

COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES



SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES & FORESTRY INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE OF PEST ANIMALS

TO: Committee Secretary
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Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and
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We see nationally significant pest animal issues are those adversely affecting agriculture and the environment. We see the following as being major causes of grief amongst the farming community within NSW:

- Kangaroos – eating crops and grasses (particularly in times of drought), ruining fences. Herds move into more populated areas in times of drought, eating pastures and causing a road hazard (vehicle damage and repairs are expensive);
- Wombats – create huge holes and leave them for rabbits to enlarge;
- Rabbits - really decimate land and cause erosion;
- Wild dogs and dingoes eat lambs, calves, etc, and need containing;
- Feral Pigs – disturb the environment, damage farm infrastructure, foul waterholes, kill lambs, spread diseases such as Foot & Mouth, Brucellosis and Leptospirosis;
- Feral Cats – kill small native animals and domestic birds, poultry. Strong, cunning animals survive, catastrophic impact on wildlife;
- Mice & Rats – can occur in plagues, cause untold damage and carry disease;
- Foxes – constant problem with low skin prices making them unattractive to shooters. Eat new born lambs, cause huge losses, decimate ground nesting bird populations;
- Birds & Fruit Bats – threaten cereal and fruit crops;
- Crows – attack any animal which is down, picking out eyes and attacking wounds;
- Emus – damage farm infrastructure, hang round self feeders or feeding troughs where grain is put out for sheep, eating the grain and preventing sheep from feeding;
- Locusts – the recent plague in NSW where locusts in some areas devastated the first crops successfully grown following the protracted drought, re-awakened awareness of this problem.

Pest animals spread disease and are a possible conduit for Foot and Mouth and other diseases which would potentially devastate Australian agriculture. Generally, pest animals also cause damage to property and competition for sustenance (food & water).

A major problem perceived by members is the relatively uncontrolled breeding and spread of pest animals throughout the expanding National Park network. A lack of Government funding for ongoing controls is leading to National Parks becoming a major source of infestations and a real problem for farmers especially in the vicinity of the National Parks.

It should be possible for Agriculture and National Parks to exist in harmony however, it will be necessary for Government to do a lot more than merely annexing areas for National Parks. The cost of a National Park is a lot greater and more ongoing than seems to be considered by Government when they announce the acquisitions of more land to be set aside as National Parks. These announcements are sure-fire vote winners, and maps issued showing the percentage of a state given aside to National Parks are certainly impressive. The question is, can Governments afford to operate these vast areas in a ecologically sound and sustainable manner?

- Members believe one solution to the problem of animal pests moving into and from National Parks and that is to build high kangaroo and rabbit proof fences, (electrified and possibly powered by solar cells) around all National Parks. Fences should at least discourage the passage of pest animals. Fences could be gradually introduced and upgraded.

These pest animals need to be isolated. Control measures by farmers are quickly negated if neighbouring landowners or National Parks are doing less to control the same pests.

If such a fence were built farmers could go about keeping pest animals in control on their own lands in the knowledge that any recurrence of bad infestations is their own concern and their neighbours. Councils could then more readily prosecute bad neighbours. Community based organisations – Landcare and Pastures Protection Boards, could then also be more active in their campaigns.

Australia is not largely a country of migrating herds and the isolation of Park areas would not only assist farmers nearby in control measures, but would also assist in any control measures within the parks.

- Intensive methods of eradication are necessary with the co-operation of National Parks and all adjoining landowners using baiting, trapping and shooting – personnel employed on a continuous basis if needed.
- Access trails should be kept clear of thick undergrowth which limits effective access. This would serve the dual purpose of fire hazard reduction.
- Wilderness extensions adjacent to National Parks to be restricted as these compound the problem of pest animals.
- Consideration could be given to selective logging for improved access and to help provide funds for control measures.
- Personnel are needed for 'hands on' control work – perception is that Departmental resources are absorbed by management.
- Kangaroos – the promotion of the kangaroo meat industry is a dignified way of dealing with a native animal which reaches pest proportions.
- Numbers of grain eating birds need controlling, particularly white cockatoos, corellas and galahs.
- Early detection of and action against grasshoppers is vital for the financial wellbeing of farmers.
- Continued encouragement and funding of programmes for rural landholders needs to be continued and strengthened in order to reduce and, if possible, remove some of the problems associated with the problem of pest animals.
- There needs to be a continuation of culling permits for native animals which reach pest proportions. Consultations need to occur with neighbours for true picture of numbers.

Unless pest animal control is improved expenditure by Governments on conservation and natural resource management priorities is wasted.

Certainly, linking Commonwealth, State and Local Governments together to co-ordinate a programme – well funded, should bring results. It is important that landholders are *listened to* with regard to new pest threats.

The opinions of the Green Movement, who have the ear of Government, are not always right, e.g. 'Kangaroos are threatened'. Only by listening to landholders, Pastures Protection Boards, Agriculture Departments, Landcare organisations, etc., can a true picture emerge. Grazing is wrongly seen as incompatible to conservation, yet scientists have been able to gather seeds of native species from stock routes and reserves that were trampled and grazed by millions of stock for more than a century.

Thousands of sheep have been and are being killed by marauding feral animals on farms adjacent to national parks, state forests and nature reserves across NSW. These public lands have become the breeding places for pest animals. Nobody knows what the cost is to our native species.

A co-ordinated strategy is urgently needed by all levels of Government to control pest animals. Included in the strategy must be funding for control of such animals in public lands as well as support for landholders in the private sector.

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