

SUBMISSION NO. 24

Secretary: 

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES
AND FORESTRY

13 May 2004

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

ATTENTION: Mrs Kay Elson MP

Inquiry into the Impact on Agriculture of Pest Animals

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

The potential for pest animals to spread exotic disease cannot be ignored. **Wild Pigs** can and do cause massive environmental damage impacting on fences, soils, water quality, vegetation, ground nesting birds, frogs and other animal species. **Wombats** in some areas are also an environmental problem, their holes add to erosion and again the damage to fencing beggar's belief. **Wild domestic cats** impact on many of our smaller bird and animal species. **Wild deer and wild goats** are competitors for a limited food supply not to mention the risk of disease spread. **Wild Dog** attacks are not only cruel on the animals, extremely expensive for the live stock owner both financially and emotionally but must impact heavily on many of our wild life species when they are not attacking and eating domestic livestock. **Wing-less grasshoppers** are from time to time a severe problem on the Monaro.

Global warming is recognised as already happening, our national borders in the north are close enough for birds to import some of the many terrible diseases present in neighbouring countries (that can affect animals and/or humans) but not yet in our country, as temperatures rise southward these species will surely move south too, bringing with them whatever they may be infected with. You only need to look at the spread by wild ducks and mosquitos of Ross River Fever since the 1970's.

Surely it is nonsense to approach such a serious problem as pest animals/insects on such an adhoc basis as we do now. Pest animals/insects should not only be looked at from an agricultural point of view, but rather the broader impact on the whole of the national economy, taking into account agricultural production, the physical environment along with native fauna and flora and last but not least epidemiology. I honestly believe pest animals/insects are a National problem and should be treated as such.

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

"prevention of new pest animals becoming established;"

Surely some restrictions/controls need to be in place to prevent "Guard Dogs for Livestock and/or Hunting Dogs" from being able to breed with Wild Dog populations, these breeds are highly intelligent, naturally cunning, can be aggressive by nature and are often large in size. We could be breeding up a breed of "SUPER DOGS" if they get in with the wild dogs.

"detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals;"

I know of no enforceable reporting system for pest animals/insects.

In the past rural communities had more people and therefore more time. Today we still have the same land mass, but fewer people in the bush, the pressures of life leave little time to keep on top of all the things that more people did. The ownership of land has often changed considerably and so too the size of properties. Many owners are now city-based residents and the country property has become a lifestyle choice, for many it is simply for rest and recreation. I have spoken to some of these people and they actually like to see a dingo or evidence of wild animals, for some I think it gives them a sense of living on the edge far from the maddening crowd. This might be nice for them but does not solve our problem.

The procedure for regulatory officers to make property inspection is often a severe burden on their time and a large imposition on our taxes/rates. Many people are difficult to contact for whatever reason, this can be expensive for the regulatory authority in both time and money. I don't object that people have a right to know who may be entering their property, and why, the need but surely official notification by letter in advance and a written report of the outcome/follow-up should be sufficient. Owners who lock their entry gate should make provision for access and inform the officer in good time prior to the inspection.

Eradication of infestations (particularly newly established species or 'sleeper' populations of species which are considered to be high risk) where feasible and appropriate;

If sufficient people were permanently employed as trappers/pest animal controllers then the above would be taken care of as the need arises as part of the due process.

"reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations"

The impact of established pest animal populations and the elimination/control of new populations would be overcome by employing the right people on the ground (properly trained and with the required skills both natural and acquired).

Prosecution of those who fail to carry out the required work as directed under the various Acts seems to no longer work as well as it should. It is extremely discouraging for all concerned when cases go to court what ever the out come. In some situations the location or terrain makes control/eradication beyond the resources of ordinary individuals to get on top of their pest animal problems. Sometimes these properties are sold to unwittingly buyers or sold back to State Departments who also have insufficient funds to overcome these problems, many see this as unfair when lands owned by the Crown/State are actually breeding grounds for some of the major agricultural pest species.

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. "*

Having to submit funding applications from the many and varied sources of inadequate funds is simply a waste of time and money leading to in effective results. The money should come out of General Revenue and would be better spent on a more targeted approach for new and on going programmes.

I believe some of our Politicians, public servants, academics and members of the general public are blindly driven by unreal expectations when it comes to the environment and nature. Personally I am not against the National Parks, I do believe they are necessary for the conservation of all species including our own. However, I do feel National Parks must be well managed and that includes the eradication/continual suppression of noxious species.

For some years now, I believe all wild dogs that are trapped have had an ear sample taken this was sent to one of the universities in Sydney for DNA testing, in order to establish the location of (if any) pure dingo populations. What % of dingo DNA would classify a dog a pure dingo. Are any such populations left? Results have fallen in a heap due to lack of on going funding.

I understand that dingo/wild dogs are being tagged, radio collared and released in the South East to establish their movements.

Both the above activities are conducted by scientists and I do not question that both fields of endeavour have merit but surely it is fundamental to know if there are any pure bred dingos left in the South East, if so they do need protection but surely if they are only mongrels/x-bred dogs I believe it is not a question of good science but really a poor economic choice to allow these dogs to exist; impacting on many other native species and agricultural lands.

Meanwhile on the Monaro in the Adaminaby/Yaouk area some landholders and their livestock have suffered the impact of wild dog attack. This situation most likely would have been avoided had the previous trapper been replaced at the time that he left. He was not replaced earlier due to a NPWS job freeze. This situation has caused a lot of frustration for all concerned but has since been remedied.

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

If the RLPB in NSW is considered an industry group then all other people residing in NSW are being cross-subsidized by those that pay the General Rate, I do not see this as being fair, we all own part of the problem no matter where we live.

I am aware the Game Council NSW is working on the preparation of a draft Game and Feral Animal Control Regulation 2004. Also that in America, some people do pay big money for hunting wild animals and that this might be seen as a way to gain revenue for pest animal management. This also raises issues of public safety and may make some pest species even more difficult to control/trap/eradicate. I also wonder, after the cost of administration for the above is taken out, just how much money will go to Pest Animal Management and what safe guards will be put in place to stop the funds raised going back into general revenue?

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

When land is sold there needs to be (by law) a pest animal statement that informs the buyer/s of the current state of the property in regard to pest animals and weeds and the likely cost and duration of initial and follow up control/eradication work in order that they know what problems they might be buying, and whether or not they can afford to own the problem. The cost of the initial work should have to be borne by the seller. This would be a very strong incentive for all landholders to keep on top of their problems.

All Governments need to be aware that times have changed for the "Volunteer". They are fast becoming an endangered species for many reasons but probably the main reason is the ever-present fear of being sued and the unforeseen impact of economic rationalism on the lives of the ordinary Australian.



Coral Talbot
13/5/04