

## Transcript

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**STATION : ABC**

**MACQUARIE ISLAND'S FLORA AND FAUNA IS BEING DAMAGED BY RABBITS AND RATS. A FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OFFER TO FUND HALF AN ERADICATION PLAN HAS BEEN WITH THE TASMANIAN GOVERNMENT SINCE THE END OF 2006 BUT NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR.**

**INTERVIEWEES: ROD LEDINGHAM, FORMER MACQUARIE ISLAND EXPEDITIONER**

**JENNY SCOTT, SPOKESPERSON, UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

**PROF JAMIE KIRKPATRICK, SPOKESPERSON, UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

**JULIE KIRKWOOD, SPOKESPERSON, WORLD WILDLIFE FUND**

**MALCOLM TURNBULL, FED ENVIRONMENT MINISTER**

Demographics:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people	ABs	GBs
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

**AIRLIE WARD:** Ten years ago Macquarie Island was declared a World Heritage area because of its outstanding natural values, but its hillsides are looking less than outstanding now as over 100,000 rabbits feast on the native flora, and rats attack bird nests. Penguin colonies are being buried under mudslides and bird nests falling off hillsides as the rabbits' march destabilises the island's steep slopes. It's feared

without quick action the damage will be irreversible.

It turns out a Federal Government offer to fund half an eradication plan has been with the Tasmanian Government since the end of last year.

REPORTER: Halfway between Tasmania and Antarctica Macquarie Island is a haven for wildlife including a number of threatened species. But the landscape which has nurtured them is disappearing.

ROD LEDINGHAM: All around there the tussock looks like it's been done over with agent orange or something, it's just dead. The whole area is flattened. It's a real mess.

REPORTER: Last month Rod Ledingham was shocked at what he saw.

ROD LEDINGHAM: You can see looking up the hills and behind there's acres and acres of the same devastation, it really is quite startling. And then this year we couldn't even get up the walkway up to the rookery because the whole bank had given way.

REPORTER: Mr Ledingham has been going to Macquarie Island for over 30 years. His first venture was as station leader for the Antarctic division in 1976.

ROD LEDINGHAM: From 1991 onwards I was there maybe once or twice a year also on the tourist ships, so I've been there most years in the last 10 or 15.

- REPORTER: Since retiring from the Antarctic Division in 2002 Mr Ledingham has continued to visit at least once a year as a tour guide. Tourists to the World Heritage island are limited to 800 a year and they pay for the privilege - \$200 to step foot on the island.
- ROD LEDINGHAM: So it's quite an expensive experience for them and already it's been curtailed down at Sandy Bay because we can't get up and see the royal penguins.
- REPORTER: A recent landslide closed the tourist boardwalk. Rabbits killing vegetation is blamed for destabilising the steep slopes. In one month last year 20 landslips were reported. In one an unknown number of king penguins were killed.
- JENNY SCOTT: There's something like four species of burrowing birds and albatrosses which are threatened and listed there as either vulnerable or endangered. The fact is that the rabbits grazing on these steep slopes and grazing away the tussock is impacting, compromising these threatened species.
- REPORTER: The sooty and grey-headed albatrosses build their nests amid the tussock pedestals.
- JENNY SCOTT: If you kicked an old tussock pedestal it would fall off and just tumble down the hill, and that apparently seems to have been what's been happening with albatross nests.

REPORTER: Rodents, rabbits and cats introduced by early sealers plagued the island's wildlife are driving some species to extinction. Cats were successfully eradicated early this decade, but the rabbit population has exploded to an estimated 100,000.

Myxomatosis helped keep the rabbits in check but that's no longer available, and the calicivirus doesn't work in the cold sub-Antarctic climate.

JAMIE KIRKPATRICK: The damage done by the rabbits now to the landscape is more severe than the damage that was being created before they introduced myxomatosis because you've not only not got myxomatosis you've also not got cats.

REPORTER: Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick and Jenny Scott are researching the long-term changes of the island's steep slopes.

JENNY SCOTT: If it goes on and the eradication plan doesn't get funded then the whole of the slopes of Macquarie Island will change dramatically. For some slopes it may have already become irreversible.

JAMIE KIRKPATRICK: The first intonation that something really disastrous was happening were in the early years of this decade.

REPORTER: Professor Kirkpatrick says there was a rapid bureaucratic response to develop an eradication plan, but the plan is as far as it's gone.

JAMIE KIRKPATRICK: They may be holding it back of the election. If I was a politician I'd seriously consider it.

REPORTER: Rabbits have been successfully eradicated from other sub-Antarctic islands.

JAMIE KIRKPATRICK: In New Zealand they even managed to get rid of rats off some islands.

REPORTER: The eradication is likely to involve baiting and a follow up shooting program.

The World Wildlife Fund says time is critical.

Julie Kirkwood: The eradication effort to get started in full throttle would take about 18 months from when funding is properly committed. There's a re-supply ship heading to Macquarie Island on 6th April this year, and equipment and people could be on that ship to start work, otherwise we're just going to see more landslides, more penguin deaths, more albatross nests being lost off hillsides, and when we're talking about such important habitat and the only habitat for some species that's just too great a cost.

REPORTER: But money to help solve the problem has been on the table for some months. Federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull says an offer from the Commonwealth to fund half the \$16.5 million eradication plan has been with the Tasmanian Environment Minister since December last year.

**MALCOLM TURNBULL:** We've offered to fund half the program. That offer is there, it's been on the table since late last year and the ball is in the Tasmanian Government's court. I've spoken to the minister Paula Wriedt today and encouraged her to make a quick decision, make a quick commitment and then the work can begin.

**AIRLIE WARD:** Tasmanian Environment Minister Paula Wriedt says given the significance of Macquarie Island the Commonwealth should fund the entire program. But today Mr Turnbull said the Federal Government had never been asked to foot the whole bill.

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