

# **Inquiry into the Impact on Agriculture of Pest Animals**

## **SUBMISSION**

**To**

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture  
Fisheries and Forestry**

**Prepared by:-**

**Organisation: The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc)**

**President: Mr Trevor De Landgraft**

**Address: Level 4  
239 Adelaide Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000**

**Postal Address: PO Box 6291  
EAST PERTH WA 6892**

**Phone: 9325 2933**

**Facsimile: 9325 4197**

**Email: [andymcmillan@waff.org.au](mailto:andymcmillan@waff.org.au)**

**Contact Name: Andy McMillan**

**Title: Director of Policy**

**May 2004**

## **Background**

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc) (WAFarmers) is WA's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation.

WAFarmers represents West Australian farmers from a range of primary industries including grain growers, meat and wool producers, horticulturalists, dairy farmers and beekeepers. WAFarmers membership base also incorporates rural small business owners.

It is estimated that collectively our members are major contributors to the \$5.5 billion gross value of production (ABS March 2003) that agriculture in its various forms contributes to Western Australia's economy.

Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental well being of that land.

## **Introduction**

WAFarmers welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals.

In accordance with the Committee's request, WAFarmers sought input from its members and in this respect, the Inquiry is timely as the agricultural region is currently experiencing extensive stock losses (lambs) from increasing populations of wedge tailed eagles.

In 2003, WAFarmers participated in a WA State Government investigation into the "Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Wild Dog Control Program in Western Australia". A copy of WAFarmers written submission into this process is attached.

Comments contained within the submission are relevant to the House of Representatives Inquiry and should be read in conjunction with comments contained herein.

## **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.*

Western Australia's agricultural and pastoral regions currently incur substantial financial losses due to the impacts of pest animals on livestock and cropping operations.

Wild dogs, emus, kangaroos, feral pigs, foxes and wedge tailed eagles are primarily responsible for these losses.

State Government pest animal control processes can be better improved by closer co-operation between Government agencies. The Department of Agriculture, through the Agriculture Protection Board (APB) is responsible for the control of pest animals whilst the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is responsible for the management of the States public land holdings and unallocated crown land.

WAFarmers considers that both agencies are grossly under-funded to adequately manage their respective responsibilities and it would appear that diverse agency objectives severely restrict the level of co-operation between the agencies, which in turn impacts on the effectiveness of control programs.

Funding constraints have also resulted in the State Barrier Fence being allowed to deteriorate to a condition which renders it ineffective in many areas of the State and regional staffing levels are unable to cope with the demand for services.

WAFarmers understands that CALM staffing levels are currently 20% of what they were 20 years ago yet the area of land managed by CALM has increased threefold.

As a result, pest animal populations are increasing rapidly and moving throughout the State with no barriers to their growth area.

Western Australia's land mass and isolation make coordinated management across State boundaries extremely difficult.

*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.*

The solutions to these issues are all resource based. Inadequate funding leads to deterioration of physical barriers, reduction of border security and regional staffing levels.

In addition, an overly "green" philosophy of many agency field staff results in inadequate commitment to any reduction of pest animal numbers.

There exists a vast level of knowledge of these issues across the farming community, yet Government agencies prefer to manage these issues from regional offices and on rare field visits, local knowledge is discounted.

Government reluctance to acknowledge and accept local advice has also been raised as a contentious issue in recent WAFarmers submissions in relation to bushfire management.

There is a need for industry and Government to work together and smarter to deliver solutions to current problems.

- 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.*

As previously discussed, State Government expenditure on pest animal control is grossly inadequate and pales into insignificance when compared to biodiversity preservation expenditure, particularly in National Parks, where WAFarmers members continue to advise the source of the problem lies.

It is generally considered in regional WA that the State's worst land managers can be found in control of Government owned and managed land. This criticism goes beyond pest animals to weed control and land degradation issues.

Farmers are expected to control pest animals on their land but if sharing a boundary with CALM land are fighting a losing battle as pest animal controls on CALM land are minimal. For example, farmers can lay baits on their own land up to a shared boundary but are not permitted to lay baits on CALM land.

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

In Western Australia, landholder concerns about pest animals are managed through the APB which is restricted in its ability to respond in many cases due to lack of financial and physical resources.

WAFarmers believes that currently, R & D Corporations have minimal or no involvement in pest animal issues. Given the impact of pest animals on all sectors of agricultural industry in WA, there is an obvious potential for involvement

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

WAFarmers believes that rural communities already understand and are actively involved in pest animals and their management.

Due to the poor State Government response to pest animal problems, in the majority of cases, landowners are forced to undertake their own control measures. Already pressed for time in the management of day to day farming activities, the need to apply for "damage permits", the issue of which is often subject to a field inspection by a CALM officer is an unnecessary impost on farmers.

**Conclusion**

Whilst this submission is critical of the WA State Government in relation to pest animal control, WAFarmers is currently working with CALM in the development of a “Good Neighbour Policy”.

It is too early to determine the likely success or otherwise of this exercise, however, early discussions have improved the understanding of each respective party’s responsibilities and objectives.

It is obvious however, that a satisfactory conclusion and eventual implementation of a “Good Neighbour Policy” will require a culture change within the ranks of CALM, particularly at operational level.

It has been WAFarmers experience that past House of Representative Standing Committee Inquiries have been followed up by public hearings. WAFarmers would welcome the opportunity of appearing before the Committee to give evidence in support of this submission and encourages the Committee to pursue this option.

.....END.....