

# MYXOMATOSIS FOR RABBIT CONTROL

Submission to: Ms Hughes, Parliamentary Commissioner for Environment  
PO Box 10 241  
WELLINGTON

M Brosnan  
July 1987



Rabbits' preference for dry bare land.

M Brosnan  
"Riverside"  
HAKATARAMEA VALLEY  
SOUTH CANTERBURY

7 July 1987

Ms Hughes  
Parliamentary Commissioner for Environment  
PO Box 10 241  
WELLINGTON

Dear Ms Hughes

I farm 600 hectares on the drier eastern side of the Hakataramea Valley in South Canterbury. The average annual rainfall here is 450 millimeters. In this harsh semi-arid environment we have seen hereabouts in the past, that if the vegetation becomes depleted through overgrazing with sheep then it becomes rabbit prone. Under these conditions of low pastoral productivity and with decreasing returns, the full cost of current rabbit control methods become a major burden.

However, seeing Myxomatosis, as a potential solution, is to focus on one of the symptoms rather than the cause of the problem.

The solution to this and some other pastoral "pest problems" is to change the depleted habitat conditions.

On our farm, as on others with productive well managed dryland pasture, feral rabbit numbers remain well controlled through lack of habitat combined with efficient local rabbit board methods. Our main weapon against big rabbit infestation is to keep a lot of cover on the land (people need clothes, so does the land). Rabbits don't like long grass, especially when wet. It's not well known that baby rabbits will not survive with a wet stomach.

Often, a threat to soil and water conservation values is quoted as an argument for the notion that rabbits are vermin to be controlled regardless of economic, ethical or cultural costs. I reiterate that it is usually persistent excessive grazing with domestic stock rather than rabbit grazing per se which has created the problem. Indeed, removing one of the adverse side effects, (rabbit infestation), is going to make it easier to continue unsustainable vegetation depleting over-grazing patterns of land use.

Past land use follies, such as introducing stoats, ferrets, weasels, and other animals, visually and physically degrading tracks and fires, misplaced fencing and other pastoral developments, have continuing impacts on us today.

Rather than throw yet another complex of biological weapons against our lands, we must capitalize on the pure natural attributes that our mountain and intermontane grasslands embody.

Rather than attempting to preserve past patterns of land use, we must open up access to these land resources to people with enterprise and vision, people who can develop the tourism, horticulture, forestry and diversified pastoral opportunities which abound without recourse to resource degrading measures such as Myxomatosis.

Yours sincerely,  
Mike Brosnan

Copy to: Mr J Sutton MP, The Right Hon. D Lange, The Honorable R Douglas Minister of Finance



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