	- Staffing structure meets operational requirements and provides for succession in the context of an aging workforce. - Position descriptions align with roles and responsibilities and are regularly reviewed. - Annual staff performance review process implemented. - Training needs identified and actioned.
	Partnerships	Operational Plan Actions 1 & 2
Asset Management	Fence maintenance	Operational Plan Actions 3, 5, 6 & 7
	Fence renewal	
	Resourcing	
Compliance	Control	Operational Plan Actions 1, 9 & 10
	Data	
	Communication	

Table 1 - Strategies 2025-29

Risks and Opportunities

Risk management is an integral part of our operations and strategic focus and is a key consideration in the planning and implementation of our business. Our Risk Register (**Appendix 2**) is reviewed at each Board meeting, with strategies continuously refined to better mitigate risk and identify opportunities.

Appendix 1

Operational Plan 2026-2027

Action	Responsibility	KPI	Strategic Plan Link
1. Improve Local Government (& other stakeholder) engagement	CEO	1.1 Quarterly Communiques provided to partner LGs 1.2 Draft budget, strategic & operational plans provided for partner LG comment 1.3 Collect data on the extent of rabbits in areas adjoining the DDMRB operational area 1.4 Implement Communications Strategy	Governance
2. Identify external funding opportunities	CEO	2.1 Funding sources investigated to achieve operational and strategic objectives	
3. Risk mitigation	CEO	3.1 Risk register reviewed at each Board meeting	
4. Protecting human rights	CEO	4.1 Continue to review our policies, practices and service delivery to ensure our decisions and actions are compatible with human rights. We will ensure that human rights are central to everything we do.	
5. Maintain fence in rabbit proof condition	Inspector	5.1 Audit shows fence is maintained at >98% rabbit proof condition	Asset Management
6. Fence renewal and maintenance	Inspector	6.1 Fence condition data maintained in Fulcrum database 6.2 100% of fence = or > FAIR condition	
7. Asset management	CEO & Inspector	7.1 Infrastructure and plant replacement program implemented 7.2 Biannual grid audit completed	
8. Implement housing strategy	CEO	8.1 Investigate tenure options for reserve lands held in trust 8.2 Install energy and water saving measures in line with Environmental Sustainability Policy	
9. Improve control of rabbits	CEO, Inspector & Compliance Coordinators Compliance Coordinators	9.1 Compliance strategy, incl. fee for service implemented, in collaboration with partner LGs 9.2 Provide control advice for 10 properties per month 9.3 5 breeding sites cleared of rabbits per month 9.4 Pet rabbit reports dealt with within 5 working days 9.5 Incorporate the use of emerging technologies (e.g. thermal imaging equipped drones), where proven, to improve rabbit detection and fence monitoring	Compliance
10. Maintain rabbit distribution and abundance data	Compliance Coordinators	10.1 100 property inspections per month 10.2 Compliance data maintained in Fulcrum database 10.3 Establish automated monitoring systems via deployment of remote cameras network and AI platforms	

Appendix 2

Risk Register

	Risk	Date Added	Rating	Treatment	Responsibility
1	Failure to meet fiduciary responsibilities resulting in insolvent trading	January 2025	HIGH	Reports to each Board meeting on how/when responsibilities discharged.	CEO
2	Change in government policy results in DDMRB being wound up	January 2025	HIGH	Communicate to all levels of government (& all stakeholders) DDMRB's critical role in suppressing the impacts of rabbits, supported by scientific research. Maintain sufficient finances to meet obligations in the event DDMRB is wound up.	CEO, Board
3	Rabbit populations and impacts increase due to one or more of: - reduced efficacy of existing bio-controls - rabbit barrier fence failure - lack of effective compliance tools	Elevated to 'high' risk January 2026 due to escalating rabbit populations nationally, linked to decreased biocontrol efficacy	HIGH	Advocate for the need for continued research into biological controls. Robust asset management is resourced and implemented. Contemporary compliance strategy developed and implemented collaboratively with partner local governments.	CEO
4	Impacts from continued Middle East conflict result in prohibitive fuel and related costs hampering operations.	March 2026	HIGH	Implement budgetary measures to offset rising costs. Incorporate fuel saving measures into BAU operations where possible and plan for contingency measures.	CEO

Note: numerous risks were retired upon review in January 2026, as risk treatments and routine management practices have been adopted for their mitigation.

Risk Matrix					
Likelihood	Consequences				
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Critical
Rare	LOW - consider accepting the risk, or routine management	LOW - consider accepting the risk, or routine management	LOW - consider accepting the risk, or routine management	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	HIGH - quarterly senior management review
Unlikely	LOW - consider accepting the risk, or routine management	LOW - consider accepting the risk, or routine management	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	HIGH - quarterly senior management review
Possible	LOW - consider accepting the risk, or routine management	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	HIGH - quarterly senior management review	HIGH - quarterly senior management review
Likely	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	HIGH - quarterly senior management review	HIGH - quarterly senior management review	EXTREME - monthly senior management review
Almost Certain	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	MEDIUM - specify responsibility and action	HIGH - quarterly senior management review	EXTREME - monthly senior management review	EXTREME - monthly senior management review