

VICTORIAN FARMERS FEDERATION INC.

BARNAWARTHA BRANCH

Branch of the Year 1997-98

SUBMISSION NO. 11

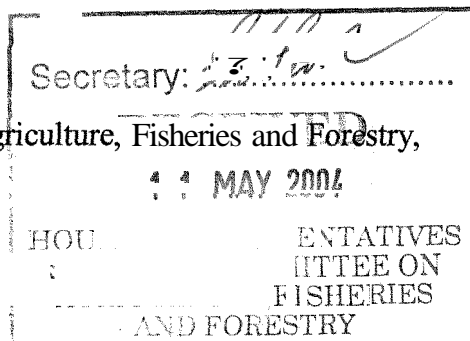
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"Broad Billabong"
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11th May 2004

The Chair,
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Elson MP,



INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE OF PEST ANIMALS.

I believe the above headline puts the emphasis on the specific problem that is currently being overlooked by many of our legislators-the importance of agriculture to our National economy. We no longer "ride on the sheep's back" but have become some of the world's most innovative, efficient and cost effective producers of agricultural and horticultural products.

However our livestock producers are constantly faced with large financial losses from pest animals-predators that aren't even native to our country-foxes are the scourge of our lambing seasons and cause huge depletion of lambing %. Wild dogs roaming rampant in packs across our high country have in many areas closed down most livestock activities No matter how often these disasters are brought to the notice of authorities the problem continues to worsen and we become more and more restricted by petty laws on what we as farmers are legally allowed to do about it.

One of the worst aspects of these two scourges is the fact that they are living and breeding on Public Land-national and State parks and forests etc, and are coming onto private land to dine. The authorities appear powerless to care or cope with the situation and the effected farming community is completely "hamstrung" by red tape legalities. Whilst we are told to keep out of public land, not allowed to bait, trap, shoot because of the supposed damage we will do to native wildlife everyone seems to be unaware of the damage being done to native wildlife by wild dogs and foxes having cleaned out an area and then moved onto private interface properties. It won't be until someone is actually mauled and killed by a pack of wild dogs that any notice will be taken - these dogs are not pure bred native dogs but they are extremely large, strong, cunning crossbreds with large hunting dogs-more control on "hunters" animals is needed.

This issue is very emotive and needs a strong Government approach and the definition of a National policy instead of a fragmented approach which will not work-wild dogs don't stop at State boundaries and State Governments seem too busy scoring points from each other to co-ordinate their policies.

Another point that perhaps has not been emphasised enough is the disease element — wild dogs and foxes carry hydatids—with moving on private land they can contaminate pasture and from there into the food chain. Also in the NSW South Coast dairy herds there has for some time now been an explosion of abortion-neo spora-carried by wild dogs. Having had a National campaign to eliminate abortion in cattle here we go again-is there a danger to humans? There was before so why not now. With a high population of feral animals in the high country water pollution into the

catchments is a high possibility and an outbreak of rabies would devastate wild life and foot and mouth would be uncontrollable if it once got into our millions of hectares of land. I know wild dogs and foxes don't get Foot and Mouth but they could cart carcasses for ever.

To prevent the above happenings we need very stringent quarantine import procedures and having travelled in and out of Australia over many years I'm still appalled at the procedures at airports in Australia upon return and declaring you have been on farm visits or living in farm communities overseas.

I realise the cost of all measures to combat new and long established pest animals is a huge factor But if you are serious about the current emphasis on conservation and natural resources surely there is a lot of unnecessary expenditure going on which could be diverted to more effective control and elimination methods. The whole of society seems driven or led on conservation so is open to education on pest animals-even though no one appears to care about our agricultural industry Australia's future does need it.

We need more people on the ground-dogmen, working but also involved in decision making and management. We also need a transparent set of data-money available, how it is spent, number of actual hands on dogmen, number of dogs caught, where and how. Also a return to aerial baiting in inaccessible areas-this would also work for pig and fox control. With modern aids -helicopters, GPS etc, these areas could be easily and effectively serviced. A strong consideration should be given to returning the use of 1080 for vertebrae pest control.

If the high adverse impact of pest animals on agriculture is to be reduced then public land managers must not only have the resources to manage the problem but also - unlike public land managers in Victoria in relation to pest weeds, be made fully accountable and open to independent inspection and monitoring.

Yours Sincerely,

Betty M Murtagh

Betty M Murtagh
Honorary Secretary.