

THE Secretary
Agriculture Fisheries Forestry Committee
House of representatives
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Working with wild dog affected families in the SE of Australia for several years
surveying impacts and solutions.

Wild dogs are causing unacceptable carnage of domestic and native wild animals across most of Australia. Authorities not being aware of the bush remain ignorant of their impact largely disappearances happening at night. In the SE inside the 5400km of dog fence in the SA W NSW Qld most dogs are being bred on and continually flowing out of Government run public land. Public land managers largely live remote from this land at night when dogs become more active. A single dog can cause \$50 000 to \$120 000 damage to a farmer's livestock production in livestock killed mauled lost wages damaged product disruption. In the order of 2500 to 3000 dogs have been caught or shot on the periphery only of public land in the Snowy last 12 months. They could eat 750-900 tonnes wildlife livestock pa or kill 390 000 to 468 000 wallaby pa if they were available. Packs of 15 to 20 dogs have been reported 3-6 dogs in groups are not extraordinary reports. Disease is now becoming a significant source of lost domestic animal productivity if not also affecting native wildlife. As dogs are allowed to breed in and flow out of public managed land, industry as near neighbours are forced to fund the muster of dogs legitimized (by questionable quality science?) as 'top order' predators in public land but still declared noxious on private land. In open grazing country we have cases where rogue dogs may take 8 yrs or more to capture and have a territory of 20x30km. To minimize dog risk, by destocking, shift and supplementary feed, fencing a fortress, up keep of guard animals, exhaustive trap, bait, monitor may cost park & state forest neighbours \$20-40/ha pa or protect remaining sheep \$3-22/sheep pa according to a survey of 70 representative dog affected enterprises conducted in the Snowy in the year 2000. Accumulative losses on one property were estimated up to \$2.8M destocking 3000 wethers for 25 years and 1000 fat lamb producers for 10 years because of an untenable wild dog influx. Other property losses and opportunity amounted to often \$100 000s. Dogs are vectors for serious endemic disease hydatids *Neosporium caninum* affecting human, domestic and wild animal health and reproductive ability. They and foxes are susceptible to rabies as an exotic disease. In NSW and Victoria dogs are presently straying up to 30km from their source in public managed land before they can be mustered by private

landholders or their representatives. This territorial leak is getting worse as funds and resources of the same affected families wear out, they sell out and sell to absentee landholders naïve about the ways of dogs etc. having a domino effect in once productive country. The long term prospect for livestock production is very serious from threat including disease, attack, disruption, onto loss of business confidence, community thrift, land management thrift directed to raising productivity, genetic gain, weed and bushfire suppression, innovation, diversification stability of land management. In areas destocked fully land owners talk more of living under siege not being able to safely walk in the bush for fear of wild dog attack. People fishing, camping, walking their dog, riding a horse are more regularly reporting being attacked or threatened by wild dogs.

β Destocking of sheep, goats, deer in the dog affected zone loss of commodity diversity is largely unknown but growing by the minute. Income loss of sheep/cattle to cattle only results in a 80-90% reduction in average income on the same land. Loss of calves predated cows suffering harassment, soft tissue, udders vulvers damaged, hunted over fences, off pasture, suffering abortion from neosporium are aspects to beef and dairy enterprises now the sheep flocks have been disbanded. The author knows of at least 98 460 sheep destocked around the Snowy and there is likely to be a lot more undetected. Landholders no longer have the choice of what they can grow. At least 44 000 ha of private land is known to be destocked fully around national park in the SE NSW. The Bega valley used to run 100 000 sheep few if any remain under heavy guard as packs of dogs eliminate wildlife in public land and look to find a living on private property. The Holbrook, Tumut, Braidwood, Goulburn, Moss Vale, Oberon, abandoned Sydney water catchment, Scone, Dungog, Walcha, Armidale, Dorrigo, Glen Innes, Tenterfield areas are also suffering a worsening dog problem coincident with the greater dissolution of grazing and logging leases were lessees obligation to manage ferals and fuel loads is being replaced by national park management. Dogs are being bred in the Canberra Cottor catchment Victorian alps, abandoned Melbourne water catchment and flowing into nearby communities causing threat, disruption, economic hardship and personal trauma to families as domestic and wild animals are repeatedly torn to pieces or disappear on private land by invading straying “top order predators” from near by public land. DNA studies suggest there are few if any dogs of recognizable dingo genetics living in these areas casting doubt on their conservation worth particularly as unsuppressed populations and at the expense of a native marsupial fauna.

β Public land managers in SE of Australia are knowingly breeding and harbouring wild dogs east of a 5400 km dog fence running from SA to Qld maintained at vast expense to livestock owners and tax payers consumers reliant on quality food production and export earning. Until recently wild dogs have

been declared noxious animals over all titles. Now they are legitimized in public managed land and only become noxious as they move out onto neighbours in hoards.

β Aerial baiting developed based on 200 or more years observation of dog behavior by generations of professional dogmen to suppress wild dog populations in the rugged SE has been mindlessly banished for use in what has recently become public managed land. No other effective method has been substituted or instituted to stop packs of dogs vacating onto adjacent private land once wildlife populations have been decimated. Park authorities are clearly experimenting with our wildlife, our livestock, our farmers lives and futures. After extreme pressure the NSW Gov is conceding \$17M for feral animal suppression in national park estate of 7.3M ha. The Carr Gov has doubled the NPWS area by taking much well managed bushland from local community care and largely voluntary input into feral and fire suppression. \$17M over 7.3M ha is only \$2.33/ha pa for a grossly overlooked activity with much catch up required. In the same year they are reportedly cutting national park budgets by up to \$30M from about \$260M pa \$240M plus special Gov grants. It is very difficult to obtain accurate figures of what public moneys are spent on an expanding national park estate tied very closely to obtaining an important environmental vote to gain Government in State elections. It is also very hard to obtain accurate figures of how budgets are allocated and whether desirable outcomes are met. National parks have few enforceable business plans attempting to match or surpass local community management outcomes for feral, fuel proliferation or suppression of bushfire. Audits and performance indicators are absent. Once national parks are declared they deteriorate as conservation entities with ferals and fire spilling out over the region. Those of us forced to stem the tide of pest animals escaping public managed land are concerned the postured \$17M allocation will be squandered in research, plans, population studies and little dedicated to active and sustained control, suppression or containment. Dogs are not welcome in any numbers or form on private managed land serious about safe disease free raising of livestock and protection of native wildlife. We question whether \$17M this a real allocation to pest management or change of account name. NSW NPWS system has not gained a reputation for spending budgets efficiently or wisely. We estimate for dog, fox programs at least \$3-6/ha pa for ground work using unshackled professional well supported staff is required in the deteriorated SE. This may prove a conservative estimate as the true dynamics and magnitude of the problem becomes apparent. Public land managers have been very prepared to impose untenable restrictions on access, use of poisons, traps, professional staff time, where staff live, vehicle use etc. Knobble suppression and containment attempts of affected public. Ignore lose, deny, 'fob off' reports question credibility of witnesses to dog sightings, heard, attack presence detected.

β Lobbyists posturing environmentalism enjoying government funding for their activities offering little or no land management expertise have advocated termination of aerial baiting largely without notice or offering viable alternatives to meet their responsibilities. Budget allocations chronically fall short or even omit pest animal management. The outcomes are a fiasco for conservation of native species and very damaging for primary industry national security of export and domestic produce dependant on irrigation water and quality restocker sheep and cattle.

β The costs to the Snowy Mts alone is 99.9% of our wildlife butchered or burnt. We fear many species lost forever. Snowy stockmen forced from their leases were promised our wildlife, wildflowers, water ways, huts and access be maintained for the Australian people honour our families sacrifice in 2 world wars. Our hut, wildflowers, wildlife, neglected, butchered, starved or burnt, water may not be delivered, access denied even to pursue traditional regional feral and fuel suppression bushfire mitigation. Our families publicly vilified and misrepresented. Our Brumbies descendents of our faithful remounts and stock horses massacred most inhumanely posturing feral animal control. The green grazed Brumby runs were where the fires were either stopped or least damaging. Grazing portrayed as an anathema to Australian native vegetation when we as stockmen know how to apply grazing for optimal response for plants, soil fertility and supported wildlife, the long and short term responses.

β Dogs have over predated wildlife the last mechanism left to manage vegetation and minimize bushfire risk Snowy 2003 bushfires cost \$25-70B in national assets and estimated \$1B+pa in lost water yield siltation of water reservoirs. 30-40% (11 000Gl pa) of the annual Murray river in flows are in jeopardy and may be reduced by 40% due to dysfunctional regrowth if not rain shadow from millions of killed trees combined with effect of emissions from Adelaide Melbourne disrupting cloud function delivering Snowy rain or snow falls.

β In NSW alone \$9B pa of agricultural produce is value added through the retail, manufacturing, hospitality and export to \$40B Great investment mark up. 56% of our nations produce is irrigation dependant much of it water collected and distributed from Snowy for rice, dairy, meat, fruit and vegetables. Over 83% of Australia's population lives in the temperate high rainfall zone less than 50km from the beach. This has put great pressure on our high rainfall zone for real estate displacing agriculture off highrainfall areas reliable deep fertile soils making dairy, horticulture, stock finishing more irrigation dependent sent inland to low humidity, salt affected soils, dwindling rainfall. The Snowy more important to provide irrigators life blood reliably. It cannot be over emphasized that Government has been irresponsible in how Snowy has been managed for

both ferals and fuel loads pandering to unsubstantiated environmental theory, penny pinching on basic land management responsibilities.

β Snowy has also been regarded to be the nursery of some of the nations most valuable livestock genetics also butchered and burnt. It is difficult to look at a mutilated ram or ewe lamb and value their contribution to the future of the wool industry. Similarly a line of well bred jersey heifers culled infected by neosporium. Neosporium is endemic in Qld dog affected areas experiencing 60% calving rates or less. Can't contemplate running sheep at all. Neosporium is considered to be a worse production constraint than Brucellosis which attracted a national eradication program of bleed and cull. There is no vaccine against hydatids, neosporium or dog attack. Neosporium is affecting 70% of tested dairy herds in the Bega area many dry cattle beef and dairy reported to be coming onto the market. It will be a matter of time when dogs in the Snowy become infected and spread the impact. Hydatids infection of offal is being found in 30% weaner cattle and 80% 3yos in Qld Emerald. Production loss unknown but contracts for offal in China have been lost at \$6-10/hd of cattle slaughtered. Infection rates in sheep are also reported to be increasing and a source of concern. Much of the data needed to portray these trends has not been collected and collated comprehensively in the context of a worsening dog problem both in area affected and size of populations harboured.

Personal Family Experience

ECONOMIC IMPACT BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

My father ran 800-1000 sheep running capacity in largely bush runs. Despite an exhaustive effort to oppose the dog invasion for 15 years he lost over 700 sheep in successive breakdowns of exclusion. These sheep were usually his core breeding females lambs young hoggets the very heart of our enterprise. Surviving sheep suffered wool damage full of vegetable fault dirt, tender suffering huge market discounts hard to muster and handle using working dogs. Prize working dogs accidentally poisoned by baits forcibly laid in our paddocks to clean up what is essentially Government neglect of duty added to our loss and hardship. Wild dogs know how to draft out and eat the best ewe hoggets, suckling lambs, pregnant ewes. His flock a self replacing fine to superfine flock regularly sale topping wools prior to dog invasion sold through Goulburn. Basically a highly selected Merryville blood flock 18-19m stable genetic base selected for 50 or more years. My father lived in Brindabella since birth 1922. In 1972 he saw his first wild dog. In the next 15 years he was to teach himself to be a dog trapper, catching 50 dogs on his own country in addition to what a professional regional trapper caught in adjacent and same titles. Huge time and effort, resources, wearing out vehicles taken away from the immediacies of farming. He spent many days attended meetings, sat on dog destruction boards, wrote letters, lobbied political people to deal with the erosive invasion of wild

dogs to our Snowy. We watched helplessly as echidna disappeared from our runs 1972 to 1978. Every dog scat found in the bush full of echidna quills. Today scats are clear of quills the echidna are long gone my daughter 9yo before I could show her an echidna that we as children saw weekly. Wallaby, wombats, kangaroo, possum too have been cleared from public land and now our own runs forcibly abandoned. There hasn't been a family member that dog invasion has not affected as we struggled to gain an education and off farm employment, support the family. Financially and emotionally ruined deeply and repeatedly traumatized by living in the war zone my parents left their home and went with their remaining sheep to Tumut in 1987 after a family history of over 100 years. My parents have never really afforded to retire and has little to do with their level of application to hard work. Government shirking of responsibility forcing neighbours to clean up the mess. Ironically dog packs are almost in Tumut now as their territory expands beyond the national park where they have bred up on the wildlife on our old runs resumed for national park and nature conservation???? and have since been allowed to spread. State forest too now is in a state of denial that they harbour huge populations of wild dogs systematically comprehensively eliminating wildlife before moving out onto adjacent private land. It is estimated Snowy as thrifty vegetation can run ~3 wallaby equivalents of wildlife /ha and 0.5 to 1 sheep equivalents /ha as part of managing and encouraging a palatable supportive vegetation. Contrary to the urban myth that has been developed to capture votes and monopolise land sentenced to merely water catchment or lately carbon sink offset, tie up timber source forcing investment in plantation or other agenda, running of livestock is complementary to not competitive with wildlife support in native bush. Traditional small area low intensity frequent fire used to sweeten vegetation tidying up unpalatable plant residues and providing potash fertilizer, opportunity to recolonise regenerate stimulate plant community diversity provide continuity of food sources to birds and other classes of life. At 3 wallaby equivalents (3WE/ha) 800 dogs only can move over and clean out 100 000ha in 12 months or less according to figures agreed to by cross referenced observations of bushmen. In 4 years of unsuppressed breeding a pair of dogs and their progeny can push a territory of 2400ha beyond sustainability to produce enough food eating into the parent wildlife population. A single dog can kill for practice 100 lambs a night push a mob of sheep into a dam or river to drown scatter ewes and lambs for kilometers impale sheep on sticks. Packs of dogs can kill 30-40 adult sheep a night, maul and traumatize many more, suffering fly strike, infected wounds, shock, exhaustion. A neighbour lost 3000 wethers in 6 weeks another farmer reported losing 1200 sheep in 2 months on a remote block. Finding such carnage once is traumatic but having to live with the threat and tidying up after repeated breakdowns is unacceptable. Under these circumstances my father mother and ourselves approached public land managers to receive a tirade of abuse denial judgemental comment that running sheep was

unacceptable next to national park! The dog problem has worsened across the region with packs of dogs terminally injuring beef or dairy weaner cattle, childrens ponies, possibly donkey, killing deer, stalking and threatening children and adults.

It is hard to estimate what it has costed my parents and our family indirectly. 700 sheep killed seem trivial except when you know the effort required to minimize it to that unacceptable carnage.

My husband and I bought our own sheep in 1980 running 350 sheep nominally in the civilized floor of the valley barricaded by guard dogs electric fence exhaustive manning of trap and bait lines exhaustive political lobbying. Since 1980 we estimate we have lost in excess of 700 sheep many new born lambs. Our community ran 9000 sheep in 25 000 ha or with cattle 14 500 DSE (dry sheep equivalent). Today that country runs only 7500 DSE losing 8300 sheep running capacity. Most families have been forced to find off farm work. Our neighbours try to run a similar number ie 350 sheep. They haven't been able to raise a lamb for about 4 years. Since we have had our fences burnt down in the snowy 2003 fires we have lost over 10% adults and an unknown number of new born lambs despite guard dog use over run with packs of dogs. I am unable to offer guard dogs the support they need without fences. We have spent our savings on feed brought in from Victoria to replace burnt out pastures. We have few resources left for fencing. My husband is suffering ill health osteoarthritis in the knees likely brought on by an exhaustive existence years of going around dog traps in rugged country spraying blackberries and other weeds washing out of the national park. Many destocked paddocks suffer weed problems which would otherwise be controlled by sheep or goats if we could manage our land as we wished. We have lost fencing material timber in the fires due and laid out for fencing programs. We have lost shade trees orchard stove wood soil nutrients have soot all through our wool clip and will have for several years to come. Soot is considered a serious fault in 17m wools top of the line Italian wools. We have attracted top awards and prices for our wools in the past to 4200c/kg. Our wool was sitting in the shed during the fire with our pregnant ewes jammed in for their survival day after day over 5 weeks of Armageddon where fire ripped at us from all directions. My husband was the only tanker driver for our brigade so my 10 yo daughter and I worked day and night to secure houses sheds livestock. The wool market since has suffered from the SARS threat, Iraq war depressed demand compounded by soot tender faults attracting up to 400c/kg discount of over \$3500 for our \$13 000 clip. Then we have free trade agreements, spiraling costs, just like everyone else and no we don't get premiums for produce because we have defied all odds. Presently back into drought do we spend more money buying sheep nuts to feed sheep to feed the crowns wild dogs. If we spend money and effort on fencing we have nothing for feed. If we put fences back up

there is no guarantee that authorities will not burn it down again because they are kidding themselves it was a fire event, all over for decades. The fire danger is as bad as ever without active intervention as millions of dead trees cure as an angry scrub builds up in the absence of wildlife to structure a fire retardant vegetation. Rapid fire cycle is the course nature will take now. It was possible to have a fire again this summer. While Snowy was embarrassed by long dry grass leaf and timber fall, livestock inland were dying of heat stress, thirst and hunger as drought relief grazing was refused. Animals would facilitate the healing and reseeded process. The dog invasion has cost our modest enterprise at least \$265 000 over the last 24 years or an average of \$11 000 pa. Labour costed at merely \$14/h. We have gone from essentially no dog problem at least visible only to us to attracting a bandaid dogman mediated program over the interface running over the last 3.5 years were our dogman has taken out over 300 dogs many foxes, pigs, cats in 210 000 ha. If this program had not given us some cover we would be forced into social security as failed farmers suspect viability unable to stem the tide of neglect blowing out of our valued conservation land. To look at our scared hills sheet eroded creeks watch helplessly as our birds and wildlife disappear is heartbreaking. The dilemma of whether to continue to punish our family our surviving livestock for an unappreciative system is facing many families across the Snowy. We listen and watch the ACT Bushfire coronial enquiries among others with despair. No one knows the predisposing events of incompetence dysfunctional administration of public land. Canberra facing and uncertain future for water hydro power bushfire, 11 000ha of pine plantation \$82M bulldozed and burned in windrows. Mt Stromlo Forest head quarters burnt to the ground including all records. 100s of homes lost It could all have been alleviated by sound land management allowing fire fighting improvements to take effect. Pest animal suppression is an integral part of this management we know our families have done it. The 1939 fires didn't cross the Murrumbidgee in a far more challenging climatic event than 2003. We were lucky to have 1920 trucks then muchless 1920s fire trucks. Foresight a green bush and a box of matches was all our families had.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A Pest Species Council be established to attract funds from both state territory and federal Governments. These funds are to be an ongoing commitment looking at goals of minimising pest animal impact on livestock industries, disease affecting livestock wildlife and human health, cropping efficiency, water way health etc.
2. Administrators sympathetic with the challenges and vagaries of pest animal control in the bush be appointed to manage those funds
3. Appoint professional staff with experience and wanting training industry accreditation in humane efficient pest animal control techniques.
4. Acknowledge that native

species too can become pest species to industry and conservation cause hardship and environmental impact 5. Pest Animal Council (PAC) is to work and coordinate pest animal control over state and territory borders over all titles public or private assisting land managers to suppress, contain, minimise impact of pest species on the environment production of food fibre fish plantation timbers crops etc. and maintain native species biodiversity. 6. Goals will be removed from a dead animal tally to other goals of maintaining minimal impact. Funding will be based on performance to maintain high standard of land and water way management. 7. Staff ideally should be mobile and multi skilled to handle large and small pest species diverting basic bushmanship skills and observational ability to managing horses camel donkey buffalo goat deer pigs dogs foxes cats emu parrots eagles snakes flying fox carp cane toads possum and possibly marine species crocodile shark jelly fish shellfish star fish etc as the need arises with accidental introduction or over population.

8. Salvage of skins meat genetic worth should be encouraged to offset costs of recovery however steps taken not to make it an industry in it self

9. Carcass disposal should be acceptable not to encourage scavengers and disease spread

10. The PAC be encouraged to conduct research into better capture and control methods develop innovative skills of staff. If affected farmers etc. are to suffer continued hardship while research is carried out then moneys must be made available to compensate for losses of crop fruit livestock pasture income time labour.

11. Samples collected from feral populations and routinely sent for monitoring disease status. Staff are to be trained in sampling technique, record keeping and routine biological hazards associated with bacteria viral parasitic diseases.

12. Structures set up to receive calls for specialist assistance from rural land managers contacting through community health, social security, farming organizations, RLPB, DPI PAC hotline etc.

13. Statistical section to monitor coordinate and assess impacts develop system of reporting monitoring receive reports and follow up on residual populations

14. Provide information on disease status population dynamics to concerned individuals and organizations

15. Funds should be made available to institute long term solutions were appropriate such as fencing netting permanent traps, processes of relocation or

disposal, critical population densities determined to maintain sustainability. For example 3 wedge tail eagles may be beneficial to a locality however if 15 eagles are breeding on lambs and wallaby then the outcomes are unacceptable. If Government wants to protect these species then responsibility must be taken for the damage they can cause in excess. Options for consented relocation to zoos and nature parks to adopt these animals must be considered.

FUNDING COMMITMENT MUST BE CONSISTENT & ADEQUATE TO DELIVER SET GOALS OF MINIMAL DISEASE RISK, MAXIMAL PROTECTION OF INDUSTRY, HUMAN SAFETY & WELFARE & ENVIRONMENT VEGETATION, NATIVE ANIMALS, WATER WAYS ETC.

It is evident that research is too regularly used as an excuse for procrastination and indecision of diverting funds to more worthy causes other than active containment or suppression of pest species by government departments. β