



MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

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NATIONAL PLANS TO PROTECT NATIVE ANIMALS

Environment Minister Peter Garrett today announced that the brush-tailed rabbit-rat (*Conilurus penicillatus*) would be protected as a threatened species under national environmental legislation.

The small native rodent, which has suffered substantial population decline due to a range of threats, including feral cats, will be listed as vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The listing coincides with Mr Garrett's recent approval of four updated national plans to combat the threat posed by invasive pests, as well as a report which details the environmental damage being wrought by invasive animals across Australia.

"Today, I am announcing the release of four revised threat abatement plans for feral cats, the European red fox, rabbits and unmanaged goats - these are among 10 of Australia's worst invasive pests," Mr Garrett said.

"Feral and pest animals cause significant land degradation, damage to our water resources, impact on our primary production industries, prey on our wildlife and are also a major threat to species conservation in Australia's World Heritage Areas."

Mr Garrett said his approval of the revised plans was timely considering the extent of environmental and economic damage caused by invasive species, as detailed in the report – *Assessing invasive animals in Australia 2008* – by the National Land & Water Resources Audit and Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre.

"This is very much a national issue as invasive species inhabit all areas of mainland Australia and many of our islands, cost Australia an estimated \$1 billion a year, and are one of the top three threats to Australia's threatened species and nationally important wetlands," he said.

"The report assesses the extent and impacts on 10 of Australia's top invasive species, including feral pigs, feral goats, rabbits, foxes, feral cats and cane toads, which are all listed as key threatening processes to Australian wildlife under the EPBC Act.

"It provides data to agencies and groups responsible for invasive animal control and natural resource management about the abundance and distribution of these pests across Australia, and is a good foundation for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of management policies and programs."

Mr Garrett said the report also highlighted the importance of a national coordinated approach to help stop their spread, which was a key focus of the threat abatement plans.

"National coordination is essential to ensure these pests are managed in a scientific and coordinated way to reduce their numbers across all states and territories and consequently the damage they cause.

“The updated threat abatement plans I’ve released today take into account recent research and advances made regarding the management of these invasive species and outline a plan to manage them across Australia over the next five years.”

The launch of the invasive animals report and the revised threat abatement plans follows the Minister’s recent decisions to ban the savannah cat from live import into Australia and to reject a request for the live import of large earth bumblebees. Both decisions were based on concerns about the invasive potential of the species and their risk to Australia’s flora and fauna.

Assessing invasive animals in Australia 2008 can be found at:
www.invasiveanimals.com/downloads/NLWRA_Invasive20Animals20WEB-READY.pdf

Facts on the brush-tailed rabbit-rat

- The brush-tailed rabbit-rat (*Conilurus penicillatus*) is also known as the brush-tailed tree-rat.
- It is found in northern parts of Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, where its distribution is restricted mostly to islands, coastal areas and areas of relatively high rainfall.
- Major threats are feral cats and habitat alteration due to fire regimes, grazing, forestry and mining operations.
- The species will now be listed as vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Photos/footage

- Photos available of the brush-tailed rabbit-rat and of the damage caused by feral cats.