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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Via: Online Submission

To whom it may concern

The impact of Feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia

The Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) was established in the 1980's and represents 13 member councils from Hinchinbrook, north to Cook and west to Carpentaria in far north Queensland. The area covers 1,235km of the eastern seaboard with a land area of 319,063 sq km and a population of approximately 273,000.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the impact of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia and national priorities to prevent the problems worsening for the natural environment, community and farmers.

The Far North region covers a series of tropical bioregions all of which are at some level of risk or experience an ongoing or emerging impact from feral deer, pigs and goats. We have provided comment on a selection the discussion points outlined by the inquiry, they are outlined below:

- a) **the current and potential occurrence of feral deer, pigs and goats across Australia;**
- b) **the likely and potential biosecurity risks and impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats on the environment, agriculture, community safety and other values.**

Feral deer are a current and emerging biosecurity risk and issue across both the wet and dry tropics. Our understanding of their current range and distribution is that they currently occupy only a small proportion of the suitable habitat available to them. Councils and communities are dealing with current impacts from Rusa deer in the Wet Tropics, and the emerging risk of Chital deer moving north from the dry tropics into the northern savannah and gulf regions. There is also a growing concern at a range of releases of feral deer for the purpose of sport hunting across the region; a matter which is difficult to qualify or quantify due to the nature of the enterprise.

Feral pigs are well established in the region and most likely occupy the full extent of the suitable habitat available to them. They have a profound and significant impact on the economy, environment and communities of the FNQROC region. In the Wet Tropics and Cape York, feral pigs

are by far the most widespread and abundant of our vertebrate pest issues. They present significant and continual risk to agriculture both directly through destruction of crops and plantations; and indirectly as a vector for other biosecurity risk such as Panama Tropical Race Four impacting on the banana industry. Feral pigs have a direct impact on wetlands, unique species and vegetation communities' right across the region. These include marine turtles; EPBC listed vegetation communities such as Littoral Rainforest and Broad Leaved Teatree; and individual species themselves such as through the predation of eggs of the Southern Cassowary, or through the destruction/modification of habitat in many wetland and forest communities.

Feral goats have direct impacts on offshore islands such as the Palm Islands group as well as dry tropics and savannah regions. They cause major alteration of vegetation communities through grazing/browsing leading to erosion, sediment loss and destruction of native vegetation. It is our understanding that the current extent of feral goats in the Far North does not represent the full extent of the suitable habitat available to them.

c) the effectiveness of current state and national laws, policies and practices in limiting spread and mitigating impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats

Through our close working relationships with our member councils and their communities in developing and delivering their biosecurity plans and programs, it is clear overall that there is an increasing burden of management relating to vertebrate pests. This is exacerbated by a significant decrease in environmental and public good program investment which has been in decline since the National Heritage Trust investments of the early 2000's. The mantra of doing more with less is wearing a little thin for community members and councils alike and the resources they have at their disposal are, for the most part, not up to the task at hand. Whilst we have some clear examples at a regional level at what can be achieved through partnership approaches, our ongoing experience is that the long-term objectives are continually compromised by shifting commitments at a state and federal level. We would be enthusiastic to see any policy and legislative alignments which can address this shortcoming.

We welcome the recent evolution of environmental biosecurity at the national level through the national round table series and the appointment of the Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer (CEBO). We also acknowledge the importance of programs such as Invasive Animals CRC and the emerging state and national research collaboration through the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CRISS). These initiatives demonstrate a clear pathway to partnerships between state and federal research programs which we hope will continue to be built on. We are conscious however that this collaboration coincides with significant reduction in capacity and program investment in environmental and public research, science and on-ground investment at both the state and national levels. We would hope that this approach is expanded beyond research and into practical application of strategic management on the ground in partnership with local governments and the community.

f) the benefits of developing and fully implementing national threat abatement plans for feral deer, pigs and goats

Beyond addressing the issues arising from the dearth of resources for on ground management and research we see benefits in a more strategic, apolitical and long term planning for investment in responding to the invasive animals' issue. This may well be addressed through threat abatement plan (TAP's) but we are understandably a little sceptical of what is proposed because the track record of developing and implementing TAP's and similar plans such as species recovery plans and



conservation advices has been quite poor. If a TAP is to be developed and fully funded it may be of great benefit, but our observation is that the challenge is actually in the resourcing of the actions contained (and the Department to oversee it) within it. If these short falls are not addressed a TAP will most likely not be an effective tool.

In conclusion we would like to highlight our concern that funding for public good research, science and management programs seem to have taken a back seat to economically driven resourcing models. As a result, key issues which are highly important to the community and opportunities to intervene in a timely way are being overlooked because they don't have an attached economic imperative - i.e. conservation programs and protection of at risk species and communities. In addition we would recommend that any investment going forward is inclusive of not just single species or issues approaches but is in fact mindful and attentive to the accumulative impacts and interactions, e.g. climate change, land use change and invasive species.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission further please contact Mr Travis Sydes, Regional Natural Asset Management and Sustainability Coordinator on [redacted] or [redacted]

Yours sincerely

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