



Marina Martinique Homeowners Association

Rabbit Population Management Progress Report 2025

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1. Introduction and Background

Concerns regarding an increasing population of non-indigenous rabbits within Marina Martinique were formally raised during 2024 and escalated to the Annual General Meeting held on 19 December 2024. External visitors with experience in animal rescue and veterinary services highlighted risks associated with overpopulation, including disease, animal suffering, property damage, and ongoing conflict between residents, pets, and wildlife.

Rabbits, which are not indigenous to the area, had become well established within the estate, supported by artificial feeding, lack of sufficient natural predation, and the availability of safe breeding environments. The issue was therefore identified as both an animal welfare concern and an environmental management challenge requiring structured intervention.

2. Purpose of the Management Programme

The objectives of the Rabbit Population Management Programme were to:

- Address overpopulation humanely and lawfully;
- Reduce animal suffering and environmental degradation;
- Limit conflict between rabbits, residents, pets, and vehicles;
- Ensure compliance with municipal by-laws and MMHOA Conduct Rules;
- Establish a sustainable, monitored population level without encouraging recolonisation.

3. Legal and Regulatory Context

Rabbit management activities were undertaken within the framework of:

- Kouga Local Municipality Animals By-Law (January 2024), Section 33(2)(e), which prohibits keeping or breeding rabbits on residential premises without a permit;
- MMHOA Conduct Rules regulating wildlife feeding;
- National animal welfare legislation and NSPCA humane treatment guidelines.

Throughout 2025, MMHOA consistently communicated that no activity promoting the keeping, breeding, or feeding of rabbits would be permitted within the estate.

4. Chronological Progress Overview

January – February 2025: Problem Identification and Early Engagement

- Rabbit overpopulation formally discussed following AGM inputs.

- Engagement initiated with external rabbit rescue practitioners to explore humane management options.
- Environmental Committee considered multiple scenarios: capture and sterilisation, rehoming, enclosure-based management, or phased removal.
- Estimated population ranged between 18 and 30 rabbits based on early monitoring.
- Two rabbit mortalities linked to dog attacks recorded.
- Two Environmental Committee members with local knowledge of rabbit distribution resigned, impacting early monitoring capacity.

March – April 2025: Planning and Enforcement

- Preparation began for formal capture operations, with implementation targeted for mid-April.
- Increased pressure from residents to reduce rabbit numbers.
- Three capture cages were offered by a committee member.
- Two members received **final written warnings** for feeding rabbits, reinforcing enforcement of Conduct Rules.
- Legal position on feeding and keeping rabbits was reiterated to residents.

May 2025: Assessment and Strategy Development

- Capture cages deployed in hotspot areas to familiarise rabbits.
- A Rabbit Assessment and Action Plan (Draft) was tabled at the Environmental Committee meeting on 22 May.
- Comprehensive survey estimated 64 rabbits across Phase 1 (18 ha), equating to ± 3.4 rabbits/ha.
- Impacts identified included:
 - Garden and vegetation damage;
 - Burrowing hazards;
 - Attraction of secondary pests;
 - Disease risks such as Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD).
- Multiple management options evaluated, including sterilisation, rehoming, and euthanasia.
- Expert advice recommended phased removal rather than full sterilisation due to cost, feasibility, and long-term effectiveness.

June 2025: Programme Approval and External Scrutiny

- The Rabbit Population Control Plan and Implementation Programme (RPCP) was approved by the Board on 29 May 2025.
- First full breeding group (14 rabbits) removed; subsequent “vacuum effect” observed as new breeding pairs moved in.

- Two breeding pairs identified post-removal, confirming the need for partial population retention.
- An external complaint from the Animal Anti-Cruelty League (AACL) alleged mass killing:
 - MMHOA responded with full documentation and legislative justification.
 - No evidence of wrongdoing was found.
 - AACL was invited to engage further; no response received.

July 2025: Implementation and Monitoring

- 16 rabbits removed through capture.
- 5 rabbits lost to natural predation.
- New breeding activity recorded in Aruba Close, with partial predation of juveniles.
- One breeding female sterilised.
- Total removals and predation reached 28 rabbits by July.
- Detailed spatial population monitoring showed a reduction from 64 to 36 rabbits, lowering density to ± 2 rabbits/ha ($\approx 44\%$ reduction).

September 2025: Formal Progress Review

- RPCP progress update issued.
- Cumulative outcomes:
 - 20 rabbits relocated to a registered farm;
 - 7 predated naturally;
 - 1 roadkill;
 - Additional juveniles partially predated;
 - 2 breeding females sterilised during 2025.
- Estimated 45% population reduction achieved toward the 60% target.
- Key challenges identified:
 - High reproduction rates (15–20% per month in hotspots);
 - Ongoing feeding by residents;
 - Recolonisation (“vacuum effect”) after removals.

October – November 2025: Programme Review and Enforcement

- RPCP placed under revision to strengthen long-term effectiveness.
- A further 23 rabbits removed during October–November.
- Feeding identified as the primary factor undermining population control.
- Proposal prepared to strengthen wildlife feeding rules at the AGM.

December 2025: Rule Amendment and Compliance Action

- Revised wildlife feeding rule formally adopted at AGM on 18 December 2025.
- Feeding of feral rabbits explicitly prohibited with escalating fines.
- A repeat offender, previously warned in April, was fined R1,000 following continued feeding, marking the first enforcement under the amended rule.

5. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

- Ongoing communication through notices, newsletters, and website updates.
- Collaboration with veterinary services, rescue organisations, and independent environmental experts.
- Resident education emphasised:
 - Legal implications of feeding;
 - Ecological and welfare consequences;
 - Importance of cooperation for programme success.

6. Key Outcomes Achieved in 2025

- Establishment of a legally compliant, Board-approved Rabbit Population Control Programme.
- Approximate 45% reduction in rabbit numbers by year-end.
- Implementation of structured monitoring and spatial population tracking.
- Improved enforcement framework through amended Conduct Rules.
- Clear operational balance between humane treatment, biodiversity protection, and resident safety.

7. Ongoing Challenges and Risks

- Persistent feeding by a small number of residents.
- High reproductive capacity requiring continuous intervention.
- Costs associated with sterilisation and veterinary services.
- Risk of recolonisation from adjacent areas if population is fully eradicated.

8. Way Forward (2026 Outlook)

- Continue phased removals combined with targeted sterilisation of breeding females.
- Maintain partial population to prevent vacuum effect.
- Strengthen education and enforcement to eliminate feeding.
- Regular review and reporting to ensure adaptive management.
- Align rabbit management with broader biodiversity and problem-animal strategies within MMHOA.