



Hon Bill Byrne MP
Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and
Minister for Sport and Racing

Reference: CTS 06498/15

14 APR 2015

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Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Services
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 30 March 2015 enclosing a copy of Petition No. 2281-14 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, regarding the present restrictions on the keeping of domestic rabbits as pets.

European rabbits (domestic and wild breeds) (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are declared Class 2 pest animals under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* and the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Regulation 2003*. Under this legislation, it is an offence to keep a Class 2 pest animal without a declared pest permit.

Declared pest permits are permissible for a small number of restricted activities only. However, this does not include, or allow for the purposes of the keeping of rabbits as pets.

The keeping of rabbits as pets is prohibited in Queensland because Queensland is the only State to maintain an area relatively free of rabbits, due to the rabbit fence in South East Queensland and the actions of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board to assist landholders in the area manage emerging rabbit populations.

A decision to maintain a ban on rabbits for other than specified purposes was made after extensive community consultation in 2002-2003 as part of an assessment under National Competition Policy on regulating domestic rabbits.

At that time many stakeholders such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), AgForce, Queensland Farmers' Federation, conservation groups and the Local Government Association of Queensland were highly supportive of the prohibition continuing. Feedback suggests that it is unlikely that stakeholder views have changed significantly.

Wild rabbits cause extensive damage to our cropping and grazing lands and have severe environmental effects including contributing to the extinction of native mammals.

Pet rabbits released into the environment have the potential to form new wild populations within the rabbit-free areas. Officers of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) advise that as an example, significant proportions of feral rabbit populations in areas around Sydney and Tweed Heads are caused by released or escaped domestic rabbits.

It is often suggested that rabbits should be allowed as pets if they have been desexed and registered. However, there are practical obstacles to the mandatory desexing of privately owned animals, and trials on other species elsewhere have not demonstrated that it is effective. Mandatory desexing is also difficult to enforce and costly to implement.

If you require any further information regarding this matter, please contact Ms Carmel Kerwick, Senior Biosecurity Officer of DAF on telephone 07 3087 8068 or email carmel.kerwick@daf.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



The Honourable Bill Byrne MP
Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and
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Member for Rockhampton