The Secretary
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee

Dear Secretary
Follows Submission on behalf of Animal Liberation.
Thank you for the opportunity and extension of time.
Best wishes,
JO BELL
for Animal Liberation

THE IMPACT OF PEST ANIMALS ON AGRICULTURE

ANIMAL LIBERATION
SUBMISSION - MAY 2004

1. PERSPECTIVE

1.1 The Right to Live

The assumption which underlies this Enquiry and other government and industry enquiries concerning non-native animals, is that it is our right to destroy them. Discussion in any enquiry such as this therefore focuses on (a) where the claimed damage is occurring and by which species and (b) the quickest and cheapest means of disposing of the animals concerned.

1.2 The animal rights perspective is that healthy animals have a right to their lives and must not be destroyed merely because someone finds their presence inconvenient.

2.1 What is Being Defended?

The assumption underlying all Government enquiries is that agriculture as practiced in Australia is benevolent and for the public good, that the running of large numbers of sheep and cattle contributes to the economy and is therefore justified and that the removal of 50 and up to 90% of Australia¹s land cover to allow all this to happen needs no defence.

2.2 The animal rights and increasingly the conservationist view is that the practice of European-style, chemical-based agriculture in Australia is harmful, that the running of large herds of European grazing animals on Australia¹s fragile soil is destructive and one of the major causes of erosion and that the large-scale removal of trees and landcover to facilitate this has wrecked rivers, raised the water table, brought about dangerous levels of salinity and led to the extinction of a very large number of native species following destruction of their habitat.

For Example:
In some areas of NSW where sheep and cattle grazed extensively, 40 per cent of native species have disappeared. According to a Natural Heritage Trust Survey, land clearing is the main threat to biodiversity. Because of land clearing, one in five native bird species is sliding to extinction. Deforestation kills seven and a half million bird every year. For every 100 hectares of woodland cleared, up to 2000 birds permanently lose their habitat.

3.0 METHODS OF KILLING FERAL ANIMALS

3.1 Under POCTA and other Acts, owned animals receive a measure of protection. If they are to be euthanased as homeless, or killed for human consumption, guidelines ensure that the method used is relatively humane. No such protection exists for wildlife.

3.2 1080

The symptoms of 1080 poisoning are dramatic and well documented: *ŒAnimals which are poisoned with 1080 scream, vomit, defecate and suffer violent seizures. They die with a final seizure up to 12 hours after ingestion.*[1] It has been claimed that the convulsions are similar to those which happen in human epilepsy, and that they occur while the animal is unconscious, therefore causing no pain. However this theory does not take account of pain and suffering prior to the onset of the seizures. It also ignores reports such as that by Foss (1958) that a dog suffering convulsions post-1080 poisoning was conscious throughout the attack.

3.3 In cases of human poisoning, 74% of patients suffer from nausea and vomiting and varying percentages of sufferers report feelings of agitation, respiratory distress, and abdominal pain in the early stages of poisoning. Dogs and foxes exhibit highly similar symptoms to those endured by humans, including retching and vomiting, hyperexcitability and respiratory distress. Therefore there is a clear probability animals may also suffer severe abdominal pain. In addition tetanic fits are not associated with the unconscious state. There is also a high probability that the resulting prolonged involuntary muscular contractions will be experienced as pain. (RSPCA Australia 2002)

3.4 Government Enquiry

In 2002 The National Registration Authority for Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals announced that it would commence a review on the use of 1080 and called for submissions. The NRA were concerned because 1080 baits intended for non-native animals were being taken by native animals, or the native animals were predating the bodies of the poisoned non-native animals and themselves dying.

3.5 In the past, farmers and government authorities insisted that 1080 is harmless to Australian native animals. This is not the case. In Tasmania 1080 is used routinely to poison Wallabies and Possums - both native animals.

3.5a *ŒCurrently around 80 metric tons of carrot bait impregnated with 1080 poison are laid in Tasmania annually to kill wallabies and possums. Tens of thousands of animals suffer protracted and distressing deaths simply to maximise profits for forestry companies and a small percentage of farmers and graziers, The public has no recourse to stop a 1080 drop in their neighbourhood, despite the fact that many pet dogs are killed every year by secondary poisoning. Secrecy surrounds the use of 1080 and its administration by the Tasmanian Government. There is no public record of who uses 1080 or where.[1]*
(Tasmanian Conservation Trust)

3.6 The Tasmanian Conservation Trust also cites a 1989 Tasmanian Government Wildlife Advisory Committee finding that native non-target species afflicted by incidental Compound 1080 poisoning include:
Œwombats, potoroos (including the threatened eastern barred bandiicoot), the Tasmanian betong (extinct on the mainland), cockatoos, parrots, the broad-toothed rat, the New Holland mouse, and the long-tailed mouse.....contract workers who collect the dead animals for disposal report picking up ringtail possums, eastern quolls, shrike-thrushes, forest ravens, herons, hawks and owls. Any creature who eats carrots or meat, or invertebrates who feed on carrion are at risk.[1]

3.7 YELLOW PHOSPHORUS
Yellow phosphorus is a poison used for feral pigs. *'The clinical findings from phosphorus poisoning are violent gastroenteritis with severe diarrhoea, acute abdominal pain, salivation and intense thirst. Pigs vomit violently and the vomitus is described as being luminous and having a garlic odour. The animal often dies of acute shock. If the animal survives this initial period of illness, signs of hepatic and renal insufficiency appear 4 to 10 days later. There is jaundice, weakness and anorexia, oliguria and haematuria. Death may occur in coma or be accompanied by convulsions.'*
(SCAW Report - 24-25 Oct 1994)

4.0 DOES KILLING WORK?

4.1 The removal of large numbers of any species creates a space in the ecosystem and this is rapidly filled by more of the same species or the survival of larger numbers of the young. Therefore the situation quickly returns to the status quo. For 150 years Australians have been killing non-native animals. This has given pleasure to some people, employed others, distributed poisonous substances throughout the land, caused generations of animals to die cruelly and cost a great deal of money. It has not rid us of feral animals.

4.2 The removal of large numbers of any species alters the overall balance in that ecosystem and can have unforeseen consequences.

In the middle ages cats were seen as witches[1] familiars and burned in their thousands. As a consequence of this wholesale destruction, Rats, the carriers of the Black Death, thrived and half the then population of the world perished from the rat borne virus.
In recent times, Vietnamese farmers suffered recurrent mouse infestations. For years Vietnam had been exporting thousands of cats to China for human consumption. As a consequence of this wholesale removal of so many cats, mouse numbers climbed and the farmers lost their grain crops to the hungry hordes of mice.

4.3 Both these events were predictable, given the sketchiest knowledge of how Nature balances prey and predator numbers and the likely consequence of human interference.

4.4 In 2002 Prof Tony English, Faculty of Vet Science at Sydney University, issued a report, reading in part: *[3]Shooting and poisoning of feral animals is failing to reduce their thriving populations throughout NSW.....instead, farmers and other landholders must be persuaded to repair the environment to make conditions less hospitable for introduced species. Despite 200 years of shooting, poisoning and trapping, feral numbers continue to rise.[2]*
(Reported in SMH 31 Sept 2002)

5.0 EFFECTS ON NATIVE WILDLIFE

5.1 The sudden removal of large numbers of any species affects the whole of that ecosystem. When calicivirus killed thousand of rabbits, native eagles starved. Rabbit had hitherto been their staple diet - as it was been in the case of the feral cat. Now, almost too late, the NSW Environment Minister Bob Debus has acted. On 31 March 2004 he announced a ban on the issuing of licences to cull Wedge-tailed Eagles.
ŒOver the past two decades Wedge-tailed Eagle numbers have decreased by up to 15% in NSW alone.....Wedge-tailed Eagles are sometimes blamed for stock losses such as lambs and goat kids but research has shown they mostly prey on rabbits and carrion. Wedge-tailed Eagles[1] primary source of food is small mammals such as rabbits and foxes as well as native species including wallabies, small kangaroos and brush-tailed possums. They are also one of the few animals that prey on feral cats[1] Mr Debus said. *(News Release, Attorney General, 31 March 2004)*

6.0 NATURAL CONTROL

6.1 Competing Predators

In Australia the Dingo and the Fox are destroyed in their thousands. Both these species predate feral kittens. When dingo and fox numbers are reduced, more kittens survive. *ŒRecent studies suggest that cats may be excluded or their*

numbers suppressed where foxes are common and reducing fox numbers may lead to increased cat numbers.¹ (T.A.P. for Predation by the European Red Fox, Environment Australia, 1999)

Overseas experience also has shown that the co-existence of competing predators leads to the survival of increased numbers of native animals. (Œ10M Wildcats¹ ABCTV 2002)

7.0 PROTECTION OF PROPERTY

7.1 The assumption by Government, Industry and the rural sector is that farmers are not responsible for the protection of their own land and livestock, and that exclusion fencing, corralling the livestock at night, keeping pregnant ewes and lambs in safe areas, the use Maremma Dogs, Alpacas and Llamas and other proven methods of protecting their animals can be legitimately ignored by them, in favour of demanding the government provide the lethal protection of 1080.

7.2 The animal rights view is that the guardianship of property is a personal responsibility. No insurance company would pay if the insurer left his / her front door open. Those who raise animals for profit must take responsibility for protecting both them and their grazing areas. In Tasmania thousands of wallabies are killed by 1080 baits every year because farmers will not fence to keep the wallabies out. Deer farmers do use electric fencing and the wallabies are not a problem to them.

7.2(i) Exclusion Fencing

Reported in SMH Weekend Magazine of 23 March 2002 - interviews with farmers concerning their problems with wilddogs. One farmer said the dogs are particularly astute and intelligent. He said they could travel easily up to 50 Ks a night. *Œ If they come upon a farm that is adequately fenced with electric fencing,¹ he said, Œthey go round it and move on to the next farm.¹* This incident was quoted at the Enquiry Into Feral Animals to the General Standing Committee No. 5 on 26-3-02.

7.2(ii) Corralling Livestock at Night Keeping Pregnant Ewes and Lambs in a Safe Area.

A Bureau of Statistics figure of the early-mid-90s states that each year approximately 18M sheep and lambs die Œon the farm¹. That is to say they are not slaughtered - they die of heat, of cold, of disease and during lambing. These animals receive no care. Death by predation is only one of the hazards they face.

7.2(iii) Maremma Guard Dogs

The Australian Farm Journal quotes farmer Peter Goodson of Kanagra. He describes his guarding dog as an invaluable farm management tool. Since

acquiring the dogs his lambing percentage has risen from 65% to 106% and his stock loss fallen from 10% to 3%. Maremma dogs bond with the sheep and fend off foxes, pigs, wild dogs and dingos.

7.2(iv) Alpacas and Llamas

These animals are very effective in protecting sheep flocks. They keep sheep and lambs together, patrol constantly and remain alert. Putting two mature alpaca wethers in with ewes a few weeks before lambing and leaving them there until weaning, can solve the problem of lamb losses to foxes. Farmers have observed alpacas and llamas chasing foxes away. It is their natural instinct to chase and trample.

Use of Alpacas and llamas reduces the need for poisoning or shooting. They protect the animals against predators and have been seen standing guard over a lamb whose mother had died. Farmers using these animals report an improved lambing rate from 80% to more than 120%. Alpacas and Llamas are also used to protect goats, poultry and even cows when they are calving. (Reported in ECO VOICE April 2004)

7.2(v) Fertility Control

Fertility control is mostly dismissed in Threat Abatement Plans as of little interest and too difficult. But unlike slaughter, fertility control is long term. Slaughter creates spaces which quickly fill. Fertility control produces populations of healthy animals which do not increase and in fact reduce over time with natural attrition. In the TAP for Foxes, there is some recognition of this. After stating that fertility control is *Œstill in the experimental stage*[1] (not true - it is successfully administered in the US on populations of wild horses and deer and with political will could be used in Australia also) - the TAP goes on to say that *ŒFoxes breed only once a year over a period of 2-3 weeks in early winter - an opportunity to apply fertility control over a short period of time each year. This will be particularly important in urban and areas where the risk to domestic animals may prevent or severely restrict the use of poison.*[1]
(T.A.P. for the European Red Fox)

It is baffling indeed why Fertility Control receives only this grudging acknowledgment and the other methods of control receive none - given that poisoning has all the disadvantages listed above and additionally must be repeated over and over again - perhaps for another 150 years.

JO BELL
for Animal Liberation
May 2004