

Submission from Braidwood Rural Lands Protection Board to the Inquiry into the impact on Agriculture of pest animals

Role of Board

The Braidwood Rural Lands Protection Board (RLPB) is one of 48 such boards throughout New South Wales (NSW). One of the roles of the Boards is to be the principal regulatory body at the local level in relation to pest animal control.

Geography

The Braidwood RLPB administers an area of the Southern Tablelands of NSW to the east of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

The Great Dividing Range divides the district into an eastern fall and western fall of almost equal sizes. The headwaters of a number of significant rivers including the Murrumbidgee, Mulwaree and Shoalhaven lie within the District. The District also contains Australia's largest fresh water lake, Lake George. The District is partly within two Catchment Management areas, the Murrumbidgee and Southern Rivers Catchments. The District covers 655,000 hectares with a large portion either National Park or State Forest.

Agriculture

The District is principally one of livestock production that is focused on beef production on the eastern fall and wool production on the western fall. Diversification of agricultural activities is increasing in the area and subdivision of farming properties into lifestyle blocks is altering some areas of the District.

The District has a large stone fruit producing area, an expanding wine industry, some lucerne cropping and hay making, and some wheat crops. Smaller properties have diversified into more exotic animals, flower and tree production.

Importance of Extensive Livestock Industries in the Braidwood District

Local Area	Total Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced (\$)	Wool (\$)	Sheep & Lambs Slaughtered (\$)	Cattle & Calves Slaughtered (\$)
Queanbeyan	711,412	68,919	19,272	37,224
Yarrowlumla	9,639,786	3,907,214	756,843	2,545,202
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Gunning	25,216,878	14,988,578	3,139,558	4,582,363
Mulwaree	34,255,181	16,964,997	4,905,612	9,879,925
Tallaganda	16,611,638	2,263,730	749,567	11,674,704

Source 2001 Agricultural Census

Pest Animals

The following list details the most common pests within the District:
Feral Pigs, Wild Dogs, Rabbits, Foxes, Deer, Feral Cats, Hares, Goats. Native animal populations of Kangaroo, Wallaby, Wombat, are also considered as pests by many agricultural activities. There are also insect pests that affect the district.

The Braidwood RLPB Pest Animal Plan for 2004 has allocated \$92822 for pest animal control within its district. As a ratepayer funded organisation this expenditure is borne by the ratepayers within the district. Additional costs are borne by the ratepayers in managing feral pests. Eg. fencing, chemicals, traps, veterinary and other costs associated with injuries and prevention of spread of disease. These costs do not reflect the losses incurred by agricultural pursuits to predators nor damage to pasture and crops.

Terms of Reference

1 To identify nationally significant pest animal issues and consider how existing Australian and State government processes can be better linked for more coordinated management of these issues across State boundaries.

- ◆ The means to manage pest animals must be protected. Humane control measures are required to control pests but chemicals and traps and other methods such as shooting must be available and where necessary speedily approved for use.
- ◆ Recent Government and community pressures to restrict the availability and power of firearms led to the use of small calibre rimfire weapons being used for pest animal control. Humane shooting of many species of pest animals requires the use of larger and more powerful weapons.
- ◆ There are national arrangements in place to manage exotic animal disease outbreaks, which could be spread by pest animal populations. These arrangements need to be regularly practised and community awareness and recognition increased. Similar national cooperation and coordination is required for ongoing pest animal control.

2 To consider the approaches to pest animal issues across all relevant jurisdictions, including:

- *prevention of new pest animals becoming established;*
- *detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals;*
- *eradication of infestations (particularly newly established species or 'sleeper' populations of species which are considered to be high risk) where feasible and appropriate; and*
- *reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations;*
- ◆ Improved national coordination is required to ensure that control measures that are introduced for the benefit of one segment of agricultural industry do not become pest animals for other segments.
- ◆ Government agencies responsible for managing areas of land eg Forests and Parks, need to contribute to pest animal control measures and ensure that their areas of responsibility are not havens for pest animal populations.
- ◆ When Government agencies are privatised the same responsibilities toward pest animal control must pass to the new owners.
- ◆ Given sufficient Government resolve, radical solutions to some Pest animal problems could be developed. Eg A highly contagious virus could be released to reduce the feral cat population if other protective measures were taken to protect other species and pet animals. Modern virology would be able to develop a highly efficient vaccine that could be made available to owners of registered cats. This would not be a whole of life vaccine but could be topped up on a fee for service basis.

3 *Consider the adequacy of State Government expenditure on pest animal control in the context of other conservation and natural resource management priorities, with particular reference to National Parks.*

- ◆ Comparisons with other areas of expenditure eg noxious weeds, which reportedly attract \$6.5 million annually within NSW, do not do justice to the scale of the Pest Animal problem.
- ◆ There is a perception among many RLPB ratepayers that Pest Animals harbour in areas administered by Government agencies. These agencies generally do not contribute to RLPB rates and are not always seen to be doing enough to assist adjacent and surrounding neighbours combat Pest animal problems.
- ◆ Improved access to National Park areas for control purposes.

4 *Consider the scope for industry groups and R&D Corporations to improve their response to landholder concerns about pest animals.*

- ◆ Large areas of rural land are now owned and “managed” by members of the community who do not necessarily have a rural background and may not share the objectives and values of those who are dependant on the land. Many of these smaller landholders are not ratepayers to the RLPB system and are often unaware of the impact of their activities on their rural blocks and the wider community. A national approach to capturing these landholders and gaining their support in the pursuit of national objectives is required. Some RLPBs now run field days for small landholders. Pest animal control solutions that are appropriate to smaller holdings and acceptable in closely settled areas should be developed and applied.
- ◆ Now that each State has a generally similar Department of Primary Industry, or equivalent, all efforts should be made to maintain coordination appropriate to maximising the research effort.

5 *Consider ways to promote community understanding of and involvement in pest animals and their management.*

- ◆ Rural subdivisions could be required to provide educational material to potential purchasers.
- ◆ National awareness programs could be developed that highlight the importance to the community of feral pest animal control. Eg reduced food costs, preservation of wildlife, control of animal health and protection of export industries.

References:

Braidwood RLPB and NSW Agriculture. (2003) Application for Exceptional Circumstances Assistance August 2003

West P. and Saunders G. (2003) Pest Animal Survey 2002. NSW Agriculture

Braidwood RLPB. (2004) Pest Animal Function Management Plan 2004