

14th May, 2004.

The Secretary,
Standing Committee on Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA, ACT.

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Dear Sir/Madam,

The following submission is made to the Committee for consideration in developing the terms of reference for the inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals.

Organisation Overview

Field & Game Australia (FGA) was formed in 1958 and has a membership base in excess of 13,000. A primary objective of the Association is "promotion of and participation in wildlife conservation projects, game management projects, the development of game hunting facilities and the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources." The FGA is widely recognised as the voice of Australia's game bird hunters and has a proud history of positive on ground environmental works, particularly in wetlands throughout Victoria. The association also has an impressive history of cooperation with landowners / managers in the control of pest animal species.

It is within the above context that the following comments are made;

1. We believe management of pest animals and plants is a major and complex problem and therefore the terms of reference should be as broad as possible.
2. The impacts of pest animals on agriculture are complex and poorly understood by the wider community.
3. It is generally accepted that no one "pest eradication method" is effective or indeed appropriate for the wide variety of pests that impact on farmers today. Landowner / Managers must have a full range of techniques at their disposal.
4. Recreational hunters have traditionally played an important role in working with landowners and state agencies on cooperative pest animal programs. Field and Game Australia has been collecting data on pest animal hunting activity from its members for over ten years. The value of this voluntary effort equates to between 350 and 750,000 dollars annually.
5. Hunters are a valuable resource that are currently under utilised by Governments and Landowners for their pest mitigation programs. The NSW Government has recognised this with the recent formation of the NSW Game Council under the Game and Feral Animals Act 2002. For the first time in Australia, a government has recognised in legislation, the positive contribution to the Environment and pest animal control that hunters make.

6. During 2002 – 3, Victorian hunters participated in a fox bounty trial that eradicated over 198,000 foxes in just over twelve months.
7. There are approximately 900,000 licensed firearm owners in Australia and the vast majority have used 'hunting' as a genuine reason for possessing firearms.
8. Some 4,000 game bird hunters assist landowners in the NSW Southern Riverina to control wild ducks on rice growing properties. Whilst no figures exist to show the economic impact of the ducks, it is known that it is substantial, and in some years, quite severe. This causes farmers to incur additional costs in aerial re-seeding and water, as well as lost production. Currently the NSW Game bird Committee, within the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, manage the Rice Pest Mitigation Program.
9. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the problems of wild ducks on the rice have increased since the cessation of the NSW Duck hunting season in 1995.
10. There is a contradiction between state agencies in how ducks are managed. For example, in 1995 NSW banned the three month open season for recreational duck hunting. Now, ducks can be taken any time throughout the year, subject to permit. The problem is that many of the birds taken during the rice season are breeding. In Victoria, SA, TAS and Queensland, ducks seasons remain and ducks can only be hunted during the 12 week prescribed season and hunters are subject to strict bag limits. This controlled harvest does not occur when ducks are breeding. This type of managed approach is far more acceptable than downgrading a native bird to "pest" status. Experience shows that the community does not exhibit the same level of concern for any bird or animal species once it is labelled a "Pest". This type of game bird management is consistent with the globally recognised principles of Game Management as espoused by the IUCN, World Conservation Union and CITES. However, there are times when waterfowl can become over abundant locally and the ability for farmers to cull birds to protect their crops should remain.
11. A high priority should be the development of an accountability process which sets out clearly responsibilities for pest management and in particular, those of government in relation to pest animal management on public land. Many landowners, whose properties adjoin public land, suffer severe impacts from pest animals because the public land managers do not have the resources to undertake control programs. Co-ordination of pest animal control efforts with adjacent landholders is essential.
12. The development and implementation of a comprehensive education policy is the key to promoting community understanding and involvement in pest animals and their management. Many urban based people are unaware of the impacts on agriculture and the environment that pest animals make.
13. A further priority is the development of a policy for pest animal eradication which is co-ordinated and uses a variety of approaches which can be used for different situations. For example, globally there is mounting opposition to the use of many poisons, particularly 1080. Yet Australia remains one of the largest users in the world of this particular environmentally unfriendly poison. Non-toxic techniques must be explored.

Field and Game Australia members have been involved in pest eradication on private and public land over many years. Generally our organisation has had to initiate this involvement. There is now an opportunity for government agencies to become pro-active and provide opportunities for hunters to become part of the solution.

We trust that you will give due consideration to this submission and eagerly await the opportunity to comment further when the public consultation process begins.

Should you require any further information on any matter relating to this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above number during office hours.

Yours sincerely,

Rod Drew
Chief Executive Officer