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Introduction of RHDV to Australia

Quod ali cibus est aliis fuat acre venenum.
(One man's meat is another man's poison.)

Lucretius, 637

Shortly after returning to Adelaide and receiving Ramon Soriguer's confirmation that viral haemorrhagic disease, *la enfermedad hemorrhagica virica*, was becoming widely established in Spain, I contacted Dr Brian Walker, Chief of the CSIRO Division of Sustainable Ecosystems. After describing what I had seen and giving a summary of the few scientific reports I had been able to find, he immediately agreed that rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus would be worth investigating further as a potential new biological control agent for wild rabbits in Australia.

Following our discussion, he asked virologists in CSIRO to independently review the information available on the new disease and provide him with their opinions on its likely suitability as a biological control agent. In the meantime, I also contacted Dr Lindsay Best, Senior Wildlife Manager in the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service. Lindsay had long been interested in doing something about the serious rabbit problems in many of South Australia's national parks and conservation reserves, and he didn't waste any time in drumming up some action.

Before long, the most senior people in Lindsay's department were planning how a program to investigate the use of this new virus could be initiated. Director Bruce Lever came up with the idea that Lindsay and I should attend an up-coming meeting of the Council of Conservation Ministers in Nelson, New Zealand. Ministers from both Australia and New Zealand were to meet in July 1989 and we would put our case forward. I was rather nervous about the meeting but Lindsay was on home ground. He was a New Zealander who had grown up in Nelson, and some of his family still lived there.

In the meeting, Lindsay outlined the great need for better rabbit control in Australia and New Zealand and I proposed a feasible 'solution'. Politicians prefer solutions to problems. Dr Walker, armed with the latest virological information, was also there to brief the Australian Minister for Science, Dr Barry Jones, and Senator Graham Richardson, the Minister for the Environment. The meeting participants unanimously agreed to establish a joint working party to investigate the potential use of the disease. Dr Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe from CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems was nominated as the Committee Chair, and responsibility for funding the work would be shared between the Australian Agricultural Council and the Council of Nature Conservation Ministers with New Zealand also contributing a significant share. An annual budget of $250 000 was granted.

Things progressed quickly from there. Dr Harvey Westbury from the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) and I were asked to travel to Europe to collect more information through discussions with scientists in the key laboratories where research into RHD was