

Keeping domestic rabbits

Your legal obligations

Fact sheet



Rabbits make good pets provided they are housed and cared for appropriately. There are many domestic breeds of rabbits available in South Australia varying in size, colour and temperament. However, all breeds share one thing in common - they are related to wild rabbits.

Cute but destructive

Rabbits may look harmless, but let loose, they can cause havoc on our environment. Like their wild cousins, escaped domestic rabbits are capable of damaging and destroying a wide range of plants in gardens and natural bushlands.

In addition, their burrowing can lead to erosion problems and cause structural damage to buildings if they burrow underneath them.

Rabbits breed quickly, so a small number of escaped rabbits causing a small amount of damage can become a large number of rabbits causing a lot of damage in a relatively short time.

Keep your rabbit captive – the law insists on it

To protect the environment from the effects of escaped domestic rabbits the Government of South Australia has given domestic rabbits declaration status under the ***Landscape South Australia Act 2019***.

This means that owners of domestic rabbits and owners or occupiers of land where domestic rabbits are kept have certain legal obligations including:

- Domestic breeds of rabbits must be housed in a well-constructed cage or pen that is escape proof.
- Rabbits must NOT be allowed to roam at large on the property.
- Rabbits must NOT be wilfully or negligently released from captivity.

Any instructions relating to the keeping of domestic rabbits, given by an officer authorised under the ***Landscape South Australia Act 2019*** must be complied with.

Wild rabbits are prohibited from being kept in any situation.

Caging your rabbit

Rabbits generally escape by digging or gnawing their way out. Wire cages work well, but ensure that the cage has an area of solid floor for the rabbit's comfort.

If you are building an outdoor pen, dig the wire at least 30cm into the ground and bend it back in the direction of the cage.

Ideally, a pet rabbit's cage should be at least two metres long to allow for a few good hops in one direction and at least 75cm tall to allow the rabbit to sit in 'lookout' posture.

For more information about rabbit cages and caring for your pet visit the RSPCA website: www.rspca.org.au

Consider desexing your rabbit. In addition to preventing unwanted litters, desexed male rabbits can be less aggressive.

How can I protect my pet rabbit against RHDV (CALICI)?

Rabbit owners should ensure their rabbits are vaccinated with Cylap® vaccine to protect against RHDV. Veterinarians should follow current Australian Veterinary Association guidelines to maximise vaccine protection. However, as Cylap® does not fully protect against all strains of RHDV, additional measures must be taken to reduce the risk of infection.

Reducing the risk of RHDV infection

RHDV can remain in the environment for an extended period and can be transmitted on objects and via some insects. The following precautions can reduce the risk of infection:

Keep your pet rabbit indoors.

- Rabbit-proof your backyard to prevent access by wild rabbits.
- Regularly decontaminate equipment and materials including cages, hutches, bowls etc, with either 10% bleach or 10% sodium hydroxide
- Limit contact between and handling of unfamiliar pet rabbits.
- Decontaminate hands, shoes and clothing after handling other than your own rabbits.
- Control fleas.
- Control insects (especially flies) as much as possible both indoors and outdoors.
- Remove uneaten food on a daily basis.

Further information

Rabbit control information is available through the Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board.

Mount Barker Office: Cnr Mann & Walker streets, Mount Barker, 5251 (08) 8391 7500

Willunga Office: 5 Aldinga Road, Willunga, 5172

Email: hf.landscapeboard@sa.gov.au



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