



MEDIA RELEASE

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Sydney Harbour Bridge bunnies prepare to be health checked and re-homed

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The fate of a small colony of domestic bunnies living under the Sydney Harbour Bridge has finally been determined and fortunately for the bunnies they will be re-homed following a visit to the Sydney University Veterinary Teaching Hospital to be health checked, vaccinated and de-sexed.

Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authorities are at present trapping the controversial Dawes Point Park bunnies by using food to lure them into humane rabbit traps. So far twelve adults and four baby bunnies have been assessed by the Sydney University Veterinary Teaching Hospital veterinarians with more rabbits expected to arrive at the Hospital as the trapping continues.

Dr Deepa Gopinath, senior surgical teaching registrar from the Sydney University Veterinary Teaching Hospital said, "Once the bunnies' arrive at the Hospital their health is assessed by our qualified veterinarians and those in good health and free of disease are subsequently vaccinated, de-sexed and handed back to the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authorities to be re-homed."

The de-sexing procedures are being performed by The University of Sydney's fifth year veterinary science students under the Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme (TIES). TIES was introduced into the veterinary science undergraduate curriculum as an essential component for ensuring students had access to hands-on soft tissue surgery. The students are supervised by the Hospitals' qualified veterinarians and teaching registrars at all times.

Dr Gopinath commented, "the de-sexing of the Dawes Point Park bunnies has been invaluable for our students as they experience hands-on surgery and it has been great to be actively involved in this very necessary community welfare project".

The bunnies are being vaccinated against Rabbit Calicivirus which is incurable and fatal once contracted. The virus infiltrates the liver and other internal organs causing the rabbit to bleed spontaneously and in some cases respiratory failure. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) originally released Rabbit Calicivirus and Myxomatosis, another disease fatal to rabbits once contracted, in Australia as biological controls to manage the prolific rabbit populations. Rabbits require annual Calicivirus vaccinations for the duration of their life.

The Dawes Point Park bunnies first appeared a couple of years back and it is believed they are escaped or abandoned pets. Recent observations proved the population had increased and a decision to remove the bunnies was made based on their potential to spread disease, cause environmental destruction as well as being at risk of dog and cat attacks.

The breeding of escaped pet rabbits is an increasing problem around Sydney parks and Sydney University veterinarians advise all pet rabbit owners to have their rabbit de-sexed if they are a non-breeding pet.

Sydney University veterinarians have only found three bunnies unfit to be re-homed due to liver failure and suspected Myxomatosis. The four baby bunnies will be fostered until they are old enough to be de-sexed and then they will be re-homed.

The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authorities have been successful in re-homing all of the healthy bunnies.

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