



Hume Rural Lands Protection Board

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The Committee Secretary
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Sir / Madam

Re: Inquiry into the impact of Pest Animals on Agriculture

As a Regulatory Authority for declared Pest Animals in NSW, the Hume Rural Lands Protection Board (Hume RLPB) is in contact with the local farming community on a daily basis. This contact involves both inspecting properties for the presence of Pest Animals as well as advising landowners on the most appropriate control methods to control such pest.

Through this contact with the farming community the Board is also well aware of the ever increasing cost to landowners of controlling Wild dogs, Feral pigs, Rabbits, Foxes and some of the Native Species, especially Kangaroos that have been favoured by large areas of land being reserved for National Parks and State Forest. The increase in the area of Radiata Pine plantations has also created another undisturbed habitat for pest and problem native animals.

Wild dogs

The Hume RLPB is a member of a Feral Animal Working Group that is based in the Tumbarumba Shire (TSFAWG). The Group consist of members from the Hume RLPB, National Parks, State Forest, Tumbarumba Shire and local Landowners. The aim of the TSFAWG is to promote close liaison between the stakeholders to achieve an effective control program for Wild dogs and. The activities of the group are funded by contributions from the National Parks, State Forest and the Hume RLPB (\$50,000). The Board also provides a Ranger to coordinate the on ground trapping and poisoning programs. The biggest impediment to the success of the group is the sourcing of sufficient funding to engage a full time trapper, approximately \$80,000 per annum is required to engage a trapping contractor, to support the 1080 ground baiting program.

The group has been very successful in reducing the number of reported stock losses in the area adjoining the Kosciuszko National Park and the State Forest Lands in the Tumbarumba Shire by implementing a 1080 ground baiting program along a buffer zone in the State Lands supported by a part time trapping contractor. The Group is coming under increasing pressure from affected Landowners to increase the trapping program, there are currently no more funds available from the existing contributors.

The disastrous bush fires of 2002/03 that burned out large areas of the National Park have caused the Wild dog population to disperse and move out onto private lands, thus increasing the frequency of Wild Dog attacks.

A solution to the increasing Wild dog problem would be to carry out aerial 1080 baiting program over a much larger area of the National Parks and State Forest, this could be done every second or third year to control the base population of Wild dogs and reduce the distribution of dogs onto private land. There is also a need for sufficient funds to be available to engage a full time trapper to work in the Hume RLPB area. The National Parks and State Forest are reserved for the benefit of the whole community and pest animal control should also be funded by the whole community and not left to the farming sector to carry the burden.

There should be an inquiry into the gene Pool of the Wild dog population along the Great Dividing Range, are they really Wild Native Dogs (Dingos) or are they now really just hybrids of wild and domestic breeds. If they are found indeed to be substantially real Dingos then there is a case for preserving them in National Parks, however, if it is found that the Wild dog population is in fact now just a hybrid version, with the Dingo gene on an ever decreasing level, then it is not possible to sustain an argument for their preservation at great expense to the farming community or indeed the general urban community.

Feral Pigs

Feral pigs share the same habitat as the Wild dogs in this area, they are also increasing in numbers and area of distribution. The large Feral Pig population in Australia will prove to be a National Disaster in the event that an Exotic Disease such as Foot and Mouth Disease is introduced. The Feral Pig population will act as a reservoir of infection and make it almost impossible for Australia to achieve a free status in the eyes of the International Community, especially in those countries that would benefit from the agricultural trading restrictions that would be placed on Australia. The loss of export income to Australia combined with the huge expense required to implement a nation wide eradication for pest animals including Feral Pigs, Deer and Goats would be catastrophic.

Feral Pigs are continually being dispersed and spread into previously un infested areas by Pig Hunters, pigs are being moved from the more remote areas into forested areas closer to the major urban population. This activity is a major problem for those endeavouring to control Feral Pigs. Feral Pigs need to be proclaimed a **pest of national importance** and much stronger regulatory action taken against persons that transport live Feral Pigs.

Kangaroos

The Kangaroo population in the State owned lands also cause considerable financial loss to the farming community. Properties that adjoin National Parks and Forest are under constant pressure from exploding Kangaroo numbers. Numbers build up rapidly in good seasons to a level that cannot be sustained, they then constantly invade adjoining farms searching for feed. This has been most evident in the drought years of 2002 / 2004. Kangaroos are responsible for considerable fence damage that may lead to livestock disease spread from a neighbouring property, eg, OJD and Footrot.

It seems to be quite ridiculous that Kangaroos may be shot and harvested for both human consumption and pet food manufacture in a large area of NSW, but the area along the Southern Tablelands in NSW is gazetted as a non harvest zone. Farmers adversely affected by Kangaroos can apply for a permit to cull Kangaroos on their properties, the carcass is then required to be tagged and left to rot in the paddock and in many cases to provide easy food for foxes, feral pigs and wild dogs.. Where is the logic in this, surely if thousands of Kangaroos are being culled every year, why not utilise the carcass to at least cover the costs involved in the culling process.

Feral Deer and Goats

Feral deer and goats are emerging as other pest animals that are putting the Australian meat exports at risk, as they are both susceptible to several Exotic Diseases that would result in huge expense to eradicate from the wild populations. Feral deer and goats are also host to diseases such as Footrot (sheep) and Johnes Disease (sheep & cattle). Both of these diseases are expensive to eradicate on individual properties, as deer and goats tend to wander over large areas they always present a risk of introducing stock disease to clean properties.

Both Feral Deer and Goats should be declared as National Pest and a control strategy implemented to at least control their numbers if eradication is not feasible outcome.

Foxes

The Fox has probably caused a greater financial loss over an extended period to Agriculture than any pest animal. The losses from lamb predation alone are staggering, even at conservative level of 10% loss annually, the loss would run into hundreds of millions of dollars. The cost incurred by farmers in attempting to control Fox numbers with 1080 baits and shooting would also run into many millions of dollars on a national scale.

The loss of the native animals that can be directly attributed to the Fox is well documented, this includes numerous smaller marsupials and almost every ground nesting bird.

As the Fox population is so large and widely distributed the only long term solution to controlling Foxes appears to either by a Biological agent or a combination of Biological and Genetic interference with the foxes immune or reproductive systems. This control program would need to be on a national level and the research and implementation (if possible) under the control of a body such as CSIRO.

One final comment is that Pest Animals do not respect either property or State borders. Control and eradication programs need to be either coordinated at a national level or at least the States need to adopt policies that are consistent and compatible to ensure that consistent and effective control of Pest Animal is achieved.

Yours faithfully

Allan Scammell
MANAGING RANGER
For and on behalf of the Administrative Officer