



Heidi Kleinert
Executive Officer, Victorian Rabbit Action Network



Damien Jackson
Parks Victoria



Geral Leach
Chair, Victorian Rabbit Action Network



Jackson Chatfield
Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning



Uncle Norm
Aboriginal Elder



Kaye Rodden
Victorian Rabbit Action Network



WEEDS AND RABBITS PROJECT

Partnerships Against Pests



We're at Ned's Corner today for the Victorian Rabbit Action Network Cultural Heritage Awareness Workshop. This event brings people together to talk about rabbit management and cultural heritage, and how you do rabbit management and culture in sensitive areas. It's really important to bring everyone together to share learnings, hear stories and hear ideas, and see how things are done in these sensitive landscapes.



Rabbits are one of their biggest issues up in the northwest, and pretty much right along the Mallee corridor, and I'd say right across the state, because they are a burrowing creature, they burrow down and they burrow into the areas that are soft out of the floodways and unfortunately they do dig into ancestral remains, because that's where the old people buried their dead back in the day, and they are affecting those sites quite significantly up in this landscape.



This is a very special place here in the Mallee, because it's not just about rabbits, or even about managing those rabbits, it's recognizing that there are culturally sensitive issues in the landscape.



In the landscapes in the Mallee, there is a lot of Aboriginal burial sites and the damage the rabbits are doing through the burrowing is actually resurfacing some of these remains, so what we've seen today was how Parks Victoria managed these sensitive areas, some of the methods they do to look after cultural heritage.



Rabbits in reserve lands are a very big problem, what the rabbits are doing in this country is they are digging up the skeletal remains of our ancestors and we have to go and rebury them again.



Whenever people go to these sites, and they go to look at their uncle's or great-great-grandfather, and they seem to be dug out of the ground by rabbits, that's very disturbing, and when you can't do anything about it, and you've got to walk away, there's no closure.



We love the way that I've seen Jack ____ and Jay Bell, and they're around the boys when they do it.



When you're dealing with rabbits putting ancestors out, it can be emotional. But when we cover them back up and deal with the rabbits, there's a closure for us and for the traditional owners.



It's really important that we learn as much as we possibly can about how we can support them, and doing it in a culturally-sensitive way.



What we wanna do is a smoke ceremony, we do it because we cleanse our body through our ancestors, when we cleanse our body we're purifying our body.



Days like today, they're vital. It's really essential that we are developing best practices for all strategies for rabbit management and this is ultimately difficult and complex, I think.



We've done some really positive good work moving forward, we're seeing some of those landscapes come back with all the natives types of grass, blue bush, salt bush. But we're doing that really sensitive stuff, you know, we need other people to start doing that, bigger landscape stuff, in the background.



Rabbit management is extraordinarily complex, and it requires lots of players, lots of community engagement and lots of partnerships. This country is just another step beyond. It's so complex, it's so fragile, the community here are trying so hard not to impact on cultural heritage, and in the middle of a drought it's really accentuated how vital it is for rabbits to be managed in a cultural heritage sensitive way.



So more you share with each other on strategies, performance, indicators... do it, you learn more.



I think there's gonna be a lot of support behind VRAN as in bringing everyone together because it's not an aboriginal peoples issue, it's not my issue, it's not our team's issue, it is everyone's issue: it's the government, it's the landowners, it's everyone.



Well, VRAN isn't just about rabbits, VRAN is very much about people, it's about helping people overcome the problems that they have with rabbits, it's about bringing people and ideas together learning from each other and helping overcome the challenges and also, most importantly, empowering people to make decisions that they are able to carry through themselves.



You can't do rabbit management by yourself, it's really important that you work with your government agencies, your neighbors and in particular, your traditional owners. Traditional owners, it's really important for them to be engaged, for them to have their say on what should happen on their country.



Partnerships are vital and are key to good delivery.



For what I can say now everyone has joined up really well and we are moving forward. It's just we need more funding, more people to come on board, you know more people that say yes, we can do it! Don't look at it as it's too hard, because it's not too hard, we can do it.



It's by people working together that we can get on top of the issues that confront us.



If you've got a problem, whether it's one rabbit, or many rabbits, or one site, or many sites, you need to go to the VRAN website log on and find out what's available to help you.