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Our Ref: RAF:JA003894 Minute W83/06/05 Refers
Your Ref:

9th June 2005

Mr Alby Shultz MP
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Shultz,

<p style="text-align: center;">RE: Inquiry into the Impact on Agriculture of Pest Animals</p>

On behalf of the Cooloola Shire Council we provide the following submission to your inquiry:

Introduction

The Cooloola Shire Council is located approximately 180 kilometres from Brisbane and covers an area of 2962 sq km with a shire population of 34054 people. Main agricultural enterprises are beef, dairy, horticultural cropping and timber plantations.

The *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* is the primary State legislation responsible to ensure all land managers meet their obligations to control declared pest animals and plants on lands under their control. Local governments are charged with the responsibility to ensure they manage pests on their own lands and all lands within their boundaries.

Local Government Area Pest Management Plans are the planning instrument that facilitates the management of pests at the local government level. These plans are community based that bring stakeholders at the local level together to formulate 4 year management strategies and actions plans to minimise and prevent the negative impacts generated from pests.

The biggest single pest animal that impacts on agricultural enterprises within the Shire is by far predation from wild dogs on livestock. For this reason our response to the inquiry's terms of reference will focus solely on the issues surrounding the impact of wild dogs on agricultural enterprises.

Response:

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

- ***Detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals***

Cooloola Shire Council collects data from primary producers on the level of wild dog predation and stock losses. This information is used in planning and conducting coordinated syndicate baiting on both state and private lands. Awareness to report and input into the wild dog database is encouraged through media outlets and extension services.

A number of other local governments in the South East of Queensland have similar models with vary degrees of success. A recent meeting with these local governments could lead to combined reporting systems to form part of a regional multi shire approach to the overall management of wild dogs.

- ***Reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations***

The Cooloola Shire Council in collaboration with both private and public landholders aims to establish Wild Dog Management Syndicates (WDMS) that undertake 1080 baiting at key time during the breeding lifecycle of the wild dog. These syndicates are financially and operationally supported by Council but onground coordination is undertaken by a Local Area Coordinator who is a private landholder.

WDMS increases the area treated by 1080 and produces a far greater cost benefit ratio when compared to one off re-active baiting activity over a single property. The area covered by a WDMS is linked to the Council Wild Dog Management Database that captures reports from landholders. This approach allows increased targetting of resources to identified problem areas. Limited knowledge of the home range of wild dog packs does impact on the overall effectiveness of WDMS. Further research is recommended into our ability to delineate the home range of wild dog packs in rural and semi rural areas that are entwined with large land parcels of State land.

The Cooloola Shire Council also recommends the use of professional trappers in areas where the use of 1080 is restricted. Council provide soft jaw traps free of charge to affected landholders. Council aims to increase the use of trapping as a viable form of control in semi urban area through the formation of “Trapping Syndicates”.

This Council also have a scalp bounty in place and would like to increase the value of this bounty however abuse of the bounty system has been documented when one local government has a significantly higher bounty value than the adjoining Shire. Establishing a consistent regional bounty value will help eliminate abuse of the bounty payment system.

Key issues for consideration by the committee:

- Wider use of professional trappers in semi urban and small farm business situations
- Current restrictions governing the use of 1080 in Queensland are too restrictive particularly in the beef and dairy producing areas of South East Queensland where farm sizes are below 250 hectares.
- Further research is required to clearly establish the size of wild dog's home ranges in South-East Queensland.

Response:

TOR 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.

Background

The Queensland State Government through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) manages approximately 134,000 hectares of State land as opposed to approximately 140,000 hectares of freehold land within the Cooloola Shire. The tenure of lands under the management of EPA and QPWS are split amongst national parks, forest reserves, exotic and native timber plantations.

The State government has the same pest management obligations under legislation as freehold landowners but the State is exempt from compliance action by local governments to ensure an acceptable degree of control towards declared pest animals.

This Council provides operational assistance and materials for use by QPWS to ensure they have the resources to participate in planned 1080 baiting campaigns.

Key issues for consideration by the committee:

- The Queensland Government is not adequately resourcing their officers at a local or regional level to undertake pro-active monitoring and control measures against wild dogs on State land.
- The level of predation by wild dogs on freehold land in close proximity to State land is at a crisis point and is having a dramatic affect on the economic viability of beef and dairy businesses within Cooloola Shire.
- The Queensland Government is neglecting their obligations in the stewardship of their own land while expecting local government and freehold landowners to meet State legislative policy objectives for the management of wild dogs.
- In an effort to reduce the wild dog numbers on State land and the resulting impacts on surround agricultural businesses this Council has provided operational resources (\$40,000 in last 2 years) to assist staff from QPWS in baiting and monitoring activities on their estate to ensure their participating in coordinated control campaigns.
- Increasing concerns for public safety when visiting national parks and State forests considering the confirmed sighting of wild dog packs consisting 15 individual dogs.
- Risk to public safety especially children who life in close proximity to national parks and forestry areas.

Recommendations:

1. The Queensland Government increases the priority for the funding of wild dog control measures on lands for which they have a management responsibility to do so.
2. That private contractors be engaged in the short term to implement large scale monitoring, trapping and 1080 baiting campaigns on State lands to reign in the expedient expansion of wild dog populations.
3. That the Federal Government investigates processes that would ensure adherence to a minimum acceptable standard of wild dog control by State Government land managers.

Response

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

Wild Dog Management Syndicates

The Cooloola Shire Council has recognised the following benefits that are produced through the pro-active establishment of Wild Dog Management Syndicates:

- Increased understanding of wild dog ecology and behaviour
- Increased positive communication amongst landholders regarding the occurrence and the need to control wild dogs at key times during their breeding cycle
- Improved relationships and teamwork between local government officers and landholders
- Decreased occurrence of wild dog predation on livestock in most cases but not across the board
- Increase pressure can be place on State land managers to conduct control measures if surrounding freehold lands are undertaking coordinated control activities

Awareness Advertising and Public reporting of wild dog activity

- Wild Dog awareness advertising in newspapers and on radio at key breeding time helps build the knowledge of landholders and the need to report sightings and attacks to Council
- A regional multi local government approach that disseminates consistent key messages regarding the breeding patterns of wild dogs and the services available from Councils
- The primary aim of awareness advertising should be to increase the communities capacity to manage the problem and become more wild dog aware

If you have any concerns or require further information relating to the above matters please contact Council's Lands Protection Superintendent Mr Jim Willmott on **(07) 5481 0899**

Yours faithfully,

R.A. FAULKNER
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER