

**EFFECTS OF RABBIT GRAZING ON THE STEEP COASTAL SLOPES OF MACQUARIE ISLAND 1980-2003**

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We present the results of a 23 year monitoring study on the steep coastal slopes of subantarctic Macquarie Island, involving 15 fixed plots and repeat measurements of vegetation and associated environmental variables. In 1979 myxomatosis was introduced to control the feral rabbit population, and for the next 15 years revegetation of coastal slopes occurred, with recovery towards tall tussock vegetation evident in most cases. During the past 5-10 years, however, a general deterioration in vegetation and soil stability has been recorded, linked with a resurgence in rabbit numbers. Severe rabbit damage to vegetation, and subsequent loss of soil stability, is currently occurring on the steep coastal slopes island-wide. The tussock-covered slopes in the south of the island in particular, are being heavily impacted for the first time, and the main tourist area at Sandy Bay is severely degraded. World Heritage values, albatross habitats, and tourist amenity are being negatively affected, and action on rabbit eradication is urgently needed.