

Macquarie rabbits soon to be on the run

Following last year's announcement that Tasmanian and Australian Government environment ministers had finally agreed to jointly fund an eradication program targeting pests on sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island (see *Ecology* 136, p. 20), the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service is in the process of selecting skilled dog trainers for critical 'mop up' operations following the planned baiting project.

The \$24.6 million, seven-year program for eradicating 100 000 or so rabbits as well as rats and mice from the island will also involve fencing to protect native vegetation and aerial baiting using helicopters.

Field teams will be sent in after baiting

to eliminate surviving rabbits by shooting, fumigating and trapping them, to ensure they are removed faster than they can breed and re-establish.

Up to five years is planned for eradicating rabbits that survive the baiting, with rabbit-hunting dogs being trained to rigorous standards.

Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service will work with trainers to ensure that dogs consistently target rabbits and not native animals.

The dogs will be a vital tool in locating surviving rabbits in the rugged terrain of Macquarie Island, one of 17 World Heritage-listed areas in Australia and home



In five to six years, rabbits may have been eradicated from Macquarie Island, enabling the environment to recover. wwf

to more than 17 threatened species of seabirds and marine mammals, including penguins, albatrosses and seals.

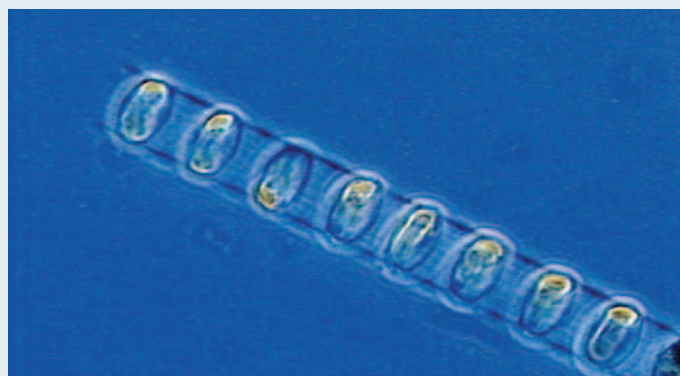
Pulp mill assessment challenge dismissed

The Wilderness Society has issued a call for law reform in response to the Federal Court's dismissal of its challenge last year to Australian Government approval for Tasmania's Tamar Valley pulp mill. The Federal Court also issued costs against the society.

The Wilderness Society had challenged the pulp mill assessment process on a number of grounds. It claimed that Gunns should not be allowed to withdraw from the mandated process and get an easier assessment process; that the public had a right to be properly heard in the process; and that the impact of the mill on Tasmania's forests should have been assessed.

'This case was only about the process used to assess the mill,' said the Wilderness Society's Dr Greg Ogle. 'It was not a challenge to the mill project itself. We will be examining the judgment and assessing further legal options, but one thing is sure, the pulp mill issue is not dead.'

Concerns raised about ocean fertilisation for carbon credits



Questions are being asked about artificial fertilisation of natural oceanic phytoplankton stocks to increase CO₂ uptake. NASA

Proposals by private companies to boost artificially the oceans' capacity to absorb CO₂ and thus generate carbon credits have been met with opposition from environment groups, scientists and international agencies.

The companies are planning to dump huge quantities of fertiliser – iron or nitrogen-rich urea – over large areas of ocean to stimulate the growth of CO₂-consuming phytoplankton, the microscopic floating plant cells at the base of

the oceanic food chain.

Australian company Ocean Nourishment Corporation (ONC) is seeking approval from the Philippine Government to proceed with plans to spread 500–1000 tonnes of urea granules in the Sulu and Celebes Seas. The company claims this will mimic natural nutrient upwellings that cause phytoplankton blooms, increasing CO₂ uptake and boosting fish stocks.

Greenpeace South-East Asia and other environmental

groups have warned that the project could suffocate marine life, permanently change ecosystems and reduce, rather than increase, regional fish stocks.

Earlier, US-based Planktos announced plans to spread iron ore dust over 10 000 square kilometres of ocean west of the Galapagos Islands.

Many scientists have expressed concern about large-scale ocean fertilisation, with one group proposing a moratorium on selling carbon offsets unless companies can demonstrate the process effectively removes CO₂, retains that carbon in the ocean for a quantifiable amount of time, and has acceptable and predictable environmental impacts.¹

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and Parties to the London Convention and London Protocol – the international agreements that regulate dumping of wastes and other matter at sea – have also weighed into the debate, stating that 'given the present state of knowledge regarding ocean fertilisation, such large-scale operations are currently not justified.'²

1 Buesseler KO *et al.* (11 January 2008). Ocean iron fertilization – moving forward in a sea of uncertainty. *Science* 319 (5860): 162.
2 http://www.iucn.org/en/news/archive/2007/11/20_pr_climate_change.htm