

Summary of Discussion – Session 3

The next 50 years – reality and restraints

The four speakers in this session addressed issues likely to affect rabbit management.

David Thompson (CARE Pty Ltd) spoke about the economics of rabbit control. The cost and benefits of rabbit control can be estimated at a number of levels e.g. for the farm, the community or the region. He described a bioeconomic model for the farm level for a wool production system.

Craig Cormick (Biotechnology Australia) spoke about public attitudes toward the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) technologies and how attitudes were changing over time. Glenys Oogjes (Animals Australia) presented the animal welfare perspective. She urged consultation with the animal welfare lobby as often common ground can be found if it is sought. The final speaker was Peter McInnes (RIRDC) who spoke about farming rabbits. The current industry is small in both size and economic terms but it is steadily growing. Those developing new rabbit control technologies should consider this emerging industry.

The discussion on these very diverse topics was understandably wide ranging:

- The need to communicate honestly and openly about GMO technology with the public was emphasised.
- Animal welfare issues need to be better recognised. They also need to become part of the process from the beginning not added at the end.
- The need for a myxomatosis vaccine to protect domestic rabbits was discussed although the main need seems to be for pet rabbits, as commercial rabbitries usually exclude virus-carrying insects.
- Economics was by far the favourite topic. Discussion covered a wide area from the real benefits of rabbit control in both the short and long term to regional differences in the benefits to be gained. Economic impact was seen as the key to persuading politicians and decision-makers of the value of rabbit control.

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