



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND
FORESTRY

Reference: Impact on agriculture of pest animals

FRIDAY, 18 JUNE 2004

ALBURY

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY
Friday, 18 June 2004

Members: Mrs Elson (*Chair*), Mr Adams (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Forrest, Mrs Ley, Mr Quick, Mr Schultz, Mr Secker, Mr Sidebottom, Mr Tuckey and Mr Windsor

Members in attendance: Mrs Ley (*Acting Chair*), Mr Quick and Mr Tuckey

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The impact on agriculture of pest animals particularly:

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.

To consider the approaches to pest animal issues across all relevant jurisdictions, including

- (i) prevention of new pest animals becoming established;
- (ii) detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals;
- (iii) eradication of infestations (particularly newly established species or 'sleeper' populations of species which are considered to be high risk) where feasible and appropriate; and
- (iv) reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations.

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.

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

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

WITNESSES

BARRY, Mr Fraser John Niewand, (Private capacity)	56
BREADON, Mr Garry William, Partner, G.W. and J.A. Breadon.....	72
BRIGGS, Mr Ronald, Pest Plants Coordinator, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation.....	13
BRIGGS, Mr Ronald, Rabbit Coordinator, Mid Ovens Landcare	1
BRIGGS, Ms Suzanne, Coordinator, Carboor-Bobinawarra Landcare Group	1
BURSTON, Mr Geoffrey Hamish, (Private capacity)	56
BURSTON, Mrs Alison Joan, (Private capacity)	56
CHESHIRE, Mr Noel, (Private capacity)	46
CLYDSDALE, Mr Neil Campbell, (Private capacity)	46
CONNLEY, Mr Clive Rodger, (Private capacity).....	56
COYSH, Mr Phillip Jephcott, (Private capacity).....	46
FRASER, Mr Brian Andrew, President, Victorian Farmers Federation; Chairman, Wodonga District Council	23
GIBSON, Mr Christopher James, Secretary/Member, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation.....	13
GRIFFITHS, Mr Anthony David, Member, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation	13
JONES, Mr John Richard (Jack), Chair, Ovens Landcare Network.....	1
LARKIN, Mr Denis Patrick, Member, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation	13
LOBBAN, Mr Ian Harold, Member, Barnawartha Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation; Member, Wodonga Livestock District Council	23
McINTOSH, Mr Alby, Pest and Weeds Coordinator, Ovens Landcare Network	1
MURDOCH, Mr Russell Scott, Nominated Representative, New South Wales Upper Murray Graziers.....	39
MURTAGH, Mrs Betty Mary, Secretary/Treasurer, Barnawartha Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation.....	23
NEARY, Mr James Henry, Committee Member, Ovens Landcare Network	1
O'BRIEN, Mr Gregory John, Chairman, Mansfield Wild Dog Group	72
PATON, Mr Douglas, Member, Corryong Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation.....	46
PLOWMAN, Mr Antony, Member for Benambra, Victorian Parliament	35
SAXTON, Mr David Maxwell, Land-holder Member, Tumbarumba Feral Animal Working Group	66
SINCLAIR, Mr John Richard Hilliard, (Private capacity).....	72

Committee met at 10.03 a.m.

BRIGGS, Mr Ronald, Rabbit Coordinator, Mid Ovens Landcare

JONES, Mr John Richard (Jack), Chair, Ovens Landcare Network

McINTOSH, Mr Alby, Pest and Weeds Coordinator, Ovens Landcare Network

NEARY, Mr James Henry, Committee Member, Ovens Landcare Network

BRIGGS, Ms Suzanne, Coordinator, Carboor-Bobinawarrah Landcare Group

ACTING CHAIR—Ladies and gentlemen, welcome. I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals. My name is Sussan Ley and I am the acting chair today. I must give our chair's apologies. She actually made it to the airport this morning before deciding she was just too green around the gills to step into the plane for the flight down. I am joined by my experienced and valuable colleagues, on my right, Harry Quick from Tasmania and, on my left, Wilson Tuckey from Western Australia. We look forward to a valuable day's hearing.

This inquiry arises from a request to this committee by the Hon. Warren Truss MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Written submissions were called for and 76 have been received to date. The committee is now starting on a program of public hearings and informal discussions. This hearing is the first for the inquiry. We will be hearing from a number of invited witnesses who have made written submissions. Discussion cannot be taken from the floor, but if members of the public wish to make comments then I invite them to put them in a written submission to the inquiry. The advertised closing date for submissions has past, but the committee will accept late submissions. We would be very pleased to hear what you all have to say.

I welcome the representatives of the Ovens Landcare Network and the Carboor-Bobinawarrah Landcare Group. For the *Hansard* record, would you please each state the capacity in which you appear.

Mr Jones—I am the Chair of the Ovens Landcare Network. We represent about 22 Landcare groups, from the top of Mount Hotham down to Yarrowonga. So we have that whole valley system. I am also representing my Landcare group, Mudgegonga.

Mr Neary—I am a farmer at Murmungee and a committee member of the Ovens Landcare Network.

Mr McIntosh—I am part of the Ovens Landcare Network, rabbit and pest species coordinator with the Springhurst-Byawatha Hills Landcare Group.

Mr Briggs—I am part of the Mid Ovens Landcare Group. I am a pest animal and plant coordinator for Hodgson and Horseshoe Landcare Group, the Burgoigee Landcare Group and the Gapsted Landcare Group.

Ms Briggs—I am representing the Carboor-Bobinawarra Landcare Group, which is under the arm of the Ovens Landcare Group. I will be talking on behalf of Geoff Bussell today because he was unable to come.

CHAIR—Thank you. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The formalities, as such, are over and I welcome you all. We look forward to what you have to say, and please relax. Would any of you like to make a brief statement in relation to your submission? Perhaps if a couple of you do that for a short period, then most of the interaction can come from questions from us to you.

Mr Jones—I will give a bit of an introduction and then each person will have their say, because each of them is representing a different aspect of what has been happening. Looking at the overall picture, our major difficulty in all pest animal management is that we are not getting the support from the state government that we used to, and when I say ‘used to’ I mean 30 years ago. We also have nobody really documenting the distribution density of the pest species. We also have an increase in distribution of some of the native species where they are becoming problems. So we are lacking the documentation of distribution and density. We have also had the benefit of the calicivirus in this area, which was unplanned. The calicivirus was more designed for the arid lands. Our whole effort nationwide on rabbits has backed off. They are still there and their potential habitat is increasing as we plant more and more vegetation.

We have had some good support with some of the programs and we would like to see them ongoing, and that will be illustrated by each speaker. My main message is that we really need to be, with some formal structure, managing the distribution density of the species and extending the information on managing those species. I am speaking from experience, having spent 23 years as an extension person, a consultant, in South Australia with the pest control boards. So I have more than my role here as a land-holder.

Mr Neary—If you go to any Landcare meeting, VFF meeting or whatever, you will see that nearly top of the list of priorities are weeds or pest animals. Over the years the enforcement has backed off and we find that that is inhibiting good farmers’ ability to maintain their properties in a weed-free or pest-free status because their government neighbours and/or their farming neighbours are not being pursued rigorously enough on the problems that they have on their properties. A short-term loss at times can be a long-term gain. With poisoning, dropping aerial baits or whatever, there have been restrictions all the time. Even if one or two wombats or a kangaroo or something are killed in one poisoning outburst, I think the long-term gains would be tremendous for native wildlife as well as farmed animals.

Mr McIntosh—This will probably be a little bit repetitive. The state of Victoria is extremely legislated for. If we had the law enforcement on the ground to assist the land-holders and Landcare groups, we should not have a rabbit or a pest or a weed problem because everything is in place to do it. There just are not enough people on the ground or the priority areas are too small and too defined to support the positive land-holders doing the work. This does not mean to say that we need people out there in uniforms prosecuting everybody, but at least they need to be

there directing people to do it or directing people to be responsible for their land and carrying out feral animal and pest works.

The group feels that there is not enough done on public lands, which is parks, railways, forests and councils. Public lands should be the leader and work cooperatively with the land-holders. At the moment the land-holders are doing all the work, bearing the brunt of the responsibility and watching the government or Crown lands being neglected. If a farmer with 3,000 sheep lost 10 per cent of the lambs to foxes, the cost in yesterday's market price would equate to \$39,000 to \$45,000. Ten per cent sometimes can be quite conservative in fox bait loss. Foxes eat lambs once a year. I am pretty confident that a bellyful of lamb is not going to last for 12 months until the next lambing season. The amount of other things that foxes eat for the rest of the year makes it not only a land-holder problem but a community problem.

The land-holders do all the work, which is expensive, and they have to pay for the baits. I use the bounty in Victoria as an example. While it has some very good aspects, almost any Tom, Dick or Harry can pick up a road-kill fox or shoot a fox, take a tail in and get \$10. That bounty was taken off. All of a sudden it became the land-holder's responsibility not only to buy the baits but also to carry out the work. This map gives you an idea. This is a fox program run in our local area by the local Landcare group. I need that returned. On the bottom of that it has some statistics. There were 27 land-holders involved. It covered 28 per cent of our area. There were 630 baits issued. Something like 293 baits were taken. That has now increased up to about 330 baits taken. That was organised with no government assistance because for some reason the north-east did not rate as having a fox problem or being an area of concern.

Finally, there is the issue of complacency, and this happens on both sides of the fence—land-holders and government departments—and it has already been mentioned. The calicivirus or the 1080 program or something else comes through and we knock over 90 per cent of the population of the pest, which is very easy to do for anybody. It is the 10 per cent that takes the hard work and the dollars and is very unaccountable—you cannot see the work you are doing. We walk away and leave that 10 per cent, and the next time we lift our heads that 10 per cent is back up to 100 per cent. History has proven over and over again that we do that. It gets a bit easy or it is not politically right at the time, we cut the funding, sack people and then in another five years time we readdress the issue.

The last issue is listening. With all due respect to the committee, how many times have either I, in some of my past roles, or the generation before me come before a committee and the people have had a hidden agenda, have had a preconceived agenda or for that morning did not wake up with their ears on and did not listen to what we were saying? We need the support on the ground. We need the legal enforcement to support our day-to-day work. Without that, we are not going to get anywhere.

Mr Briggs—I would like to bring a positive attitude to this hearing and give a run-down on what our Landcare groups have done on private land, and with the assistance of the state government, to follow up the program on rabbit eradication. This program has been going for about eight years. I have been running it for about four or five. Every year we do an average of up to 300 hours dozer work on ripping burrows and the destruction of habitat. Last year 35 land-holders put out 206 bags of carrots. In previous years we have put out up to 10 tonnes of carrots. We are getting on top of the problem.

Mr TUCKEY—What poison is in them?

Mr Briggs—1080 poison. Going on to the issue of 1080 poisoning, we need some sort of alternative. There is a lot of resistance to the 1080 poison, particularly the way the regulations have been tightened.

Mr TUCKEY—Are you talking about animal resistance or public resistance?

Mr Briggs—Public resistance.

Mr TUCKEY—Like greenies?

Mr Briggs—Yes. Government regulations come in. You have to have an ACUP to get the poison. That means you have to have a chemical certificate.

CHAIR—Could I get Ron to briefly finish his remarks and then we will go to questions.

Mr TUCKEY—It is no good saying ‘resistance’ unless you know what it means.

Mr Briggs—I would like to follow up on what Alby said. We did a similar fox program to the land-holders. We had only half the area that he had. I just want to reiterate that the land-holders contributed and the other 51 per cent of the land-holders did not.

Ms Briggs—As I said in my introduction, I am representing Geoff Bussell from the Carboor-Bobinawarrah Landcare Group. I just want to give an example of the efforts he has made with fox control over the number of years he has been there. Geoff owns 1,300 acres and he runs 1,400 ewes for prime lamb production. His public boundary is 4.8 kilometres in length. This public boundary backs onto national park. So it is public land and then national park. It goes on nearly to the sea. Geoff estimates that foxes cost him a minimum of \$20,000 from his profits a year, and if he did not control them he would lose 40 per cent to 50 per cent of his lambs. He has been actively controlling foxes for the last 25 years. In the last five years he has combined a shooting and a baiting program, with promising results. He spends up to 200 hours shooting and 200 hours laying baits. Last year he shot 140 foxes and 260 baits were taken from his property. So far this year he has shot 30 foxes and 20 baits have been taken. However, lambing has been going for only a month.

He puts a considerable amount of time into controlling foxes on his property, due to the fact that he is going to lose profits. He intensifies his spotlighting around lambing time, yet he does go out all year round. Around lambing time he will go out a few hours just on dark and then he will get up at four o’clock in the morning and go out until dawn just to spotlight to make sure he can get the foxes that do not take the baits. He also spends up to two hours a day going around his baiting stations to replace baits which are affected by moisture or ones that are taken, and he records all that as well. This is with no assistance from the government.

Geoff is lucky, as his immediate neighbours—that is, private land-holders—will bait when he baits. So not all his work is lost. However, his public land neighbour does not participate, and this is where the foxes are breeding and living. According to research, to make all Geoff’s efforts

worth while, the public land-holder should bait at the same time. When the Landcare group conducted their fox baiting program they approached the public land-holder, with no response.

In conclusion, the Carboor-Bobinawarra Landcare Group would like to see achieved from this inquiry the public land-holders lead by example and control the pests on their land. Also, we would like to see a nationwide integrated fox campaign offering encouragement and incentives for baiting and shooting. Science tells us that a campaign of baiting, shooting and the fumigation of dens is required to have an impact on the fox population. Baiting gets the young foxes. Shootings get the foxes that do not take the baits.

The reason why an integrated program is required is that when Carboor-Bobinawarra did their fox program this year, the same time as the Mid Ovens group, only five land-holders participated, and four of those land-holders were sheep farmers. The other agricultural producers did not see any benefits of baiting or did not have an ACUP. To achieve a high participation rate, a shooting program should be conducted along with a baiting program. This will encourage land-holders other than sheep farmers and townspeople to participate in controlling fox numbers. Baiting alone does not provide the motivation or the encouragement.

Mr TUCKEY—As Minister for Forestry and Conservation some time ago I visited a national park on Cape York. We had given funding for a program and we were advised by those conducting it that they estimated there were 19 million feral pigs in the Cape York national park. They were trapping them and researching them. There were typically 100 frogs in each pig's belly. One had 300. And you wonder why we have a bit of a shortage of frogs. I make that point because I want to ask a question. Everybody has virtually said, and I note all the submissions say, that a major problem is public land, otherwise known as national parks. They have just been the source of a major fire. What is your view of a requirement that appropriate pest control fencing be a condition on all national parks? Should the owners of those parks have to put that sort of fencing in? Would you accept, for instance, federal legislation that put those sorts of obligations on all landowners? We have quite a few obligations on landowners. Typically, you cannot cut a tree down. But, on the other hand, we do not seem to have a sufficient obligation as to the maintenance of feral animals or with those sorts of things—weeds. I think we are a bit more conscious statewide about weeds.

The problem for us, notwithstanding we are doing this job, is that land management is constitutionally a state government role. But it is my personal view that if you got into our environmental powers and things there is the possibility of a national responsibility that then required state governments to fence national parks. They should be required to do adequate hazard reduction. But that could not be applied to just state governments. It would mean that private property owners, including hobby farmers, would have to do something. Would you like to comment on those remarks?

Mr Neary—I appreciate what you say about the fencing, but you are not reducing the feral numbers. All you will do is lock them out for a while. But they will get smarter, they will breed up, they will get to tremendous numbers out there and they will break through. I appreciate what you are on about, but I think you are on the wrong track.

Mr TUCKEY—Nearly all your submissions say that electric fencing has been very positive.

Mr Neary—Yes, it does work, but at the end of the day the numbers are still going to build up. Unless you kill the breeders, the numbers are going to build up.

Mr TUCKEY—I do not dispute that. The fencing issue is one question. But the other question is really about responsibility. You once had to put in firebreaks. You still have to in my state. Is there a role for a national law that says an inspector can come onto your property or a national park and say, ‘What are you doing about feral animals?’ It is a question. It is not a statement. All these submissions say, ‘States do nothing for us; we want some federal coordination.’ The federal government has very limited opportunity. By the way, one thing it could do is give more money to local government and less money to state governments in the hope that local government might do something. You might want to comment on that.

Mr McIntosh—Fencing is an issue, and it should not be any different with a public land-holder—national park, railway, forest—than your next-door neighbour as a general land-holder. It should be fifty-fifty.

Mr TUCKEY—It should be 100 per cent each.

Mr McIntosh—Yes, 50 per cent each of the total project.

Mr TUCKEY—You mean the cost of the fence?

Mr McIntosh—Yes. But it is usually the land-holder who puts that up, and then it is usually the land-holder who maintains that if he wants to keep the things out. That is where the legislation needs to be or, in relation to the public landowners and managers, that is where the responsibility needs to come down—not only share the cost of putting it up but also share the cost of maintenance. It has to be a two-way street. It is one rule for your land-holder next door who is grazing cattle or sheep but a totally different rule for a government piece of land. It just does not add up and does not make sense.

All those legislative controls on controlling pests and weeds are in place in Victoria. It only applies to land-holders. It does not apply to government departments. Yes, an inspector can walk onto our place at any time if they so wish and say, ‘Do something about that,’ but they do not and that is what we would like them to do in a lot of cases. We have had cases where land-holders ring the relevant department and they say, ‘No, I am sorry, we cannot help you, we are not working in that area,’ or, ‘No, we do not have the staff to do that.’ You end up with a very frustrated land-holder. For all the work he is doing, he can look across the fence either in private land or in government land and see it totally unattended and he cannot get the assistance. It is not a very good scenario.

Mr Jones—Historically in Australia we had fencing for rabbits which was extensive right across all states and, in reality, it failed. A fence is only as good as the maintenance on it.

Mr TUCKEY—I agree with you on that.

Mr Jones—I worked on the dog fence for a while, and I did some work in Western Australia and South Australia on the fencing there. The electricity worked well, as you will see it work on some properties in this area, but again it has high maintenance and it has one weakness if you are

dealing with all animals, and that showed up very clearly at Sunnycliffs near Mildura where they had some very good electric fencing keeping the kangaroos in the park and not in the fruit blocks. In the drought a few years ago the kangaroos were dying and the whole park was barer than this floor because the kangaroos were not dealt with.

James's story is the key one. You can fence them in, but you still have to deal with the animal. It is like our dealing with the wild dogs here. They are wild dogs. The genetics work done by CSIRO in Alice Springs in the early 1970s showed that the dingoes around here have about 10 per cent dingo blood. They are wild dogs and they need to be managed on the land where they live. You can fence them out for a time, but you have a lot of work maintaining that fence.

Mr QUICK—People spoke about the enforcement on the ground not being enough. What numbers of people are involved in the enforcement and where are they based in this area?

Mr Jones—We have one lady based at Ovens who now does Mount Beauty right down through Myrtleford. I cannot comment over on this side on the enforcement side. But they are getting fewer anyway. If you go back 20 years, there would have been three or four people doing the work of that one person.

Ms Briggs—The role of that person at Ovens has always been taking over the bushfire recovery, as well as pest animals.

Mr QUICK—So they work for the lands department?

Mr Jones—They work for what was the old department of lands, yes. It is now DSE.

Mr QUICK—There is one person covering how many thousand—

Mr Jones—It is a big area and many land-holders.

Mr QUICK—Probably larger than Tasmania.

Mr Jones—Yes. When Wilson talks about it, he has to be aware that in Western Australia people are frightened of the inspectors. I was on a property in Western Australia when they were shearing. A helicopter flew in and the guy said, 'You have too many goats. We will be back in two weeks. They will be gone.' The guy had to stop shearing and go and do his goat control.

CHAIR—I guess you have to be able to see someone to be frightened of them, haven't you?

Mr Jones—But it is the community culture. They knew that he would come back and there would be enforcement. That does not happen in this state.

Mr QUICK—How many do you need? Do you need them based around two or three regions or regional cities? What if you have 20 people with the ability to sanction the landowners who are not contributing? You people are doing the hard work. You are not getting any kudos, apart from the satisfaction of cutting your cost down as producers, yet other people are not doing a damn thing. If we had more enforcement, we could then introduce sanctions and those sanctions

could be effective because they would be followed up. At the moment one person cannot do a damn thing.

Mr Jones—You need a person on the ground who is collecting information on distribution and density of the species and who can then come and say, ‘We have recorded this. This is a year later. You have done nothing. Where are you going?’ At least in Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales, and now starting in Queensland, there are—linked through local government—boards where a shire area will have one person. We are covering several big shires now with only one person, who is based with government.

Mr Neary—We would want roughly 15 catchment management officers to service the north-east catchment area. That is only a ballpark figure off the top of my head, but roughly 15 for the CMA area of the north-east.

Mr Jones—James has had work in the past as a member of the old Ovens management flow. So he has worked in these land management areas for some time.

Mr QUICK—Would it be more effective for them to work through the local government, which seems to be more responsive than the state government?

Mr Neary—No, I would leave them with the state government because the state government has the prosecution role. If you start fragmenting it, I think we will run ourselves into trouble.

Mr Jones—They need to be designated to that task and not dragged away whenever there is a fire or another emergency. They can contribute, but they still have a main role.

Mr QUICK—Who monitors the effectiveness of the aerial baiting program? If you have only one person, are they responsible for the monitoring of the effectiveness of the aerial baiting or is that someone else’s responsibility?

Mr Briggs—It has not happened.

Mr Neary—Aerial baiting has not happened here for years.

Mr Briggs—Twenty years.

Mr QUICK—So why did it stop?

Mr Neary—Because, as I said, somebody sees one or two dead animals of not the target species and they throw their arms in the air and say, ‘It is too hard, we cannot do it.’ But, as I said, a short-term loss is a long-term gain as far as I am concerned.

Mr QUICK—So if that were reintroduced how effective would it be? Would that solve 10 per cent, 50 per cent of your problems?

Mr Jones—It is only one tool that can be used in certain areas. It has to be part of an overall program.

Mr Neary—You would reduce the dog and fox populations by at least 50 per cent probably in the national parks.

Mr QUICK—In what time frame?

Mr Neary—Two years; in a two-year program.

Mr Jones—It is going to have to be an ongoing one. I had long experience with a 40,000-hectare job on foxes to rehabilitate mallee fowl. We had to bait that whole area every year and it was ongoing. The Western Australians had the same sorts of problems with the quolls and the work they have done in the south-west.

Mr TUCKEY—West Australian wildlife is typically resistant to 1080 because it is in all the little berries and other things that they eat. The debate that is going on in my electorate at the moment with wild dogs is the relative effectiveness of doggers versus aerial baiting. I believe it is coming down a bit on the side of the dogger at this stage, notwithstanding past successes with aerial baiting. Does anybody have a view about that?

Mr Neary—Somebody later today will probably tell you that.

Mr TUCKEY—I am not trying to pick arguments. I am interested to know what the view is amongst you people.

Mr Jones—The dogger needs to be able to use bait to do strategic baiting. We live in a world where the community is saying, ‘Aerial baiting is not an acceptable practice because you are not targeting the animal; you are putting the bait where non-target species can get it.’ There are a few areas where we should be baiting to protect the quolls, but aerial baiting may put them at risk.

Mr TUCKEY—I think James’s argument about who is killing the wildlife at the moment is a very powerful one. What about the disease factor that is mentioned by some, including this abortion problem with cattle? Has that materialised here? That struck me as a pretty powerful message. It is called *Neospora caninum*. It is an abortion disease in cattle. It is transmitted by dogs. That is not a problem around here?

Mr Neary—It has not been commented on.

Mr Jones—I cannot comment on that.

Mr TUCKEY—I did make mention of hobby farmers in this issue of ‘my neighbour does nothing’. Could someone be a bit more specific about that? It is not your view that bottom-up funding—in other words, money coming through local government—would be of benefit? Do you think state governments have to do it or do you want them with just the regulatory role?

Mr McIntosh—The hobby farmer or lifestyle farmer is a problem now in a lot of areas. Because of the small holdings, of their inexperience, of their inability to obtain relevant certificates, they usually work fairly hectic jobs. I can see that doubling or tripling over the next few years. It is an area of real concern, particularly around the bigger cities, say, Albury-Wodonga—Wangaratta for this area. It is a major problem. For all the work we do right

around this area, if we cannot address some of the places closer to town and the inhabited areas, it will not be any different from having a major land-holder next door doing nothing or having a state park all around your boundary.

ACTING CHAIR—In your local government areas are you facing rezoning issues that make the likelihood of small holdings more? Is that actually happening in your local government area?

Mr McIntosh—Yes.

Mr Briggs—There has been a 33-lot subdivision right in the area that we are trying to manage with rabbits and foxes.

Mr Neary—And weeds.

Mr McIntosh—In our fox program, we could bait in one of the major tributaries in the area and probably get double or triple the results that we have got. We did not bait there or could not bait there because all the small land-holders were not prepared to participate. It is too close to too many neighbours; it becomes a job too hard when you put 1080 out in areas like that. They have all got lifestyle dogs or lifestyle animals. They cannot move them to bait. It is a major concern, and it is really going to get out of hand.

Mr Jones—Not only the poisoning but the whole of these management issues are a cultural thing. I spent years trying to convince farmers how to put out rabbit bait and train them how to put trail. I did exercises. You funded the Chowilla one. I did 5,000 hectares there. We got rid of every rabbit. Three years later there are still no rabbits, and there were thousands per hectare—huge numbers. The thing is to get people to use the technology correctly, and then you go further.

We have communities, local government and state, which are stuck. Queensland had a program out in the west where they used 1080 with dingoes. 1080, when it kills a dog or a fox, causes them to vomit. Your dog can eat that vomit and it can die. So you have secondary poisoning problems. In Queensland they used to use strychnine in settled areas because strychnine kills quickly and there is no vomiting. It is a different way of dying. I do not want to go into that. Strychnine became unacceptable—I used the last of the Queensland strychnine poisoning the mice in South Australia in 1992—because strychnine went out culturally. It is a natural substance, but we do not like it. We might use it in angina tablets, but you are not allowed to use it for anything else.

We have these cultural things happening which are not based on good information and good education. We need to have some leadership in addressing some of those issues. How are we going to manage these closer settled areas? Are we going to let people have those small blocks and not deal with the problems? There is a real problem developing and it is going to cause significant conflict between groups. Unfortunately the land-holder using the best techniques is going to offend those people.

Mr TUCKEY—In the case of research and development, which is a Commonwealth role, what is your view of a virus, like the calicivirus virus—a virulent distemper or something or a similar disease for feral cats—for which there is an antidote, but if you do not buy the antidote

your best cattle dog goes out with the wild dog? Do you see that sort of biological response as being worth while?

Mr Jones—I think that would be wonderful.

Mr Neary—Yes.

Mr Jones—I am not sure the community will accept it.

Mr TUCKEY—If they license their dog, they can go and buy the antidote.

Mr Jones—One shot and fix it.

Mr TUCKEY—Yes. In other words, inoculate their animal.

Mr Briggs—Brilliant.

Ms Briggs—Is that what they are doing?

Mr TUCKEY—I do not think we are, but what influences politicians is when enough of you people say it is a good idea.

Mr McIntosh—I spoke to a New South Wales environment minister and suggested that he push for the release of the cat flu virus and his words were, ‘Not while I am the minister.’

Mr TUCKEY—You have to be terribly careful not to scare the cat lovers.

Mr McIntosh—That is right.

Mr TUCKEY—My wife is one, too.

Mr McIntosh—If the vote counts, that is the way it goes. If the vote does not count, unfortunately that is why we are here today.

Mr Jones—The federal government put a huge amount of money into fox research. Bob Hawke, when he was Prime Minister, gave the majority of that to CSIRO to do research on immunosuppressant technology, which is a genetic thing we can build up; yet our community has not discussed the building into the fox population a gene which will cause natural abortion or the inability to get fertile. We have not dealt with whether, socially, that gene can swap across. You saw what happened when the calicivirus got away. Why are we putting all the money there when some of that money could have gone into other forms of research? As I said, we have these cultural problems. That cat one of yours is another one. We have to look at those issues.

ACTING CHAIR—We are out of time for this session. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee. I assure you that your evidence today will form part of the committee’s recommendations, and you will have a copy of those recommendations in the report in due course. Thank you very much for appearing today.

Proceedings suspended from 10.43 a.m. to 11.02 a.m.

BRIGGS, Mr Ronald, Pest Plants Coordinator, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation

GIBSON, Mr Christopher James, Secretary/Member, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation

GRIFFITHS, Mr Anthony David, Member, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation

LARKIN, Mr Denis Patrick, Member, Wangaratta Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the representatives of the Wangaratta branch of the VFF. Gentlemen, for the *Hansard* record would you please each state the capacity in which you appear.

Mr Larkin—I am a member of the Victorian Farmers Federation, Wangaratta branch, and I also have an individual submission.

Mr Gibson—I am the secretary and a member of the Wangaratta branch, and am also on the North East District Council.

Mr Briggs—I am a member of the VFF and am a Landcare coordinator for pest plants and animals.

ACTING CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Having dealt with those formalities, I invite you all to make a brief, perhaps two- or three-minute opening statement. That will give my colleagues and me the most opportunity to ask you questions and to draw out the issues that are going to be important to us.

Mr Larkin—I have been party to the formation of the submission of the local branch of the Victorian Farmers Federation. I think all of us at the table consistently agree with that particular submission. We have all had input into it and there has been no conflict. I have also added a couple of dimensions of my own that are quite individual which I have not run by anybody else, looking more at the broader picture of pest management across the Commonwealth. I believe the Commonwealth may well benefit by playing a larger role than it does, and hopefully I have made that clear in my submission. I am quite happy to speak along those lines if in fact I am required to.

Mr Griffiths—I will defer to Chris because he can give an overview, as he authored this submission, and then I can follow up.

Mr Gibson—The Wangaratta branch of the VFF would like to take the opportunity to express its appreciation for being able to make the submission. This submission has been made on behalf of the farmers of north-east Victoria, particularly those involved with the Wangaratta branch of the VFF, many of these farmers having land bordering or within close proximity to forested state and national park Crown land areas. For the purposes of discussing the pest types that are causing problems, we classify the pests into two groups, these being the commonly acknowledged and introduced pests, such as rabbits, foxes, dogs and even deer, and those native species that have become abundant and therefore are causing problems to farmers, such as kangaroos, cockatoos, wombats et cetera. I will let the other members perhaps elaborate a bit more on those.

The main concern relating to pests of any type was that of ultimately economic losses, whether this is from loss of livestock; slaughterings by dogs or foxes; overgrazing by rabbits and kangaroos; physical damage to property, crops, fences and the like from kangaroos, wombats. The use of control programs, which have been made available principally through Landcare, has been both beneficial and successful to those that utilise them. Unfortunately, only a percentage of rural land-holders follow and administer such programs; therefore, only a percentage of the pests are perhaps being controlled.

Just to summarise, prior to further detail from the other members, pest animals have a large impact on the economic wellbeing of farmers. Control methods for pests need further dedication, availability and coordination for all affected land-holders. Pests such as wild dogs are emerging as a serious problem, and control measures require continued and further funding. Further research in alternative control measures, such as biological or viral controls, needs to be continued and enhanced. Some native animals in situations need to be recognised as pests. The harvested product from culling operations of such animals should be utilised and not wasted.

Mr Briggs—Going on from what I said before, I would like to make note of the control methods that we use for rabbits and foxes, which is 1080 poison. The availability of this poison is highly restricted. You have to have the proper accreditation. A lot of the smaller land-holders will not go and get that accreditation because they do not think they need it. But you cannot get the poison. We need an alternative poison. If they cannot come up with an effective eradication program, we have to go back to the 1080 poison. To get that you have to have an ACUP. When you are running a rabbit program or a fox program, as I have been running, when you get one person in the middle who does not have a ticket, the whole program falls in a heap. The only way I get around that is by using my own ticket to fill that void. By doing that, I leave myself open to compensation. I always look at it from the land-holder's perspective because I am a land-holder myself. If you do a job, you do it properly. That is standard.

ACTING CHAIR—What is the attitude of the state government and how has it changed over, say, the last 10 or 15 years? We have heard of a level of inactivity. Are you seeing the same good and bad things over time? Are you seeing a gradual deterioration? What is the trend at the moment?

Mr Briggs—Overregulation. If you want to rip a rabbit burrow and there is a tree near it that you need to push over, you have to get a special permit. Even though the tree might be old and decayed or something like that, if the tree is older than 10 years you have to get a special permit to get rid of that burrow.

Mr TUCKEY—And what percentage of burrows are made under and around the roots of trees? It is one of the preferred positions for rabbits, isn't it?

Mr Briggs—That is their preferred position, yes, particularly with older type trees that have had their lifespan. If there is a decayed bit at the bottom, the rabbits get under there. Then you are not allowed to push that tree over unless you get special permission.

ACTING CHAIR—So you would say overregulation is the No. 1 increasing trend?

Mr Briggs—Overregulation, yes.

Mr QUICK—Is that getting permission from a local agency or from one that is 100 kilometres away?

Mr Briggs—I think the only person who is allowed to give that permission lives in Wodonga.

Mr QUICK—What sort of area does he or she cover?

Mr Briggs—The whole north-east catchment.

Mr Griffiths—Before we go into any more questions, could I make a few comments to follow on from Chris's comments on native animals. Ron covered the rabbits et cetera. The VFF's submission referred to kangaroos, wombats and sulphur-crested cockatoos as some of the main native pest species in our area. Obviously they cause damage to fences and pastures—wombats with their holes, cockatoos by eating trees out et cetera. Some of the main differences between these native animal pest species, as we see them, and introduced species are that for all these you need to get a permit to take any control action whatsoever and the carcasses, as a result of those control actions, cannot be used. They have to be left to rot. You cannot sell the pelts, the meat, whatever. It is absolutely wasted.

To give you a bit of an indication of the size of the problem, in my district alone, which is the hills just south of Glenrowan, there are in excess of probably 1,000 kangaroos shot under permit annually. There are probably more than that shot not under permit. After a good season, sometimes there could be up to 1,500. Who knows? It is very difficult to get concise data on those issues out of the department. Anecdotally, from the land-holders involved in those areas, virtually every farm shoots up to 50 to 100 a year just in that district. So an enormous number are basically shot, killed and left to rot. You cannot utilise them whatsoever.

That means the whole cost of that control has to be borne by the land-holder, whereas if you have a big rabbit problem or fox problem et cetera at least the price of the pelts or the meat, if you can find a market for them, can mitigate the cost of the control. But with the native species it is absolutely prohibited. Frankly, it is quite absurd that this enormous resource has to be wasted. If you piled up 1,000 sheep and buried them, everybody would be appalled. But it seems to be accepted as quite okay to do that with the native wildlife. We feel that is quite ridiculous.

One of the possible solutions we would like to see come about is that, in the places where these native animals—and we have concentrated on these three species, but across the state there is quite a number of other species that cause concern in other areas—are in sufficient numbers to

have a major impact on existing agricultural enterprises, they be declared a pest, similar to the native wild dog, and you do not need a permit; you can take control action without being inhibited by having to get a permit. Fortunately most of the wildlife officers are very accommodating. If you have a problem, you ask for a permit and they deal them out. But it is a bureaucratic chore for everybody involved at both ends of the equation, whereas in those specific areas if these animals were declared a pest the same action could be taken.

The other major issue is that the animals that are culled can be utilised. It is an appalling waste that all this meat, pelt or what have you is left to rot or be buried or be burnt or whatever. It is quite ridiculous.

Mr Briggs—It is a health risk.

Mr Griffiths—It is a big health concern. In some areas of the state, and the hill country at the back of my place is probably a good example, kangaroos do better than probably any introduced animal. We should turn the situation around and be allowed to capitalise on it and commercially farm and harvest that wildlife to get some return out of it, rather than having to treat it as a pest and having no option but to try to cull it so other animals can survive. If that wildlife does the best off the country, maybe that is what we should be farming and turn the problem into an opportunity.

Mr QUICK—How difficult would that be?

Mr Griffiths—The main problem at the moment is state legislation. It is prohibited. You cannot get past first base, particularly on kangaroos. There have been inquiries made, and basically they seem to have hit a brick wall. I do not know really what the logical basis of it is. Certainly in other areas they seem to be able to do it with emus et cetera.

Mr TUCKEY—Do you have in Victoria any licensed shooters who are allowed to sell the meat they harvest?

Mr Briggs—No.

Mr TUCKEY—None at all? It is not like in Western Australia where the animals that carry tags are marketable?

Mr Larkin—None at all.

Mr Briggs—A local abattoir that specialise in emus, goats and all the rest of it were willing to take all the kangaroos that they culled off Puckapunyal, and they were not allowed to do it. The carcasses had to lay there and rot.

Mr TUCKEY—It is patently stupid, isn't it? We still have a debate in Western Australia where people go out in the middle of the day and count the kangaroos to find out how many are there. Then they say, 'We will issue this many tags for professional shooters,' which can be farmers. They can also then shoot other kangaroos as long as they leave them lying on the ground. But at least there is a process in Western Australia for some harvesting. I take your

point. Why not? The meat is held up as highly beneficial for people with cholesterol problems et cetera.

Mr Griffiths—Particularly where it has basically been authorised that the animal can be destroyed. If it has been killed, why not utilise it?

Mr TUCKEY—Yes. It is a powerful point.

Mr Larkin—In response to your question earlier, Mrs Ley, I would like to add a little to what has been said by my colleagues and co-presenters here. In the case of Ron's submission about the restriction on poison use, poisons are well guarded. They are in fact licensed under the health commission. At the present time, only DPI personnel can utilise them and store them. The resources within most Landcare groups would meet any standard imposed by the health commission to store 1080 poison. In most instances the experience of land-holders in rabbit infested areas using 1080 would be greater than most of the DPI personnel involved, and I am ex-department. The skills are also equally available in the Landcare movements to the DPI.

Off-target damage is a real risk in the use of chemical poisoning. There is no doubt about it. In totality, it is probably unavoidable that there will be some. People who have intentionally tried to poison kangaroos with 1080 have been very disappointed with the result. In eastern Victoria the kangaroos seem to be quite immune to it—not so wallabies and not so possums. There is no great advantage in anyone having dead kangaroos and no apparent explanation.

I would also like to speak in support of Anthony's comments about kangaroo culling. I have been employed in issuing licences to shoot kangaroos. As Mr Tuckey pointed out, my inspections were carried out in the daytime when I would have been able to estimate visually probably 10 per cent at the most of what the population was and look for evidence of droppings around dams to get a more thorough idea. Generally, the demand from farmers to shoot kangaroos was in the late summer, autumn or a drought year. Burning the carcasses could not be done at that time of the year anyhow. They had to be left on the ground so an officer could do a count. The farmers were generally very good at selective shooting. They shot the big bucks so that the others would go back into the forest and seek out the next leader before they came out again. Water in the forest was very limited. So they came onto open land to use farm dams. They were a real problem to farmers.

Then you have the additional problem of the carcasses attracting other pests. You can shoot and bait for foxes. You can shoot crows. If you want to do things illegally, you can bait them as well. But the population of pests such as flies has really thrived on kangaroo carcasses. There are two processing plants in Victoria that process kangaroos brought in from New South Wales. So it is anomalous in that sense as well. They are licensed to process kangaroos, but not kangaroos harvested in Victoria.

Mr TUCKEY—There is a comment that says if they had any brains they would be dangerous.

Mr Larkin—That is true. Thanks very much for the opportunity to address that issue.

Mr TUCKEY—Could I ask a question about your ACUP. There are advantages in this. I accept Pat's argument that there is a lot of experience built up within families et cetera. Are there regional classes conducted from time to time where a large group of farmers can spend a couple of days in Albury? Do they do that?

Mr Larkin—Most Landcare groups have done it.

Mr TUCKEY—I asked before for a view on some national legislation that may or may not happen—I am not saying it will; I am just trying to get a view—which puts the responsibility on all land-holders to maintain adequate control of feral animals et cetera. During the morning tea break I was approached about my reference to fencing. I agree no fence is any good if a 30-metre tree can fall on it. So I will modify my question. Do you believe there should be adequately cleared reserves with adequate fencing provided by the responsible party for national parks? I accept that nothing is perfect, but would it be better?

Mr Larkin—It can be only advantageous. It would not be perfect; you are right. It would not stop avian pests. They would fly over it. Wombats would find a way through, even with electrified fences. Dogs would find openings where there were roads. But you would minimise their introduction into freehold land and it would be favourable.

Mr Briggs—Electric fences work perfectly if you have a perfectly flat area and there are no trees for 100 metres each side. But it is a problem when there is a national park that has creeks that come down like this. The Victorian government tried to make the land-holders whose fences were burnt out in the fires to replace their fences with dog fences. The government put up \$5.4 million as a subsidy. To date, only \$800,000 has been taken up because it is just too hard; it is too dear.

Mr TUCKEY—And \$5 million would not go far.

Mr Briggs—They have to maintain it. The parks do not have to put any time into it. There was a minimum area of three metres to clear trees.

Mr Griffiths—While putting up those sorts of fences does reduce the impact on agriculture on the private side of the fence, it does nothing to reduce the impact on the biodiversity of native wildlife on the other side of the fence.

Mr TUCKEY—I understand that. That is why I asked the two questions. But, having been a forestry minister, I think it is an outrageous disgrace the way metropolitan based politicians can get this warm inner glow of declaring another national park and then rip up all the roads and not even make it possible to go and put a fire out. I was told in Canberra the other day by a lawyer who is assisting the coroner on behalf of all those people who were killed in the Canberra bushfires that people are very worried that they have just discovered there are no competent dozer drivers left who can operate in a forest to help put out a fire. You wonder why. They closed down all the forest industries and the whole skill base has been lost. A substantial issue in this whole business is the extent to which government land is the principal problem both with fire and with feral pests.

Mr Griffiths—There is basically no Crown land in the area I come from where this kangaroo problem is. They are all coming from private bush.

Mr TUCKEY—But they are still not allowed to shoot them?

Mr Griffiths—No. So they do not all come from just Crown land.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it private bush owned by absentee land-holders?

Mr Griffiths—Some of them live there. Some of them are absentee land-holders. Some of them have reasonable size holdings of bush so they can walk about and enjoy it, or they do not see the kangaroos as a problem because they do not impact their end of their farm, or some of them just do not care.

ACTING CHAIR—Would many of them be farmers who make 100 per cent of their income from their farm?

Mr Griffiths—I would say none of them.

Mr TUCKEY—This comes back to the hobby farm question.

Mr Griffiths—Yes.

Mr QUICK—Pat, in your submission you state:

One of the perceived views held by communities is government's reluctance to prosecute other government agencies and rely on private land managers to implement programs at the boundary interface, thus treating the "symptom" rather than the cause.

Mr Larkin—Under the Catchment and Land Protection Act in Victoria government departments cannot prosecute other government departments. For instance, VicRoads, the agency responsible for large highways, is a government department by any other name, a government agency by any other name. National parks are no longer incorporated into DPI and DSE. They have their own entity. Under the Catchment and Land Protection Act, the DPI inspectors, who are now called catchment management officers, do not have authorisation to pursue legal action against other government agencies. Under the old Vermin and Noxious Weeds Act it was possible to do so. It was generally not implemented, but it was possible. I threw VicRoads in because there have been a lot of protests about pest plants, but that is not part of this inquiry. There are pest animals on railway lines. Rabbits particularly harbour very well there.

Mr QUICK—That is right.

Mr Larkin—There are a lot of VicRoads plantations now that are considered to be pretty adequate fox harbours. In fact, one department cannot take action against another, as far as legislative action is concerned, to control the problem on their land.

Mr QUICK—So only local governments can give state government departments a hard time?

Mr Larkin—Local government cannot.

Mr TUCKEY—Furthermore, dare it.

Mr Larkin—They can make a lot of strong protests, yes.

Mr TUCKEY—They are a creature of state governments.

Mr Larkin—It is all done by negotiation between departments. Local government can make more noise, and probably the north-east municipalities at the present time do. But under their own act they cannot go after each other. Under occupational health and safety legislation they can. Any one of those departments I have just mentioned can be prosecuted by WorkCover. But they cannot prosecute for land management.

Mr QUICK—But to have an effective eradication policy you need to have interagency cooperation. It would be nice if each of the agencies were based in the same town so they could at least talk to each other or when their officers played golf they could talk to each other or talk to each other at the rotary club. If your situation is anything like the situation in Tasmania, they are never all based in the one region, they are all 100 kilometres away, so there is no opportunity to talk to each other on an interagency strategic approach to something that is costing the community tens of millions of dollars.

Mr Larkin—I think the communication is probably quite open with today's email advantages. In the north-east there are a couple of large centres where most agencies are represented. What is a problem is that one agency can just thumb its nose at the other and say, 'Yes, we sympathise with your problems, mate, but we do not have the budget. Go to hell.' Budgets come into it. It may be a justified reason in many cases; it may be an excuse in others. Also, various government agencies have various priorities. Managing weeds on agricultural land might be the highest priority. In a particular park situation it may not be. It may be; it may not be. I am not saying it is not. In some of the areas I have seen, parks have really upped their game. But the fact is there is no back-up. There is no bottom line for one agency to deal with another through legislation, through the courts.

Mr Briggs—I would like to give you an example of what Harry was talking about in relation to government departments such as VicRoads. We spent an hour last night at a Landcare meeting. I have been trying for four years to get VicRoads to address the rabbit and weed problems on only a short section of road—the Wangaratta to Beechworth road. There are processes to go through. I have gone through all of those processes. We got VicRoads up to a meeting two years ago. Nothing happened. We sent letters. We never even got a reply to the letters. The last time we approached the same chap he said, 'You have to write to my boss.' So we wrote to his boss. Nothing was done. I suggested last night that we send them a bill from the local contractor to do the work, but they did not let me do that.

Mr TUCKEY—Are you prepared to make that correspondence available to this committee?

Mr Briggs—Yes.

Mr TUCKEY—We might ask them to come and give some evidence, if the Premier will let them.

Mr Griffiths—Ron's example highlights what is rapidly becoming accepted in Landcare groups et cetera—the time and effort involved for either an individual or a small group to get some of these major agencies to tackle the issues. As Pat said, some are better than others. Some of the agencies accepted that it would be far quicker and probably cheaper for you to go and do it yourself rather than to spend all that time trying to get them to address what is often quite a small problem when you initially raise it. But, as the years go by and nothing is done, of course rabbits breed, weeds spread and what is small becomes big.

Mr Briggs—I have done that exercise too. We had a rabbit problem. A railway line was next to it and there were a few burrows there. I went in there so I could clean up the area. I went in there and ripped the burrows and got my hand smacked for doing it.

Mr TUCKEY—That is the point I was about to make. It is like hiding in your own home with a gun to catch the perennial housebreaker, and they sue you for having a shot at them.

Mr Larkin—That is what I meant by the interface problem.

Mr Briggs—We tried all the tricks to get it done.

Mr QUICK—I am interested in one other issue that you mention—the detection and reporting systems. If we ask people about the number of native animals that are killed by 1080, people can give us anecdotal evidence but no-one can actually say that 3,227 bandicoots have died as a result of 1080 in Victoria in the last 12 months.

Mr Briggs—There are more killed on the roads.

Mr QUICK—I know. I am interested in the 'farmers, bushwalkers, cyclists, stockmen', contractors and others who are part and parcel of living, working and being involved in the community. If there were some form of registration or card, they could drop it off and say, 'I was bushwalking up such and such a track and I happened to notice this,' and they put the ticket in and at least someone could collect it. Would it be the responsibility of the Department of Sustainability and Environment to do something like that?

Mr Larkin—They would be the people who should carry it if the resource were there and if the funding were there to develop that resource. Part of the education processes identifying pests is to educate people who come to the bush—

Mr QUICK—From the city?

Mr Larkin—From the city, and even from some of the larger regional centres. I have seen estate agent ads—not recently, I must admit, but some years ago—in which rocks and rabbits were part of a feature to attract people to buy a nice, little piece of paradise: 'Rabbits are nice, cuddly, little things.' A lot of people have strong humane values and have great difficulty with poisoning rabbits and shooting kangaroos. That is to be respected. Part of the education process is (1) to identify the animal, (2) to identify the habitat it is most likely to be found in and (3) to

show some illustration of what damage that animal can cause to other living things—not just predatory animals but animals such as the rabbit that outcompete sheep or native animals. Rabbits could probably be just as responsible as foxes for eradicating bandicoots by taking their food resource and by outcompeting them on harbour. That cycle is generally unknown not so much to long-term, full-time farm residents but to lifestyle people coming in now. There has not been much education. I think the DSE and the DPI are the appropriate sources to provide that. As for the contractors or walkers recording deaths or sightings, if there were some card they could fill in and deposit at the local office, it would be an advantage all round.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, gentlemen. We have to wind this section up and move on to our next witnesses. Thank you very much for your most informative evidence. I assure you that your remarks will be recorded and considered by the committee in its final report, copies of which will be sent to you.

Mr Gibson—Can I take the opportunity to thank the committee for hearing the views of the Wangaratta VFF. It is certainly appreciated. We believe getting information from the grassroots is valuable to such inquiries.

[11.37 a.m.]

FRASER, Mr Brian Andrew, President, Victorian Farmers Federation; Chairman, Wodonga District Council

LOBBAN, Mr Ian Harold, Member, Barnawartha Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation; Member, Wodonga Livestock District Council

MURTAGH, Mrs Betty Mary, Secretary/Treasurer, Barnawartha Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome representatives of the Barnawartha branch and the Wodonga branch of the VFF. For the *Hansard* record, can you each please state the capacity in which you appear.

Mr Lobban—I am a member of the Barnawartha branch, I am on the Wodonga District Council and I am on the Victorian Farmers Federation State Council. Today I am mainly here representing the branch and the DC.

Mrs Murtagh—I am a Rutherglen farmer. I am Secretary/Treasurer of the VFF Wodonga district council and also of the VFF Barnawartha branch.

Mr Fraser—I am a farmer from the Tallangatta Valley. I am Chairman of the Wodonga District Council of the VFF.

ACTING CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. You can each make a brief, perhaps only two- or three-minute opening statement if you so require, and then we will go straight to questions.

Mrs Murtagh—I wish to explain the submission I have put in on the area of health and wellbeing in the community. Other facts will no doubt be presented by the others. I feel the health of the community certainly plays a very major part in agriculture. I have dealt with feral dogs and foxes. They are recognised, among other animals, as carriers of hydatids and *Neospora* disease. These animals frequent water sources to drink, and they dine on the native fauna. With hydatids present in wild dogs and foxes, they soil pasture and water catchments and storages and can get into the food chain, and that should be kept in mind. As the native fauna diminishes on the public land, they move further afield and are now devastating farms, consequently soiling these areas also.

The conclusion can be drawn from this that there are considerable health risks to people as well as financial and traumatic effects on the rural industry and the rural community. To come out one beautiful morning to find lambs torn to pieces and their mothers endeavouring to drag themselves around is an experience that is very hard to put out of mind. You then go on to

depression and heartache and a breakdown of the family circle in rural areas because of the unnecessary tension and stress that is put on many families.

Some New South Wales rural land protection boards are threatening to summons farmers whose cattle carcasses at abattoirs are found to have hydatids cysts. They will first be advised to treat their farm dogs, and a follow-up will occur to see whether this has happened. However, if the dogs are feral, which they could well be, then at the moment this is an uncontrollable risk.

I forwarded to the committee secretariat a copy of the paper 'The role of *Neospora caninum* in Bovine Abortion Complex', published in the proceedings of the 2002 Adelaide conference of the Australian Association of Cattle Veterinarians. In this paper, *Neospora* is discussed at length and conclusions are drawn that the disease is and can be spread by wild dogs. This disease is having a significant effect on the production of coastal dairy herds in New South Wales and Queensland, and it is observed in beef herds as well. I was recently told there have been several confirmed cases in dairy herds in the north-east Victorian high country. Several years ago we had a national eradication program for abortion and eventually had a clean world status. So why risk it all over again? The wild dog problem intensifies in the traditional areas adjacent to public lands and expands into other farming country. These disease problems will only get worse.

Mr Lobban—The issues we want to address—and Brian will talk more about them—are, firstly, the wild dogs. We have some information from a very successful rally we had last night at Tallangatta. There were nearly 200 people there at very short notice, and that really highlights the extremity of the problem. Then I want to talk about 1080, a little bit on foxes and kangaroos and about public land. They are the main areas that I want to address.

Mr Fraser—I hope this is the culmination of some 30 or more years of endeavouring to do something about the problem. I initially asked for the hearing to be held in Tallangatta, where I hoped you would wake up to the howl of dogs, the scream of sheep and all that sort of thing. I would like to elaborate a little bit further later on and tender some evidence. I will make a presentation at the appropriate time.

ACTING CHAIR—Why not kick off with that now.

Mr Fraser—From our point of view, our farmers are on the northern end of the Dartmouth Dam. There is a lot of bush country between there and the coast—150 miles of bush, parks and alpine park. When the Dartmouth Dam started to fill in 1975 that was the beginning of a real escalation of dogs in our particular area. Since then it has gone from bad to worse. We have tried on a number of occasions to get recognition. One of the first moves was a ministerial committee appointed by Joan Kirner, and that did a lot of good for Gippsland and north-eastern Victoria. Gippsland, you can imagine, had the problem with the dogs, too, because the Dartmouth Dam cut their natural travel path off along the high country. They went north and south, and they still continue to go north and south. So that worked very successfully. Joan Kirner demonstrated that she was a very good politician: she recognised it, came and saw, accepted the problem and did something about it.

As time transpired, the problem kept on escalating. We created what was called the Victorian and New South Wales Wild Dog Control Coordinating Committee to try to get some sort of coordination between Victoria and New South Wales. The Kosciuszko National Park is a

corridor for dogs which just comes straight into Victoria. They do not take any notice of the river. So it needs a bit of cooperation on dog control work each side. Following that, as a result of agitation from the Victorian and New South Wales control committee and the Wodonga District Council, the DC, we had the formation and the introduction of the national summit in Wodonga in February 2002. That was followed by a deputation to Dr David Kemp and an explanation of what was going on. It was recognised, and I think we sit here today as a result of that deputation and some of the concerns shown.

One of the things that were brought up that tended to be overlooked at that deputation and other meetings was the creation of a federal apprenticeship for pest control officers. We have a mishmash of experience and that type of thing and no coordination or no general approach to pest control. When we look at it from a national point of view, those people who are trained in that way with apprenticeship funding can travel about the country, get experience and do the job properly. That includes not just dogs but also pigs and all the other types of pests. So we would like to see the creation of that form of experience.

Victoria did not come out of the summit in a very good light because it did not seem to have a grip on the situation. The solution to wild dog control is not pouring more money at it; it is pouring money in the right direction. That seems to be the thought of a number of people—that money will fix it. It will not; experience and logic will.

During the war—just as an offshoot—there were two dogmen in the Tallangatta area. They each had a horse and 200 traps. They got dispensation from war service because the wild dog problem was pretty significant. At the end of the period when they were operating they said they had poisoned more wild dogs than they had trapped. But I think it is fair to say that it was probably very hard to find a dog between Corryong and Bogong. That was two men with horses and 200 traps. If it could be done then, it can be done now with the sort of experience that we have. I think the success of all this is federal organisation. Cross-border coordination is a problem because, as Betty has explained, the impact of diseases such as *Neospora* is not a state problem; it is Commonwealth wide.

I would like to tender as evidence the six motions that were passed at the Tallangatta meeting last night. I am not sure how I present that, but I will leave it with you. There is one motion that needs highlighting—that is: 'That the meeting request the federal government to declare wild dogs a pest of national significance.' In addition to that, there are a couple of notes that should go with it: (1) it is refuted they are native animals, (2) they endanger wildlife and (3) they have never been anything other than a suppressed population. I think you all understand what that means. If you do not, we can explain it later on. I tender that summary of those motions. Also, I tender pages 4 and 5 of the *Border Mail*.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Is it the wish of the committee that they be taken as an exhibit? There being no objection, it is so ordered. Ian, you said you had some particular things to speak to. Can you do that briefly so that we can keep our question time as long as possible?

Mr Lobban—Yes, I will. I will start on the issue of wild dogs. Bear in mind that, in my job as a regional councillor on the state council, I go around to all the branches and I also spend a bit of time in east Gippsland because of the wild dog problems. It is one of my portfolios with the VFF. As I explained to the meeting last night, of all the issues in land management we have to

deal with, wild dogs and native vegetation have been the two we have not been able to get a satisfactory outcome on. The wild dogs issue has been a total frustration to me, being responsible for trying to represent the farmers, in that we have not been able to get the message across in Victoria.

As I said last night, the warning signs were there a few years ago. They were not taken on board by the Victorian government. Then we had the disastrous bushfires, which have really spread the problem enormously. The fires moved a lot of dogs onto private land because what the dogs had not eaten before was cooked in the fires. The problem now in Victoria is out of control. We need some desperate actions and some commonsense to be able to bring the situation back. We have done some homework, and I talk to colleagues in other states. Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia are certainly doing far better on wild dogs. It is interesting that those three states are still aerial baiting, and we have nowhere near the number of complaints from farmers that we have here in Victoria because they are keeping on top of the problem.

I want to talk about aerial baiting because, whilst our opponents might claim that we poison wildlife and all this, the absolute evidence is there that it is not true. The wild dogs and the foxes, not the baits, are killing the wildlife. The baiting is target specific. In Western Australia, where they have been doing aerial baiting for some time and they have done trials, the number of quolls has increased dramatically since there has been aerial baiting. You cannot get any greater evidence than that. Victoria is certainly lagging behind, and that is why we welcome this federal inquiry. We are hoping the federal government might be able to come in and lend some weight. The wild dog program needs coordinating. It is probably the federal government's role to try to bring all the states together. Hopefully, if you can coordinate that, Victoria will have to lift its game and come on board with the others. The saddest part—and we have to face reality with the wild dogs—is do we have to wait for a human life to be taken before the Victorian government realises what a problem we have.

Mr TUCKEY—Fraser Island.

Mr Lobban—There is no question that, and I say this sadly, if we do not really reduce the numbers and do something about it, that will eventually happen. We have had some near misses with bushmen and people out in the bush with them. The only reason it has not happened to date—and I have tried to explain this to the government and the minister in Melbourne—is the fact that those people are experienced and they have known how to react and not to panic. But, if you take a child or someone inexperienced, the first thing they will do is run if they are confronted, and that will be the worst thing they can do.

I just want to mention the 1080. It is important that you make every endeavour to try to retain the use of 1080. There is an inquiry at the moment. I do not say it is under threat, but there is an inquiry into it. There are people who want it banned. There is no equal alternative. If we were to lose the right to use that in agriculture, it would be an absolute disaster. As I have mentioned at a few seminars I have spoken at, in the 20-odd years or more that I have been involved in the Victorian Farmers Federation and the Land Management Committee, this is the fourth time that I have had to, on their behalf, go in and try to justify the retention of 1080. So about every five years our opponents bring it up. I am sick and tired of it because it is costly—it costs our

organisation; it is expensive—and because of the amount of time we have to put into it, when there are better things we can be putting our time into.

Very briefly in relation to foxes, if there were to be a bounty, it would have to be a national bounty. We tried a state bounty in Victoria. I do not believe it worked 100 per cent. It was never going to because you cannot police the boundaries. Probably with the money that Victoria spent, we cleaned up a lot of South Australia and New South Wales Riverina foxes. It has to be national if it is going to be successful.

The kangaroo numbers have increased so dramatically because of the improved pastures and water supplies on private land. The public land is no longer able to sustain the numbers we now have. They are everywhere. You only have to look at some of our highways where you never saw them before and now you see them.

Mr TUCKEY—What about golf courses?

Mr Lobban—Yes, that is right. You see them dead on the side of the road. People are running into them. In the drought it was a real problem. With the very short supply of fodder and water that farmers had, it was pretty depressing to go out and see hundreds of kangaroos drinking that water. In some places they were actually paying to cart it in, only to supply the kangaroos. So we have to look at the kangaroo problem.

We support commercial harvesting. In Victoria we are not allowed to do that. I think in some other states they can. We have tried. It is VFF policy that we should allow commercial harvesting. At the moment, farmers can get a permit to shoot a few. It seems stupid that you can shoot them but you have to leave them to lie in the paddock when there is a commercial value there. With the numbers we have, no-one is going to be stupid enough to say, ‘We want to decimate them.’ But we have to bring about a sustainable balance that the public land can sustain.

That leads into the issue of public land managers. I believe very strongly that we have to bring attention to the public land managers having to take more responsibility for the care and the keeping of the wildlife on their land. As I see it, the kangaroos et cetera that are on the parks and in the forest areas are being kept by government for the benefit of the public. It is the public that want those kangaroos and that there. It is the responsibility of government to do that. But we do not have a level playing field. If our animals—cattle or sheep—get out into the park, all hell breaks out. They have threatened to impound them and everything. Yet the public’s kangaroos can continually invade private land and break down our fences. There is no acceptance from the public land managers that they should manage their stock the same as we do. That is a contentious issue. We do the right thing. Public land managers have to be brought up to being responsible as well.

Mr TUCKEY—Betty, you were the first person to raise the issue of *Neospora*. The other word is ‘caninum’, which to me sounds very close to ‘canine’ and identifies the evidence you bring to us that this is a disease that is recognised as being carried by carnivores, and dogs in particular. Would you like to expand on this? Thinking of the fact that mad cow disease eventually transmitted to humans, is there any evidence you know of that suggests that it could

have an effect on women and their babies if it ever did make the jump to humans, as many animal diseases seem to be doing these days?

Mrs Murtagh—At the moment I do not think there is any evidence. There has not been a lot of research into *Neospora*. That paper that I included does do a fairly broad cover, but there has been no actual outcome. They do say that the dogs will spread it. They also say that the dogs can spread it from property to property by removing aborted fetuses, afterbirth and that type of thing. It is uncharted territory. We did have dreadful problems with brucellosis, and that was a health problem that came through. I also think this could affect, if it becomes a worldwide problem, our export markets as well. You can see what has happened to countries that have had mad cow disease. They have had their export cut off immediately. It is very necessary that more research goes into this for agriculture and for people's health.

Mr TUCKEY—I am rather impressed with the concept of an apprenticeship in the area of pest control et cetera. This is not a critical question, but are there sufficient trainers—in other words, highly experienced people with a working background—that could take these apprentices on, be they doggers or whatever? What is the resource available to whom we could apprentice these people?

Mr Fraser—Can I start off by remarking on your comment about kangaroos on golf courses. Funnily, in Victoria the golf courses actually burn during the summer because they cannot afford to put water on them to keep them green. I do not think the kangaroos would be too keen on the ordinary grass. When we speak about the training of apprentices, it brings to my mind the fact that in the TAFE organisation—it seems to be the way that people are trained by unknown experts and all that type of thing—very great emphasis still should be placed on prior knowledge and ability. In a lot of cases, people are training in various courses in TAFE that are academic and along those lines.

Looking at things like pest animals, I suggest we look at the resources we have within the community—people who have had long-time experience in the bush and who understand it and collect their knowledge. There are still enough of them about, but we do not want to leave it too long. Those are the people who understand exactly how to go about things. I am not sure how you would collect their knowledge, but I know it is there.

Having a national scheme coordinates the whole approach to pest animal control. At the moment in Victoria people are being put onto wild dog control or are being put on as dogmen to replace people who are on holidays. They just come out of the crew—the ordinary people who have a bit of knowledge within the department, who might be able to ride a horse and who know what a gumleaf looks like—and it goes on from there. If you look at that across the country, we could have all sorts of acceptance of some levels of skills. With a little bit of research, we can get a very good program put together so that we can train people early in the piece and get them to accept a common and very successful approach to pest animal control.

Mr QUICK—Rather than waiting for the state government to get off their whatsits and do it, has the Victorian Farmers Federation ever thought of allocating, say, \$50,000, talking with some of the TAFEs in the area—you must have TAFE colleges here—and saying: 'You have the expertise. We have the expertise. Let's share it. Let's fund six apprentices in 2005-2008. We are not going to wait for the state government, because we have moved motions of no confidence in

them. They are bloody hopeless. We will talk to the TAFE colleges and do an Australian first, perhaps a world first'? You see the problem. TAFE trainers are here. Your kids are local. They know the neighbourhood. There is interagency and intercommunity support for it. Have you ever thought of doing that rather than waiting for the guys down in Melbourne, where the minister for education and the minister for sustainability and environment are based?

You could make the move and then say to the rest of the states and to the rest of the farming federations: 'We have done it. Why don't you as a matter of course next year in WA and Tasmania'—where I come from—'introduce something else?' We face the same problem. It is not as large scale as your problem because, luckily, we are a little island and the pests have to get on the island to start creating havoc. You could make some really positive moves by doing that. It might cost you some money. But if all the land-holders agreed to have perhaps a levy—we have that many bloody levies now—it would be a wonderful levy. You could say that to some of the TAFE colleges. Sorry, Brian, it took so long.

Mr Lobban—I hear what you are saying. It sounds a very good idea and it certainly has merit. In relation to finance, our organisation, the farming community and the VFF do not have the money. With the drought and everything we have been through, we have been losing a lot of money at the state level. We are flat out supporting our branches so that we can continue to have them operate. That sort of money just is not there, unless there is a levy, as you say. We have levies for everything now and our members are rebelling very much against that.

We see it as not our problem. Why should we start to fix it? If we start putting money in for that, we will be putting money in for everything else. Even if we did get people trained up through the TAFEs, that would be only the start. It does not achieve the outcome. One of the major problems is gaining access to the parks and the land where the pests are to be able to do something. It is a bit like the situation with the bushfires. We had volunteer firemen wanting to go in and put fires out. Because it was on national park, the authorities said, 'No, that is our land, you cannot touch that.' You would need that special permission. Then you would need permits, licences and everything for people. It has to come from the government, and the responsible landowners have to manage the animals that are a problem on their land.

Mr QUICK—I understand that. But as a teacher and now as a politician I know occasionally you have to light, what I term, bushfires. If politicians see the bushfires and a whole group of people are around it, they are there either to help you put it out or to throw more stuff on it to make it bigger. Occasionally governments of all persuasions need to be embarrassed. You moved a couple of motions of no confidence at the meeting last night, and probably justifiably so because nothing has been done for the last 20-odd years. We have a national minister for the environment. If the state government or you cannot have the money, I am sure there are ways and means of getting that money. As Brian said, 60 years ago there were two guys and some horses, and the problem was basically eradicated.

Mr Lobban—But they were allowed in at that stage.

Mr QUICK—That is right. I know.

Mr TUCKEY—That is the other side. Just focusing on the apprenticeship, apprentices have to be employed by someone.

Mr Lobban—That is right.

Mr TUCKEY—But I do not necessarily take it that they need to be employed by a farmer. My earlier question was whether there are still people with sufficient knowledge. Brian assures us there are, and we knew that all the knowledge was there.

Mr Lobban—That is correct.

Mr TUCKEY—What is really needed in a government program for feral animal control or pest animal control is curricula and a process for the employment of apprentices. The fundamental issue is where do the next lot of doggers come from. In the end, it is obvious that you teach these people to shoot straight enough so that they can head-shoot a kangaroo, if that process is to be kind. If you are going to sell the meat, you make sure you head-shoot them; otherwise, you do not have to be that careful. We should follow up on that issue because, again, in the end someone is going to have to be the employer, and that really is a role for whoever employs pest control personnel. A program to get the skill level up would immediately attract a contribution from the Commonwealth government, because we pay people to employ apprentices.

Mr QUICK—That is right.

Mr Fraser—I was not trying to wind Harry up; I was trying to get a word in.

Mr QUICK—I tend to talk too much, Brian.

ACTING CHAIR—It is a male problem.

Mr TUCKEY—That is our line of business.

Mr Fraser—I am a farmer, just as Betty and Ian are. We do not have either the time or the money to fight all these types of things. We do a lot, but we cannot do everything. I have over the last three years, since the summit and prior to the summit, made every effort to try to get something like this going. I have spoken with the head of the agricultural TAFE in Wodonga, Julie De Hennin, and we have talked about the apprenticeship scheme. I have spoken to a resident in the Omeo district who has a connection with the Canberra TAFE. All we get is a brick wall. This is what you are here for and what we are here for: to try to overcome this problem that we as farmers have to get something going. Let's get the idea going and try to put it together.

I will give you an example of something in another direction. We are superfine wool growers. For a long time there has been a need to have an advanced superfine wool classers course. Nothing happened. I just happened by accident to be travelling on a bus to a wool sale in Sydney with a chap from near Canberra. He said, 'I have a connection with the Canberra Institute of Technology. Ring so and so up and away you go.' I spoke to that lady about three times, and the next thing we have a nationally accredited course which was conducted in Culcairn. It was as simple as that. I am asking you to try to take the pressure off farmers and to try to get some sort of a solution.

Mr TUCKEY—And make some worthwhile employment.

Mr QUICK—That is right.

Mr TUCKEY—That is a very good idea.

Mr QUICK—The Wodonga Shire Council could take on two and the Omeo Shire—

Mr Fraser—No, our shire council.

Mr TUCKEY—Please remember that getting apprenticeships is not necessarily easy. As a racing administrator, I tried to put in place an apprenticeship in horseshoeing, blacksmithing. When it went to the appropriate authority, they said, ‘How can this person be multiskilled?’ I said, ‘We will put the weight of jockeys up to 20 stone so that the average blacksmith can ride a horse as his other skill.’ The skill was the skill. But that is another problem you deal with.

ACTING CHAIR—Brian, the committee is clearly interested in this idea, and it might be something we can take forward. In your pushing of the idea and deliberations, what sort of reaction did you encounter from the Victorian state government? In other words, if such a course were to be put together and the federal government were to assist with that, would we have opportunities and work for these people at the end of it or would the state government say, ‘Not having a bar of them’?

Mr Fraser—We cannot get to talk to the state government. They will not talk to us. I can highlight that fact by stating that the VFF produced a structure in which the minister created committees, advisory committees, it was accepted and the recommendation—I am not sure whether Ian explained that—was that members of the committees be elected by farmers. Those committees have been in existence for two years. There have been two ministers, and neither of them has met those two committees. We invite the ministers to come to talk to us. I related the example of Joan Kirner. She at least came out, saw the problem and did something about it. That is our problem. We cannot penetrate the state government. They will not come out of Melbourne. I just hope the local politicians can work at it.

Mr QUICK—I look forward to talking to all the state governments about their response to this national problem. One of the good things about going out, especially starting here, is we get a whole heap of evidence which, once Hansard has transcribed it, we can then ask a whole lot of questions about. One of our roles is to gain the knowledge to ask the questions that we know the answers to, and then put the heat back onto people. Ian, if you were in charge, what bounty price would you put on foxes?

Mr Lobban—I probably never believed that the bounty would work, as I said, unless it was a national one. At the time the Victorian government ran it, it was \$10. A lot of people were saying it ought to have been \$20. It varies a bit as to what the pelts are worth. This year the pelts have improved in price enormously. Even though the bounty has dropped, this year shooters are going out and shooting foxes because the pelts are worth something; whereas at the time the bounty was introduced pelts were worth nothing and people were not interested in going out. Maybe \$20. I do not know whether that is a realistic figure. But the cost of travelling, ammunition and that—

Mr QUICK—And the price of petrol now. Would you say \$30? What impact would it have if we introduced a national fox bounty of \$30?

Mr Lobban—That is probably what I am worried about. I am not sure whether the amount of money that you would require to make it worth while in a bounty would achieve more than putting that money into, say, a Fox Off program in which you may get a far greater outcome. I am finding this year in the VFF that a number of farmers who did their Fox Off program before lambing, and did it well, have achieved outstanding results. With some of them, their lambing percentages are great and they said they found dead foxes everywhere. I do not say it is a unanimous decision in the VFF, because we were a bit divided, but my personal belief was that putting that amount of money into a poisoning program would achieve a far greater outcome than a bounty on the shooting of foxes.

Mr QUICK—If you can provide the committee with all that evidence on Fox Off and how successful it is, that is other good information. The second motion last night was on the retention of eight dogmen. What is their pay scale and who is responsible for paying them? We do not have them in Tasmania.

Mr Fraser—The Department of Sustainability and Environment pay them. They are paid out of funds from that department under contract. Last year there were additional dogmen put on from fire recovery funding. So it is within the department. But, unfortunately, we now have a situation in Victoria where we have the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The Department of Sustainability and Environment make the policy and set the plans into place and the DPI are supposed to administer them. So it is very messy, but that is how it works. The suspension of contracts is to be at the end of June.

Mr QUICK—What do they earn—\$80,000 a year, or \$60,000, or \$40,000?

Mr Fraser—I recently saw a figure of \$80,000, but we do have someone in the audience who can tell us. I think it is about \$52,000. I might be wrong. It is somewhere in that vicinity. But then there are dog allowances and horse allowances and all sorts of things.

Mr TUCKEY—They are going to be better off now because we have cut the tax for people on \$52,000.

Mr QUICK—Over \$50,000, yes.

Mr TUCKEY—That was the plug for the day.

Mr Fraser—Can I just comment about this bounty for foxes. Whether it is on or off, I am not sure; I do not have an opinion. But the \$10 was very receptive, and every fox you saw did not have a head or a tail or whatever. If you were to strike a bounty like that, that would be fair enough. Has the committee received a copy of the proceedings of the summit? I think it was submitted by Noelene Franklin. If not, we will table that, too, please.

Mr TUCKEY—Do so, because having two will not hurt.

Mr Fraser—Okay.

Mr TUCKEY—One of the submissions raised questions as to whether there would be continued employment of doggers, as I know them, after the end of this three-year contract. I do not know whether I am extremely keen on bounties. I remember them as a kid. I have profited from them. One of the things that has been somewhat successful in my electorate is big shoot nights. It is almost a social event. Funding is available for ammunition and things of that nature for shooters clubs, organised by local people of course. They do not just come out. Photographs appear in the rural press over there. They will shoot 100 or 200 foxes in a night. It is a big deal. Has any of that ever been considered? What would your view be if there were some subsidies to shooters clubs or something to encourage them to do that sort of thing in a properly controlled way?

Mr Lobban—It was one of the issues talked of at the time of the bounty. It did not get off the ground. Most of them have lost their guns nowadays.

Mr TUCKEY—Tell us about that!

Mr Lobban—There are some successful shoots in the Riverina. They do quite a bit of it. It has never really taken off that much in Victoria. There are probably some groups that might do it, but it has never been a big thing. Perhaps there is something about our terrain that is different that does not lend itself to—

Mr TUCKEY—We had evidence of a fellow who goes out every night while his sheep are lambing.

Mr Lobban—Individuals certainly do it. Three or four farmers will get together. In our area, they are out every second or third night. But it is on a smaller scale. It is still effective. You are talking about a much bigger scale.

Mr TUCKEY—It is bigger, but it is spread. You do not put 20 vehicles into one paddock. It is a bit like a car rally or a fishing competition. Each group is going to get a prize for shooting the most foxes. Most of the people in my electorate do it locally. They have a carp fishing competition somewhere in New South Wales, I think, and so on. It is only another little bit to the package.

Mr Lobban—One of the concerns we received from the farming community was that, unless they knew who was there, about people on their property shooting.

Mr TUCKEY—Absolutely. But that is all control.

Mr Lobban—We have mixed farms. On sheep properties, that might be okay. But, if you have a cattle property alongside and you streak the cattle or something, they might all go through a fence and out onto the highway. There are all those aspects to be considered. It would have to be very well organised and very well disciplined.

Mr TUCKEY—We are not talking about the sort of people who were in *Crocodile Dundee*.

ACTING CHAIR—They are only in Western Australia.

Mr Fraser—Can I comment quickly about the contractors. I understand that at the end of three years their contracts cease. They have to be either put on permanently or given the flick.

ACTING CHAIR—The three years are up when?

Mr Fraser—At the end of June. One particular dogman did have three years ending in February, but because of what has gone on it has been shortened to the end of June.

Mr TUCKEY—Concerns were expressed in evidence from one group.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that a copy of the proceedings of the national wild dogs summit be accepted as an exhibit? There being no objection it is so ordered. Thank you very much for your evidence. We look forward to pursuing the important issue that you have raised with our federal colleagues.

Mr Lobban—Are you going through more of Victoria?

ACTING CHAIR—At this stage we do not have anything programmed.

Mr QUICK—We are not too sure when the election is going to be.

Mr Lobban—I just wondered, because our organisation asked me when they knew we were coming.

ACTING CHAIR—We would like to travel to the Cooma-Monaro and the Gippsland areas. We have had submissions from Western Australia and the Northern Territory. But we are mindful of the election timetable and we want what we do to count. So we want to conclude our inquiry before an election is called, if possible.

[12.22 p.m.]

PLOWMAN, Mr Antony, Member for Benambra, Victorian Parliament

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome Tony Plowman MLA. For the *Hansard* record, would you please state the capacity in which you appear.

Mr Plowman—I am the member for Benambra, shadow minister for water and Manager of Opposition Business in the State Parliament of Victoria.

ACTING CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter. I invite you to make a very brief statement, as time is limited, and we will then go to questions.

Mr Plowman—Firstly, thanks very much for including me in the program. I know that when someone is speaking before lunch people look at their watches, as Wilson is doing, and think, ‘God, I hope he is not going to be too long, because lunch is beckoning.’ I will be brief. The reason that I am really pleased that this inquiry is here today and that I have the opportunity to attend the hearing is that pest animals know no boundaries. When you live on a state border, you recognise that there are times when, irrespective of the intentions of different state governments, there is a need to have an overriding view from the federal government as to how those cross-border problems might be addressed.

The main issue I wish to discuss, following the last presentation, is in fact the wild dog issue in Victoria and its implications in respect of that cross-border problem that I mentioned. We do have different regulations in the states. One of the main differences in respect of wild dog control is this issue of aerial baiting. It was fascinating to note last night at that meeting at Tallangatta, which was an excellent meeting and well attended, that probably the most important contribution came from Bruce Wiggan, who is the Chairman of the Barnard River Wild Dog Control Association between Tamworth and Armidale, who cited the evidence that they have been aerielly poisoning there as a pasture protection board for 40 years consecutively.

The increase in wildlife over that period is quite phenomenal. One of the examples they gave of that was that, when the relevant department in New South Wales wanted to make a check on tiger quoll to see whether they would live through an aerial baiting program, they were able to trap 70 tiger quoll in seven days. They were astounded at that because tiger quoll are rare in most areas, and to be able to trap for identification purposes 70 in seven days was quite extraordinary. They trapped these tiger quoll and tagged them. They then had the aerial baiting. After the aerial baiting, they identified 70 tiger quoll were still alive. One since has died for other reasons. That is an indication, when you look at the numbers of tiger quoll that you can find in the high country in Victoria, that there is no comparison at all.

The biggest problem that we have with wild dogs is not the marauding of sheep on the boundaries of Crown and public land, state forests and national parks but the reduction in the wildlife that lives within those parks and within that state forest area. It is very hard to estimate

how many dogs live in the high country. There have been estimates in excess of 4,000 dogs that live in that high country between north-eastern Victoria and Gippsland. It was reported last night that in Gippsland alone over 1,000 dogs have been trapped or poisoned or directly killed in the last 12 months. If that number have been killed in that one area within 12 months, it is an indication that that number of 4,000 dogs might be a very low estimate. Whatever it is, an extraordinary amount of wildlife is being eaten. The fact that this issue has been exacerbated since the fires indicates exactly that. So much of that wildlife was burnt and lost that, since the fires, the dogs have been forced out to the perimeter areas of the Crown and the public land.

In my 12 years as a member of parliament, I have never seen anything like the same response from the public, from people who live adjoining that public land, in respect of the problem that these dogs are now causing. It is an indication that the current state government—and I do not want to be political about this—do not yet understand the extent of this problem. That is significant and it is very disappointing that, as yet, they cannot comprehend that to lay-off dogmen at this stage is probably the worst possible time to be doing it.

But I come back to the fact that last night Bruce Wiggan indicated that that aerial poisoning has been going on successfully for that length of time, that the indication is that the wildlife have actually increased during that time and that the argument about the impact on non-target species, such as tiger quoll, which is predominantly used as the main reason why you cannot aerially poison an area is in fact fallacious. Those are the most important things that I wish to say to you.

Can I just touch on a couple of things that came up last night. One was that statement about the number of dogs that have been destroyed in east Gippsland. I cannot give you a figure for the number of dogs in north-eastern Victoria. The other statement that was made last night was that the New South Wales government contributes \$6.7 million to the control of wild dogs. Victoria contributes about a sixth of that—\$1.2 million. We know that the problem is similar across both states. The area in New South Wales is bigger, but it is not six times the size.

In Victoria we are not doing justice to this problem. There is the effect now where those people who live on the perimeter and try to conduct themselves in a very difficult environment at the moment agriculturally are extraordinarily disadvantaged by the fact that they are losing their opportunity to maintain sheep numbers. As the sheep numbers are reducing, these dogs are attacking calves and older cattle. Last night there were some very interesting stories about the way these dogs are attacking cattle.

The other point that I want to make is that last night two of those resolutions sought some level of intervention from the federal government. The first one was that there should be the immediate introduction of an aerial baiting program. The best way for that to happen would be for that to be overseen by the federal government and hopefully funded by the federal government as a pilot program, as a trial, to show what can happen. That program should be across the border between the Monaro in New South Wales and the Alpine National Park in Victoria to show that a properly conducted aerial poisoning program not only can be successful in reducing dog numbers where they breed and reducing the overall problem but also can be done without loss to wildlife. If we could do that, that would be the most significant step in respect of reducing the overall problem. The second resolution was that the federal government declare wild dogs a pest of national significance. This was seconded by your colleague Sophie

Panopoulos, the member for Indi. That was a very significant point that she made in seconding that.

These dogs are now much bigger than they have ever been before. As they grow bigger, they become less timid. They are encroaching on private land much more. They are getting into the public domain much more. The risk to human life is growing enormously. It would be disappointing if that resolution were left until someone was actually killed by wild dogs. It is something that should happen first in recognition of the risk there rather than wait for a life to be lost and then to say, 'Yes, we must do something in respect of that.' It is a resolution directed to the federal government, and I hope the federal government take up on it.

Foxes are an integral problem to agriculture in Victoria. Your inquiry is about the effect on agriculture of pest animals. Foxes are a very significant problem. Aerially baiting wild dogs also hits a very large proportion of the fox population, which again reduces the incursion of foxes from Crown land onto private land. There is the significant problem of corellas in south-western Victoria, where I have owned land. If you have not as yet had that issue put before you, it would be worth looking at that one.

I heard earlier evidence given to your committee about kangaroo culling in Victoria. We have this crazy situation where an abattoir in Victoria that is registered to process kangaroo meat can bring in kangaroos from outside the state and process them but cannot process kangaroos killed in Victoria. How illogical can that possibly be, particularly when we need and must have kangaroo culling programs in places like Puckapunyal and the Hattah-Kulkine and north-western Victoria? Those are issues that your committee should address. Thank you again for inviting me to be part of it this morning.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, Tony. I acknowledge your wealth of experience on this issue, because I know this is a case that you have personally been on for a long time. So we are very pleased to have heard what you have had to say and we take it very seriously. Colleagues, we have time for one quick question each.

Mr TUCKEY—I certainly have one, Tony, and it relates to an experience that I address to both sides in state politics. I was sitting around—and this is political in a sense—watching us, the Liberal Party, lose 30 seats in parliament so we could bring in a tax called the GST. We took all the political pain. It is already delivering to state governments amounts in excess of what they would have got under the old Commonwealth grants formula. All the time it seems to be that we have to now continue to spend additional taxpayers money to do the things we are either too lazy to do or too philosophically opposed to doing.

Queensland got \$7 billion. Western Australia got \$3.5 billion. Of the \$10 billion that Victoria got out of the GST, \$1 billion sounds pretty lousy to look after one of the great economic drivers of the Victorian economy. Unfortunately, it does not seem to matter all the time as to who is in government. We, as the collector of the taxes, get told to go and get some more off the Australian people. I sincerely hope, if you are given the chance, you are prepared to throw more money at it than the present government, irrespective of which political party it is.

Mr Plowman—Can I tackle that in two ways. Firstly, the state government has never had more income. There is more income coming into the state government than ever before, and that

is in part due to the GST, as you suggested. We have a budget surplus of \$545 million. I am sure we could have put a few more million into this program without dramatically affecting that state budget surplus. I agree with you that governments of all persuasions—not just the current government but governments of all persuasions—tend to look at these things and say, ‘It is not all that important,’ because in most cases those people in those governments do not understand the significance of this issue.

Secondly, it is vital that an incoming government does understand that, and I see it as a big part of my job to make sure that the people on my side of the house do understand how significant this problem is. The significance goes well beyond just the loss of livestock on the perimeter. It is very significant in respect of the wildlife loss, it is very significant in respect of the spread of hydatids and it is very significant in respect of the risk to human life.

Mr QUICK—One good thing about this committee is that it is composed of people of all persuasions who represent rural seats. We are aware of the issue. With this whole issue of aerial baiting, as well as there being an increase in the number of quolls, how successful is it in getting rid of the dogs? Is it 80 per cent or 60 per cent successful? Can you quantify it? Last night at the meeting did the New South Wales people mention how successful it was in percentage terms?

Mr Plowman—It is very hard to put it into percentage terms because, as you know, if you use 1080 it gives the dogs the chance to get back to their dens or whatever before they die, unlike strychnine where they die close to where you poison them and you can count them. The percentage killed is much harder to establish. What was given in evidence last night which I thought was dramatic was that over that whole area of that PP board there are about 40 to 50 sheep kills a year. That, to me, is the evidence that those dogs are not coming. Their numbers are kept down. There is a significant reduction in numbers. So they do not have to get out and maraud the sheep populations outside. There is a balance there. You might remember that dingoes were here before white men. So there was always that balance there before. If the numbers are kept down and the balance is right, then we are getting back to somewhere where we need to be.

Can I quickly answer a question that was asked about the cost of a dogman. The cost of a dogman is approximately \$40,000 per year to the individual. The overall cost to the department is around about \$80,000 per dogman.

Mr QUICK—Thanks for your contribution, Tony.

ACTING CHAIR—Thanks, Tony.

Proceedings suspended from 12.39 p.m. to 1.26 p.m.

MURDOCH, Mr Russell Scott, Nominated Representative, New South Wales Upper Murray Graziers

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the representative of the Tumbarumba land-holders group. For the *Hansard* record, would you please state the capacity in which you appear here today.

Mr Murdoch—I am from Khancoban. I am representing the farmers from the Indi, Tooma and Khancoban valleys in the Tumbarumba shire. We all adjoin Kosciuszko National Park.

ACTING CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament and consequently warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. However, you are very welcome, and we are looking forward to hearing from you. I invite you to make a two-minute opening statement talking to the submission—it was a very good submission—and then the committee will ask questions. Time is limited.

Mr Murdoch—Thank you for the invitation. I know our submission was pretty late, due to unforeseen circumstances. The impact of pest animals on agriculture in our valleys is predominantly fence damage. While electric fences have limited that impact to some degree, the main reason we wanted to appear before you today was to outline to you the impact of wild dogs on our farming operations in the valleys. Several farms in our valleys are limited in what agricultural pursuits they take up due to the number of wild dogs in the area and continuing attacks.

The Tumbarumba Shire Feral Animal Working Group was established in conjunction with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Tumbarumba Shire and the Pasture Protection Board. It was funded 40 per cent by the shire, 40 per cent by Forestry and 20 per cent by National Parks. Also, the Hume Rural Lands Protection Board provided a coordinator for that. Recently the funding from Forestry has been stopped and, as such, we have lost our dogman for the rest of this financial year. That is pretty much my summary.

ACTING CHAIR—Was it one or two dogmen?

Mr Murdoch—Only one dogman. For the area from the Upper Murray at Kosciuszko National Park, the southern end of the park, right down to Woomargama, near Albury, there is only the one dogman working. The funding has been stopped, so he could not provide a commitment to the southern end of the park, which is us.

ACTING CHAIR—So is he working at another end of the operation?

Mr Murdoch—Yes, he is now working at the northern end around the Woomargama area, as far as I know. I do not have the details of that.

ACTING CHAIR—Would the problem be worse closer to the park? Wouldn't it be more beneficial for him to be closer to Kosciuszko rather than at the Woomargama end?

Mr Murdoch—The problem, from my experience, has compounded in the last 10 years. When I first moved to the valley we had a full-time dogman with the Parks. He was employed by the Parks and worked nine to five. He was somewhat successful. This feral animal group has got together and employed a contract dogman. He works seven days a week. It was very successful. I think he trapped something like 300 dogs in 12 months. That included his whole range, from our valleys down to the northern end. The only reason I have ended up being here is that we started having kills again and we cannot get him back because there is no funding available to pay him.

Mr TUCKEY—I gather this is New South Wales Forestry that pulled out.

Mr Murdoch—That is correct. National Parks.

Mr TUCKEY—It was the National Parks and Wildlife Service?

Mr Murdoch—Yes.

Mr TUCKEY—Did they announce a reason for refusing to continue funding the program?

Mr Murdoch—No. Forestry actually pulled out their part of the funding because they employed their own dogman, as far as I know.

ACTING CHAIR—So is National Parks responsible for employing the dogman?

Mr Murdoch—Employing a dogman was a joint venture. Because of the large area of pines in the Tumbarumba shire, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry and the Tumbarumba Shire all contributed funding.

Mr TUCKEY—So that was the three?

Mr Murdoch—That is correct.

Mr TUCKEY—Forestry have pulled out, and their reason for doing so is they have employed a full-time dogman?

Mr Murdoch—That is correct, yes.

Mr TUCKEY—Does anyone know where he or she is?

Mr Murdoch—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Where?

Mr Murdoch—He is working within the pine plantations around Tumbarumba mainly. They are taking responsibility for only farmland adjoining the pine plantations. We do not, and we do not have a dogman to cover our end of the valley.

Mr TUCKEY—At all?

Mr Murdoch—At all. We lost sheep last night and the night before.

ACTING CHAIR—Your group of land-holders has lost sheep?

Mr Murdoch—That is correct.

Mr TUCKEY—What have the National Parks and Wildlife Service done? They have not tried to pick up that extra money or anything?

Mr Murdoch—No. We have been allegedly given \$2.7 million. The minister responsible for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Mr Bob Debus, announced \$6.7 million over three years—\$2.7 million per year. Of that \$2.7 million, our local ranger receives \$40,000 a year. We estimate that it takes approximately \$80,000 to employ a contract dogman. Our group is of the opinion that the only way to go is with a contractor, because he works seven days a week and he is available all of that time if you have trouble.

Do not forget, of course, we did have a very extensive program while this animal working group was going. It was very successful, but it involved only reactive trapping—that is, where we were getting a kill, he was responding. We were just about to move into the proactive stage and had extended some trails into the park in agreement with our National Parks local rangers, but we had a funding shortfall.

Mr TUCKEY—Is your ranger a council ranger?

Mr Murdoch—No, a National Parks and Wildlife Service ranger.

Mr TUCKEY—So he is an NPWS bloke.

Mr Murdoch—Yes. He has told us that he cannot get any funding from his boss, who is on the other side of the mountain. They have in the order of—and I would hate to be quoted on these figures—\$500,000 to use over on the Kosciuszko side, the Jindabyne side. All we can get is \$40,000 a year out of that \$2.7 million.

ACTING CHAIR—How much money do you need to reinstate the dogman?

Mr Murdoch—We need approximately \$80,000 a year.

ACTING CHAIR—So the other sources of funding have all gone?

Mr Murdoch—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—So you do need the full \$80,000 to get back the dogman?

Mr Murdoch—A minimum of \$80,000.

ACTING CHAIR—You said that while he was there he killed 300 dogs in 12 months?

Mr Murdoch—That is correct. Since then, nothing has happened.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you have any idea of the size of the problem—in other words, the number of dogs?

Mr Murdoch—No, no idea at all.

ACTING CHAIR—Does anyone?

Mr Murdoch—No, no-one knows. All I do know is that since I have been there the dog numbers have increased. We never saw a dog there when I first moved there.

ACTING CHAIR—Fifteen years ago?

Mr Murdoch—Twenty years ago now. In the last 10 years you are seeing dogs regularly.

ACTING CHAIR—As we heard in earlier evidence, are they bigger, bolder and more likely to be seen in daylight?

Mr Murdoch—They are definitely bolder. They are seen coming out of the bush in daylight more than they ever have been before. They are definitely bigger dogs.

Mr QUICK—If we are going to be fair dinkum about having a war, we might as well employ more than one, surely.

Mr Murdoch—All the group that I represent would like to see come out of this committee, this hearing, is some commitment from governments to funding full-time contract dogmen for an extended period. We are looking at 10 years. It is an ongoing problem. It is not going to go away. As soon as the dogman stops working, the dogs breed again and start again.

Mr QUICK—If you had three over a 10-year period, you would probably solve what—80 per cent or 90 per cent of the problem?

Mr Murdoch—Eighty per cent of the problem would be solved with more than one dogman.

Mr QUICK—Then it would be a lot more manageable?

Mr Murdoch—That is the problem. The local land-holders manage their land, and all we expect is for the government agencies to manage their land the same way we are expected to. That is not happening.

Mr QUICK—All you are basically asking is for a quarter of a million dollars per year over a 10-year period?

Mr Murdoch—That is correct.

Mr TUCKEY—Whatever the period, it is not going to be a problem that goes away.

Mr Murdoch—It has to be an ongoing thing.

Mr TUCKEY—What is the view of your group on aerial baiting, and is any of it done?

Mr Murdoch—There has not been any done since I have been in the area. There is a lot of conjecture about the effectiveness of aerial baiting.

Mr TUCKEY—I understand that debate.

Mr Murdoch—I do not have any figures. I have baited at home. All I can say is that certain wildlife definitely increased in numbers.

ACTING CHAIR—Your group considers that the way to go is for a dedicated dogman?

Mr Murdoch—Our group considers the only way to go is dedicated dogmen. We have proved the effectiveness. Previous to the dogman starting work at my place, we were baiting. That took two hours every second day patrolling five kilometres of fence line and checking bait stations. It is a fair commitment. The baits have to be continually changed or monitored, whichever the case may be. It is a lot of effort. I know of only two dogs that I have poisoned in five years of baiting. But the dogman has trapped three on my property in the last five months previous to this winter setting in.

Mr QUICK—We heard from some people previously that the federal government ought to be somehow sponsoring apprenticeships in pest control officers. What do you think of that idea?

Mr Murdoch—It has merit, for sure. I think Mr Tuckey asked who they go with. The dogman is the person who teaches those skills. Hands-on training is the only way to go. To have somebody to follow up if that dogman is sick is a good way to go and a good idea.

Mr QUICK—I have never met one. I have a vague idea of what they are like. Do you think we should at least ask some of them to come and give evidence? They would know more about the issue than a helluva lot of people, surely, because they are the ones up seven days a week, as you say. They are cunning if not more cunning than the animals themselves.

Mr Murdoch—The idea of talking to them definitely has merit. They are the blokes on the ground closer than even the farmers to what is needed.

ACTING CHAIR—There is some suggestion, Harry, they have been gagged by their state governments in relation to appearing before federal government committees.

Mr QUICK—That is interesting.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you give us an idea of the type, scope and scale of the livestock losses in your area?

Mr Murdoch—In the biggest kill I have had at home—we run 200 sheep and 200 goats—we lost 40 goats last year in the season from May to September. That is not counting the drought losses. We have got out of sheep this year because of the dog problem, and it has been a bit too dear to get back into. My neighbour has been yarding his 300 sheep ever since he started having losses two weeks ago. He marked 72 lambs out of 300 ewes. So it is not very good.

Mr TUCKEY—It is dreadful.

Mr Murdoch—He believes he has about only two weeks of lambing to go. But, with lambing, you should be looking at 100 per cent.

ACTING CHAIR—You are very close to the area that was severely burnt out in the bushfires.

Mr Murdoch—That is correct.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you consider that that has exacerbated the problem?

Mr Murdoch—There is no doubt the dingoes have been forced down into the country that was not burnt which is adjoining my property and my neighbour's place where the kills have been occurring recently. The dogman was very successful after the fires because the dogs were travelling through open country because it was burnt. He did take a lot of dogs out in that period. Also the feed that the dogs use has moved down out of the burnt country and into the unburnt country, which is closer to private land. There has definitely been an increase.

Mr TUCKEY—Was there any comment or were there any records kept of the genetic make-up of the 300 dogs? What was the evidence?

Mr Murdoch—I have not got any results out of that, except they were being DNA tested for actual dingo content. I am led to believe that, of those dogs killed, the DNA was only 10 per cent actual dingo. The rest of it I cannot comment on.

A couple of the earlier speakers mentioned fencing. We have a certain amount of fencing. There was a program in 1988 that was supposed to go from the Murray River to the Tooma River, which is all Kosciuszko National Park boundary. The funding did not quite make the distance. The upkeep of the fence has been basically deemed inadequate to control wild dogs. It actually exacerbated the problem. At the end of the fence they were forced a little bit onto my place. I do not believe seven-wire electric fencing is going to contain dogs. The maintenance is out of proportion to the benefit, and it is all thrown back onto the land-holder. I believe the only fencing adequate would be netting fencing with electric wire at the bottom on each side, because wombats destroy them very quickly. That is the fencing issue.

I believe a New South Wales law on feral animal control on public land exists. Our Pasture Protection Board representative is supposed to be able to control that. I believe that, if dogs are coming out of the national park, he is supposed to be able to take whatever steps to control those dogs on that boundary. However, I was speaking to him the other day and he told me the funding has run out. That is how I ended up here.

In relation to dogmen versus baiting long term, we have some problems with target species specific. I do not want to go contrary to any of the other earlier submissions, but we do not know for a fact how species specific it is. The dogman has proved very successful in our area in comparison to personal baiting experiences.

The other issue was diseases. Somebody mentioned introducing another disease for the dogs to transmit between themselves to wipe them out. It was also submitted there is a number of diseases that the dogs already carry. I would not like to see the dogs carrying any more diseases. All of the pest animal management control measures or strategies mentioned in the previous submissions make up only part of the solution to the problem.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. That is excellent evidence for the committee to hear. Thank you once again for travelling so far to talk to the committee.

[1.45 p.m.]

CHESHIRE, Mr Noel, (Private capacity)

CLYDSDALE, Mr Neil Campbell, (Private capacity)

COYSH, Mr Phillip Jephcott, (Private capacity)

PATON, Mr Douglas, Member, Corryong Branch, Victorian Farmers Federation

ACTING CHAIR—For the *Hansard* record, would you each please state the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Paton—I am representing the Corryong branch of the VFF. I am a cattle producer and grazier from just outside Corryong.

Mr Clydsdale—I am representing my wife, Marilyn, and myself in the capacity of graziers in the Tintaldra area.

Mr Coysh—I am a farmer in the Tintaldra district and have been for 40 years.

Mr Cheshire—I am a third generation farmer in the north-east of Victoria at Burrowye. I am wearing two hats today, but I have come here to represent myself and the local community. I also have been elected to the North East Wild Dog Management Committee. But today I am speaking on behalf of myself and the local community.

ACTING CHAIR—Although this committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Having dispensed with the formalities, you are all very welcome. We look forward to hearing what you have to say. Because time is reasonably limited and a couple of additional people have come along whom we have endeavoured to put in the program, which I think was very important, I will ask each of you to restrict your opening statements to just a couple of minutes, if you can, and then we will go to questions from the committee.

Mr Paton—There are a few points from the VFF, and I dare say you have all read the submission. Some of the points to come out of that are the good neighbour policy and duty of care to landowners adjoining state parks and land. Who is responsible? These are some of the issues. Previous speakers might have talked about this, and following ones may too. If my dogs cause problems for neighbours, then compensation is due in some sort of way. That is a very relevant point. Apart from the loss of income, which is pretty obvious, and stock losses, there is the stress that is caused on farming families, on communities having to change enterprises and all the other things that go with that.

Farm safety is another issue. Being a cattle producer, I have had dogs amongst my calves. The behaviour of cows changes, to the point that I have been taken off my motorbike because they are trying to get at the dog that is on the back of my motorbike. So there are those sorts of issues. There are animal welfare issues, dealing with stock that have been maimed in some way or killed or whatever. One thing that I have noticed is the increased grazing pressure from wildlife, being emus and kangaroos and other animals that come onto private land. They increase the grazing pressure. Therefore, the dogs follow them out. When they have cleared out, they move straight onto easy prey.

The loss of significant doggers would be the big impact. If we do not have doggers to do the job, there will be human health and food safety problems, be that hydatids, the tapeworm, which humans can get, which can get into the food chain, or *Neospora caninum*, which has been tested in America, which causes abortions in livestock. That is a significant loss. With that, there could be a reason for exclusion from our markets, be they America or Japan or whatever. So all of those issues have an impact on everybody.

Mr Clydsdale—In addition to what my wife has put in the submission that you have in front of you, a very important tool are the local area management plans. Because of variations in terrain and various other issues in different areas, it is important that the local land-holders develop a local area management plan and then are adequately funded to implement that plan. For me to state any specific way of managing this issue would be ridiculous because it varies from area to area. In different areas there are different solutions. So it is very important to have a local area management plan and then for adequate, ongoing funding to implement it.

A big issue that has not been raised in my wife's submission, and the wild dog issue is part of it, is the interface between private and public land. Government instrumentalities do not seem to want to acknowledge this issue. The burden created by this interface is falling on a few land-holders who are at that point, and they are not getting any support from the government. They are expected to do all the fencing, normally, and maintain all that fencing.

The boundaries at that interface were possibly created 100 or 150 years ago in an office in Melbourne or Sydney or somewhere like that and are in ridiculous places for this century and for the methods that we use to manage properties. That needs addressing. A whole host of issues can possibly be managed a lot better if that is addressed.

Mr TUCKEY—Can you expand on that comment about the boundary? It is there. Are you saying it is in inhospitable country or it is difficult to maintain fences? How would you address that? Would you go further into the park?

Mr Clydsdale—Those boundary lines need rationalising. The public land managers are very happy for you to bring that boundary into your property but very reluctant for you to take it out into their area. They say, 'Yes, it can be done,' but the legislation is such that you have to go through a lifetime's worth of paperwork and everything else to do it. They are the main issues. In terms of wildfire and those sorts of issues, you are not allowed to clear back from that boundary fence properly. There is no access along that boundary fence, so you cannot do control burning from that point. There are all those sorts of issues. So it is not just one issue; it is a whole host of issues. If you want to put up an adequate electric fencing system to keep out not only wild dogs but also other animals, it is very difficult to do that.

Mr Coysh—Just adding to what the two previous speakers have said, we have a dreadful dog problem and it has got worse. For sure it has been exacerbated because of the fires. What we are all incensed about is that the Department of Sustainability and Environment, in their wisdom, put on these extra dogmen, and they were funded from fire funds, I believe. A valid point was raised before that you thought it would have been an opportunity for one of these dogmen to be here. Wild dogs are cunning, but I think the wild dogmen have to be more cunning because wild dogs are very difficult animals to catch, especially when they come into urban areas. Talking to the two dogmen in our area, it is one thing to go and catch a dog in the bush or on Crown land, but it is another thing to try to catch it on private land. This dog has a different psyche. As our local trapper said, you can be setting traps and they can be watching you.

You asked before how much original dingo is in these wild dogs. One of our dogmen, who has been there for many years, caught a dog that was the epitome of a dingo. It was everything you would think a dingo would be. He caught it down near Burrowye, I believe. When they did a DNA test on it, it was as far away from being a dingo as you could possibly get. We are told that the most ferocious dogs are kelpie-crosses. They seem to be some of the most vicious dogs to deal with when they are trapped.

I do not want to go over old ground, but in the mid-eighties we did not have a dog problem. My land adjoins land of Neil's. We live on a common range which is called Mount Wermatong or the Wermatong range. We went out of sheep purely because of the economics of it. My neighbours were starting to suffer from the dogs. We thought, 'We will be exempt from this,' but then we started to have cattle kills or calf kills, and in one particular year we lost 19.

When a dog kills a sheep, there is plenty of evidence. They eat everything but the wool. They are smart enough not to eat that. With cattle or especially with young calves, they tend to eat everything. So you very rarely see many remains. You might see a hind leg or a hoof or something like that, but there is not a great deal of evidence. We know they are being attacked because, even though you do not see it as often, dogs have been witnessed attacking cattle.

I spoke to our member here today. I said, 'These dogs have to come out of national parks, chased out by fire.' He said, 'I do not think you want to fence yourself into a corner.' We live on the Murray River. New South Welshmen live across the river. The dogs would be at liberty to swim across the river and come from that direction as well as any other direction. So it is not a state problem. It is a bigger problem than just a Victorian problem. The whole issue has to be addressed in a bipartisan way.

I have been farming for 40 years. I should be retired, but unfortunately I am not. If I were more successful I would not be in this predicament. Farmers have to put up with a bureaucracy which has gone mad. In the last couple of days we have seen evidence of that. Being grandparents, we have to have a permit for our grandchildren to work on the farm. It is just a ludicrous society that we are living in. We have noticed that the bureaucracy has grown, but the people on the ground who are doing the work—that is, the dogmen—get less and less. But further up the bureaucracy food chain there seems to be this mentality that they build their ivory towers or live in a shell. When we see dogs, we are supposed to ring up the local office of the Department of Sustainability and Environment and report that. Sometimes I bypass that and I ring the dogman straightaway because I can tell him where the dogs were, he is familiar with the

terrain and he knows exactly where I am talking about. I reckon they have been even vindictive towards him.

They build up this rapport between themselves and the farmers because of that close communication. I feel so sorry for these blokes. This bloke has come in; he has been thrown into the deep end. He has been on this steep learning curve. He has caught over 140 dogs in less than two years—nearly 50 along the hills just above where Neil and I live. He has been told to pull his traps up by the end of June. There was some talk that his contract was going to be extended until January. But I think he has been shuffled on because of our concern and because there have been media reports and whatever. It is absolutely despicable that that happens. It is totally and utterly frustrating.

ACTING CHAIR—We can sense that. Noel, would you like to make a short opening statement?

Mr Cheshire—Yes. I appreciate your coming down here to listen to our dilemma and to take it on board. I hope something will come out of it.

ACTING CHAIR—I did not have to come very far.

Mr Cheshire—There are a couple of issues in my report that I would like to highlight. There are a few things that I do not believe are coming up to scratch. In my report I have said that we need to erect electric fences to a standard. Too many fences that are not standard have been put up. People are using them as boundary fences or they seem to think that they will get the money for boundary fencing and, once they have it, they have a boundary fence but it is no aid to them as a dog-proof fence. Too much of that goes on. If a fence is put up, it should be put up to a standard. If it is not put up to a standard, they should not get payment.

Mr TUCKEY—Are you saying there is a subsidy available for fencing?

Mr Cheshire—There is a subsidy available for that electric fencing. I put up my electric fence. If it does not come up to a standard, you do not get any payment. I put up an electric fence about eight years ago. I put it up, and I believe it has kept dogs out for eight years. If you can put it up to a proper standard, where there is not a lot of pressure you will keep dogs out. I really think that with a few of these things the money has been handed out too loosely. If we could come up with that and have a standard on our electric fencing, we would go a long way.

Mr TUCKEY—What is your standard?

Mr Cheshire—I am not saying my standard is right.

Mr TUCKEY—What have you put up?

Mr Cheshire—I have a four-wire electric fence—four hot, three cold and a barb on top.

Mr TUCKEY—You do not have ring lock or anything?

Mr Cheshire—No, and I have my posts about three metres apart. I have about 8,000 volts running through that. I have the biggest energiser available that will do 360 kilometres of wire. When it hits you, it nearly knocks your false teeth out.

Mr TUCKEY—I have stuck my head through a couple from time to time.

Mr Cheshire—There are a couple of other issues that I would like to bring up. I am a third generation farmer. I want to hand my farm on to my son. I want to be viable. These dogs are not going to make me viable, because they are all around me. If I cannot do it, it has a social impact. That social impact is hurting everybody. These people out there are really hurting. I put my hand up because I believe that something has to be done. I believe that the figures that the department have got are not right. So I put together a plan. I wanted to put it out to the public to find out exactly what is going on. There are 12 points. It is very easy. It is a simple yes, no or maybe. The response I have had from that would make your hair stand on end. The department talks about the number of killings people have had. I have surveyed only a small number of people, but a lot of people in the report do not fill out report forms. The attack on the family enterprise is enormous. They are not happy with the baiting program. Not one person I have surveyed is happy with the baiting program—not one. There is something wrong if people on the ground are not happy with our baiting program.

Mr TUCKEY—Is that in terms of efficacy—it is just not getting the dogs?

Mr Cheshire—The question I ask is, ‘Are you happy with the present baiting program?’ Not one said yes.

Mr TUCKEY—But you do not know what their dissatisfaction was?

Mr Cheshire—I have surveyed only a small number of people. Eighty-eight per cent said no, and not one person said yes.

Mr TUCKEY—I am accepting that. I am just interested to know whether they were dissatisfied because there was not enough of it, because it did not work or, for instance, because they were concerned about the other effects.

Mr Cheshire—I am doing this all through Landcare. I believe we have been doing it wrong. We have to go back to the grassroots level and find out exactly what the people want—at the ground level—and not be told by someone up here what we are going to do and how we are going to go about it. We have to go back and we have to get the people on the ground on side to find out exactly what they want and what is going on. We may get somewhere if we do that, tell them what we are going to do and do what they want—not what we have been told from way up there.

In my submission I said we have to be more scientific in our baiting program. We really have to look at that in our baiting program. I want to go back to the social impact. We would be looking at probably 100,000 sheep, conservatively, in the north-east of Victoria. If we could get more sheep in our area, it would have enormous on-flow to the local people. You would have more shearers. You would have more people employed on farms.

Mr TUCKEY—More shopkeepers.

Mr Cheshire—More shopkeepers. Your hospitals would be doing better. Your vet would be doing better. You would have more people in your corner stores. You would have a viable industry. But at the moment these dogs are eroding our values and our trying to keep on our farms. We were talking about the next generation of farmers. If we do not do something, we will not have another generation of farmers because there will be nothing left. These animals are controlling our destiny, and we have to do something seriously about it.

ACTING CHAIR—When will you have completed that survey? I am wondering whether the committee can have your results.

Mr Cheshire—No worries.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you in the middle of it now?

Mr Cheshire—It has been running for only a fortnight, but I am quite willing to pass on all the relevant information I have.

Mr TUCKEY—Sounds good.

ACTING CHAIR—We will be in touch about that. That would be of excellent use to us.

Mr TUCKEY—I can understand why you wanted to put a simple thing through. But it would be interesting to know why people said they were dissatisfied, and a few phone calls could be made as a follow-up. Maybe you have it right with the idea that it is not sufficiently well targeted, scientifically. But, without discussing that further, you could add a bit of information over and above the fact that they are not satisfied. In my electorate the same debate is going on about the relative value of doggers and baiting, and it is coming down on the side of doggers. We need to know why so we can make some relevant comment.

Mr Cheshire—One of the suggestions that came from our local Landcare group only last week was that we do what they call infra-red camera work where we set up a bait station and, with these cameras on that bait station, we find out what those dogs are doing. I take the dogmen along to these meeting and they come up with things in combination with the other people. They say that they want to set up a mound or set up a bait station where there are all different types of baits—set up the cameras, or infra-red cameras, in a tree focused on the bait and find out what bait they are taking. We could find out. They are even talking about calf faeces. Dogs love calf faeces. They are talking about trying different things to find out exactly what the dogs will eat. It is exactly the same on traps. We are not going about it in the right way. We are very haphazard in what we are doing.

Mr TUCKEY—You might be interested to know they did exactly that with ants on Christmas Island. They put out a bait and put little cameras down and the ants would pick up the original bait and take it to the edge of their territory and drop it because they did not like it. So, if they can do it with ants, they can do it with dogs.

Mr Cheshire—Just by setting up a camera on a bait station we could find out exactly what they are doing. You see on television what they can do with crocodiles or anything. They can go right into the den. They can find out what goes on. We should use that technology to find out exactly what is going on out there. We do not know.

Mr TUCKEY—We will get the fellows who run *Big Brother*!

ACTING CHAIR—It might not rate as well.

Mr TUCKEY—In your report, and you and Phillip alluded to this, you state, ‘We need more Indians and less Chiefs!’ That is a common remark, but I always argue that that can be achieved only if we reorder the way we, the Commonwealth government, spend money.

Mr Cheshire—I totally agree.

Mr TUCKEY—Sussan and I, as two of a number, are to argue with the Prime Minister about how we fund Aboriginal people. The top-down method never works. You just create a great bureaucracy. I have mentioned local government before. Should there be funding for a dog control committee or something that was mentioned before? What is your view of bottom-up funding—in other words, a grant from wherever coming to a local organisation that has to be incorporated or be the local authority or something? Do you see benefit in that? Politicians measure excellence by expenditure. We say we have chucked \$2 million at something and when you get down to the dogger there is only \$80,000 left. Do you think it is better if that \$2 million arrives in regions? And how would you manage it to maximise the amount of money on the ground?

Mr Coysh—What you are saying has great merit.

Mr Cheshire—Hands are tied.

Mr Coysh—The chap who spoke from Khancoban, Mr Murdoch, made a very valid point when he said that an amount of money had been set aside, yet only \$40,000 of it got across this side of the divide. A lot of the funding for these wild dogmen they have put on since the fires—because obviously the dog problem has been exacerbated because the dogs have been pushed out of fire areas—must get chewed up in bureaucracy. We know it does. What you said has a lot of merit. Perhaps, rather than this money being channelled into the Department of Sustainability and Environment, that money should be channelled to our local dog group to be spent as it sees fit.

Mr QUICK—Management group.

Mr Coysh—Listening to Noel, I have no doubt that to a degree baiting is a tool, just like—what do you call it?

Mr Cheshire—It is only an aid. You have to work the three together.

Mr Coysh—That is right, you have to work the whole three together. When you bait a dog, you do not see him. He goes away and dies. When a trapper traps a dog and he brings it down or

you see it hanging on a tree, you have a grin from ear to ear because you know you have one less predatory animal about gnawing at your stock. It is psychological. When I see the dogmen go up our road onto our hill at least three times a week, I have that surety that something is being done. It is a tangible thing. It is a comfort. I agree with Noel and what you have said that rural Australia is dying and this is just another nail in the coffin. There is no doubt about it.

Mr TUCKEY—Noel, you said something about your hands being tied.

Mr Cheshire—Someone mentioned before that we cannot have our grandchildren on the farm. Where on earth are we going to teach the kids of tomorrow where eggs and milk come from? It does not come out of the shop. It does not come in a bottle. We have to get those kids out there. The gap between city people and country people is growing. For goodness sake, we have to get them back together. We have to try to get some people on the ground and talk to the local communities and try to have some input so that we can create our own destiny, not have it eroded.

Mr TUCKEY—When you said your hands are tied, were you suggesting there would be difficulty with your dogger going into a national park or something if money were available for a properly structured local community dogging program? Is that what you meant when you said your hands were tied?

Mr Cheshire—That is probably it in a nutshell. The dogmen cannot go into the national parks because someone else has some baits in there, which is fair enough. But there is no cohesion. When they put the baits out there, they are not telling the dogman and the dogman is not going with them to where they put the baits. The bloke may be skilled in poison, but he does not know where to put the baits. That is half our problem.

Mr TUCKEY—Historically, the Commonwealth thought they always had to give road moneys to state governments. We still do a lot of it. Immediately 20 per cent goes to administration. If we fund 100 kilometres of road, we know we will get only 80 kilometres. The same thing applies in so many areas. We then went to Roads to Recovery. We said to local government, ‘We will give you the money for local roads.’ I had one example in Queensland given to me where they had built a state road with their own money and the charge for administration was two per cent. Could similar outcomes be achieved if we did some direct funding?

Mr Clydsdale—Possibly. I might be a bit at variance with some of the other speakers, but I believe to determine the effectiveness of any program in the end you have to ask: does it get the results that you are trying to achieve?

Mr TUCKEY—Like 100 kilometres of road.

Mr Clydsdale—In my mind, the result we are trying to achieve is no loss of stock. A dogman can say he gets 150 dogs a year, but if you are still losing stock then that is not effective. We have to make sure that, however we apply funding, we are effectively applying it. I would prefer a dogman getting only 50 dogs a year and having no stock losses. That is where local area plans and the methodology of applying those funds are very important.

Mr TUCKEY—This is the fundamental point of my question. I am not suggesting that everybody gets paid for a dogger. If \$100,000 a year—to pick a figure—went to your district, do you reckon collectively your community would turn that into the best possible outcome as compared to 50 times that funding going to the state government?

Mr Cheshire—Can I answer that question you asked about sending money to the local area. What we have in place is pretty good. But we would be better off, firstly, if the North East Wild Dog Management Committee had more control over the funds and, secondly, if we could get community representation at local Landcare level to represent those local people and to go further and take it to the wild dog management group, instead of us getting 20 per cent of the funding. Eighty per cent has been eaten up in bureaucracy. That is what is happening. If we could turn that around and if we could have more control of it, we would be a long way better off.

Mr QUICK—Phillip has given us the title of our report: ‘A cry in the wilderness’. I hope it is not because, as I said to some of the other people, each of us represents rural electorates. We are selling you people short if we do not come up with some recommendations that will solve this. As Noel said, we are going to have a generation with no farmers and our country towns are going to die.

Mr Coysh—They are dying now.

Mr QUICK—I know.

Mr Coysh—Our corner shops and our rural businesses are becoming minibanks, because the banks have given up on a lot of us. That is how bad it is getting. Can I give you a quick analogy. Twenty years ago I wrote a letter about weed problems, about blackberries, to a bloke called Maurie Grealy, who was the head of the department of who knows, because they change their name—and that is where the 80 per cent goes, I think. We had a national park beside us on the river. The weeds had not been sprayed for 20 years. I said to them, ‘This is a seed bed for the Upper Murray. Please do something about it.’ It was eventually taken over by Fisheries and Wildlife and was sprayed. It cost them \$13,000, from memory, to spray in 1992.

From when my concerns were raised until 1992, the weeds exploded through the wet summer through the district. I get notices from the department threatening to sue me because I have a weed problem. That is no different to the wild dog problem at the moment. As bad as it is, it may be only in its infancy. If something is not done, it will get worse. Now is the time to break its back and do something about it, we hope.

Mr Cheshire—How would you like to get up in the morning and take a pay cut?

Mr TUCKEY—You blokes tell us to take one all the time.

Mr Cheshire—We do it every morning when we get up. We go out into the paddock and we have taken a pay cut because we have lost the people who are working for us. That really hurts.

Mr Coysh—The pay cut is bad enough, but the kick in the guts is worse.

Mr TUCKEY—There is no dispute about that. That is why we are here today.

Mr Paton—I would like to say one thing in closing. I hope commonsense prevails, because I do not think there is a lot of that, and that funding is resourced to whatever level to all of those things—to the people in the district. Farming communities are dying. I am part-owner of an abattoir and a butcher shop. We have to source stock—and I am talking about sheep; everybody in our area used to have 100 or more sheep—outside the district. We are on for value-adding product and stock, and keeping the dollars in the community. Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you.

[2.20 p.m.]

BARRY, Mr Fraser John Niewand, (Private capacity)

BURSTON, Mrs Alison Joan, (Private capacity)

BURSTON, Mr Geoffrey Hamish, (Private capacity)

CONNLEY, Mr Clive Rodger, (Private capacity)

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the representatives of the Omeo land-holders group. I imagine you have travelled a long way to be here today, so we really appreciate it. For the *Hansard* record, could you each please state the capacity in which you appear.

Mr Connley—I am a farmer.

Mr Burston—I am a farmer at Benambra.

Mrs Burston—I am a farmer.

Mr Barry—A farmer at Swifts Creek.

ACTING CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading information and evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Having moved the formalities out of the way, can I say you are very welcome to talk to us today and we look forward to hearing what you have to say. So that we can keep to our rather tight time frame, I ask anyone who would wish to make a short opening statement to do so and then we will move to questions.

Mr Barry—I have been here for a little while. There are four basic issues. The first is the population management of the pests in the forests and on public lands or parks. It is a numbers game. That is why land-holders adjoining the forests and parks are having so many problems. It is a numbers game. There are too many dogs out there. If we can get on top of the wild dog problem, we will have a blueprint for all pests. I have a photo here of the first pig that was sighted and shot yesterday just outside our boundary. We have not had wild boar. It is a real feral. So we are going to have not only dogs but also pigs. We also have deer and obviously foxes and all that. Dogs are the major one. They have the biggest impact on our economy.

The second issue is land management. We actually have an eucalyptus monoculture out there. We have very little understanding of the bush and the way it was. Because of that, we are getting a lot more pressure. There is no feed out there. There used to be. Everything is trying to come onto private land.

The third issue is that we really need to get on top of the fencing at the interface. It was referred to before as the interface. It is. It is the frontline of the war we are fighting. If we are to get on top of that, we need to get some really decent guidelines on public and private interface fencing. At the moment they are unworkable. There is money out there, but nobody really wants to put money in because of the guidelines that are there. For example, the nine-foot or three-metre boundary that you are allowed to clear needs to be at least at tree height; otherwise, why put up \$10,000 a kilometre for fencing and have it flattened within the first or second year?

The fourth issue is fighting the culture that is basically in the community and within public land management. We have the wildlife management groups that are cooperating. They were set up in good faith, with a lot of input from the VFF and community groups. Unfortunately, they have been hijacked by the department. The culture of the department is such that wild dog management groups were not allowed to contribute to this inquiry or they were not allowed to come over. That is what has happened. So we are really fighting this culture of empire building.

There are some savings that can be made, like you were talking about, Mr Tuckey. But unfortunately, in relation to those who are in control of the budget, there are positions for, say, 17 people on the management side but they need only about seven. Who are they going to fire? Are they going to fire themselves? We have to look at the whole issue of what it is, who is going to pay for it, the public land management and how we maintain a really decent ecosystem. The numbers are very critical in maintaining a decent ecosystem.

Mr Burston—I first went to Benambra in 1960. There was an abundance of wildlife and not many dogs. By the early 1970s we had three resident dog trappers in the old Omeo shire. They were able to do preventative trapping many miles out, and that is one of the reasons why the dog numbers at that time were kept down. In the 1980s the then minister for conservation, Rod McKenzie, had a work party on electric fencing, which I was a part of. At the same time the treadle snare was being developed. The government used electric fencing and the treadle snare as an excuse to ban the steel-jaw trap. I have always argued that electric fencing is a management tool for land-holders to control the movement of dogs. It is not for everyone, and really only for people who maintain fences. Later in the 1980s the Omeo based trapper retired. It was felt then that if the department put his wages into fencing and they developed a perimeter fence around the area, together with a baiting program, that would solve the dog issue. By the early 1990s, 87 per cent of killings or dog attacks were behind government funded electric fences. The two remaining dogmen could not attend all the dog attack sites. At one point there were 32 calls for assistance. So some people just had to put up with the problem.

There is an economic impact on us. Our property is in three parts—Camerons, the home block and Hinnomunjie—which are about 18 kilometres apart. Over the past five years we have averaged only about 31 per cent lambs weaned as opposed to the 76-plus percentage earlier, although we have had a fairly big fox-baiting program. We calculate the reduced income from this, with not having the excess sheep to sell and the average age of the flock getting older, is about \$21,000 on a 650-ewe flock. The wool from those sheep this year made \$26,500. We are suffering about a 44 per cent loss in that area.

Since the fires, we have rebuilt most of the Crown boundaries to a dog-proof standard and about 40 per cent of the ones against neighbours. But we are still suffering dog attacks. This year eagles have proved a major problem. Both the Hinnomunjie and the Camerons blocks were

almost completely burnt in the 2003 fires. The boundary fences at Camerons where we run most of our cattle are almost dog proof but not wildlife proof. During the development of this property, the more country we improved the more kangaroos we ran—to the point where we were running between 900 and 1,000 kangaroos on a winter's evening. We designed an electric fence which kept them out and proved very successful against all species of wildlife. Since the fires, with no electric fence, we have nine kangaroos left. This shows the effect of the fire and the dogs.

Our main concerns at Camerons are the loss of calves, two dogs and the introduction of *Neospora*. In areas of Queensland and northern New South Wales and in the Bega area, it is mainly seen in dairy herds where the farmers are handling the cattle all the time. The calving percentage is on average down between 15 and 35 per cent, with the other cattle aborting, and in some instances they have had up to 80 per cent abortions.

Mr TUCKEY—Is that in the dairy areas or the areas you represent?

Mr Burston—No, in dairy areas. In Queensland they are quoting the 80 per cent figure. If the disease got that sort of hold in our area, it would make most farms not viable. Since 1985, swamp wallabies, echidnas and emus have been rarely seen, and they were very common before this. Dogs have removed enormous numbers of wildlife, some species to near extinction. The poor old quoll is one of those. You do not hear of anyone seeing them or any reports of quoll at all. Wildlife numbers have been reduced to the point where there are not enough mouths to control the growth in the bush, thus shortening the fire cycle.

Wild pigs are becoming established in the eastern highlands. There was one shot on the corner of our Camerons block about three weeks ago. These animals together, the dogs and the pigs, are changing the whole ecology of the bush. Control measures undertaken in Victoria are on a very small percentage of Crown land, leaving enormous areas for breeding. There is a need to develop a national strategy for pest animal control to be coordinated across state boundaries to protect our native fauna and domestic stock. Immediate action is required to reduce dog numbers to a sustainable level, with aerial baiting and traditional trappers. I ask the committee to recommend that wild dogs be declared a pest of national significance.

Mrs Burston—I would like to draw the committee's attention to the fact that in Victoria wild dogs are declared established pest animals under the Catchment and Land Protection Act of 1994. Under this act, it is the responsibility of public and private land-holders to implement practices which will prevent the spread of and, where possible, eradicate the pest animal. The government policy on wild dogs fails to control them, let alone eradicate them. Also, they are not taking any action at all about the incidence of pigs in our area. That concerns us greatly.

You have seen in submissions figures of the economic impact that wild dogs have on individuals. There is also a report called *Impact of invasive animals in Australia, 2004*, by Dr Ross McLeod and the Cooperative Research Centre for Pest Animal Control, which might be of interest. The loss to farmers is not just the immediate financial loss but also the potential loss from lost production and the genetic loss. Farmers throughout the eastern highlands have been renowned for their high quality of stock—stud and commercial. Some people are having to change the composition of their enterprises because of wild dog attacks and the associated loss. This requires the introduction of stock, which increases the chance of introducing disease and

weeds not previously on their properties. It can also alter the quality assurance status of their enterprises. Quality assurance is becoming a major marketing tool for products.

Returning to the threat of diseases carried by wild dogs, hydatids and *Neospora caninum* are of major concern. Also, I see wild dogs as a vehicle for transmitting any exotic disease, such as foot-and-mouth disease or rabies, if it comes into Australia.

Tourism is being affected by the high populations of wild dogs. In our area there is a higher rate of reports by people who say they are being followed by either a single dog or a pack of dogs when they are walking. There was a group of ladies camped at an area called Native Dog Flat. I think there were 10 of them. They are older ladies. They set up their camps. At 5.30, seven dogs were walking around the camp area. So they pulled up and went home. People riding their horses have been harassed. Dogs are regularly sighted during the day in the bush and on private land, and they are heard.

Mr Burston—In relation to dogs being regularly seen, we were mustering cattle for preg testing just after Christmas. A grey-brindle, hyena-looking thing about 20 metres away sat up in some thistles. I was glad I did not have my dog with me. I cracked the whip at it, and its mate sat up beside it. So I thought it was time for me to move.

Mrs Burston—It really is only a matter of time before somebody is hurt. The social structure of the rural communities is tied to the economics of this issue and must be taken into consideration. The high dog populations have a devastating impact on the native fauna. A dog requires 800 grams of protein a day. As they prefer choice pieces, such as hearts, kidneys and liver, the balance of the kill is left for foxes, cats and pigs, which also creates another problem. Between April 2003 and 2004 in the Gippsland region, the official DPI figures were 733 dogs caught, and this saved 214 tonnes of wildlife, working on the 800 grams. The official figures do not include dogs destroyed by land-holders and hunters and road kill. Even with this number of dogs caught, there has been no decrease in sheep attacks or sightings.

The loss of native fauna also affects the status of the forests and grassland, which results in reduced grazing of domestic and native stock, which then increases the fuel loads for the fire cycle. Since the fires of 2003, there has been a window of opportunity created to control wild dog numbers through New South Wales and Victoria. We really should capitalise on it with poisoning, trappers et cetera. The National Parks and the state government should really review their current policies and practices. It is important that this committee recommend that the wild dog be declared a pest of national significance and that 1080 remains as a registered poison. Thank you.

Mr Connley—I can remember years ago as a 14- or 15-year-old riding horses in the bush. You would see occasionally packs of four or five, sometimes six or seven dogs. If you cracked your whip or set your dogs on them, they would run away. Nowadays it just does not happen. They are getting back into mobs of five, six, seven or eight again. Because they are inbred with our more domestic dogs, they are not frightened of humans anymore. We have had times when we have had to put our dogs in the huts with us for the night to keep them away from the dingoes attacking them. They will attack them. They will attack your dogs and they will kill them. There are no two ways about that.

You can be riding your horse through there going back home, happen to look over your shoulder and see two or three dogs. You see two or three. Up in the bush there are another four or five following you that you will not see. People go out there deer shooting. They have got there and seen one dog. The next minute they have looked around, and they have turned around and gone home. Part of the cause is people taking dogs out with them and not bringing them home.

ACTING CHAIR—Exactly where is your place? Where are you talking about?

Mr Connley—I am talking about Beloka, which runs along the border of the Kosciuszko National Park.

ACTING CHAIR—So you would certainly agree with the comments we have heard today that the dogs are getting bolder and venturing out more in daylight?

Mr Connley—There is no doubt about that. As Geoff was saying, you would hardly see a dog during the daytime before. You can just about go out to the bush at any time of the day now and you will see dogs, whether you are driving along the road or you are riding your horse through the bush.

Mr Burston—And hear them howling, which you did not in the past.

ACTING CHAIR—How big are the ones you are seeing now?

Mr Connley—They vary in size. They are not as big as staghounds, but in a few years they will be getting as big as them. I have seen a few bushwalkers out there by themselves lost. They do not know where they are, they do not know where the next creek is to get a drink of water and they totally do not know which ridge they are supposed to be on. If they end up getting hurt, two or three of these dogs will come in and within a few hours that will be the end of them. These dogs are not frightened to have a go at you. Out in that area the dogs are already taking our calves.

Mrs Burston—Could I table an article out of the paper. Bruce Reid was to give evidence at this inquiry and was not able to come. He is featured in the article. There is also a photo of dogs hanging in a tree, which is at one of Rodger's gates. You will see how many dogs there are.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. Is it the wish of the committee that we accept this article as evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs Burston—Since Christmas—and Rodger is one of the people who have suffered heavily from this—there have been over 1,000 sheep killed and others mauled in our area, and that is to a value of \$90,000.

Mr Burston—That was in four months.

Mrs Burston—Those figures were associated with the figures in April I quoted.

Mr TUCKEY—Your written submission says that 720 dogs have been caught in the Omeo shire this year.

Mrs Burston—Yes.

Mr Connley—And we got another one out the back of home last week—Tuesday.

ACTING CHAIR—Are you suffering a similar withdrawal of dogmen from your area that we have just heard about from the other people?

Mrs Burston—Yes.

Mr Connley—Another issue there is they are putting on some of these young blokes. Some of them are not from the areas and do not know the country, for starters. They could have been taught by some of the old blokes who used to be dog trappers, who know the area, who know a fair few tricks, who have learnt a fair few tricks over the years and who have a fair few more up their sleeve. They should be teaching these young blokes, but they are not given any money to go out there. I am pretty sure some of the older people who were doggers would have gone out there for free and taught these young blokes how to track dogs and that sort of thing.

Mr TUCKEY—There is a suggestion, too, that when you lose people you obviously lose a lot of local knowledge, if you have to bring somebody new in. In other words, you want a dogger around for quite a few years, if only because of the local knowledge they accumulate.

Mr Burston—The present doggers are only on—

Mr TUCKEY—Three-year contracts.

Mr Burston—I think two of them are only on 12-month contracts. In east Gippsland, 6.4 doggers are funded out of base funds. The other two employed are funded from wherever they can get the money. Those two are on 12-month contracts. The problem is the department thinks you can turn doggers on and off. One bloke has caught nearly 200 dogs since he has been on the fire recovery thing. He is looking for another job at the moment because very soon he will be out of work. They are the sorts of people we really want to keep on.

Mr TUCKEY—Would you comment on the discussion we had a minute ago. We all know that it is much easier to identify the problem. But, in terms of solutions, do you have any remarks you want to make about whether it would be better if the money arrived on a regional basis to be administered by a local board or through local government or whatever?

Mr Burston—When the dog committees were set up two years ago, it was our understanding that there was going to be stand-alone funding and that someone was going to be in charge of the program, with the dogmen under them. The money was to go to the CMAs. But it is all just a ploy. It would be more effective if it were streamlined. Being on one of the committees, we are supposed to be transparent, as are the department people. But the budgeting I cannot understand. The cost of running a dogman 12 months ago was \$56,000. It suddenly jumped to \$76,000 in 12 months.

Mr TUCKEY—That is 20 per cent.

Mr Burston—When I asked why the difference, they just discovered their computer program allocated the funds better.

Mr TUCKEY—It is worth asking you to comment on this because we are into catchment councils and the Commonwealth is putting up a lot of money for salinity and that sort of thing. We insisted on a community involvement. I am extremely interested in that with dryland salinity. I probably have more of it than any other electorate in Australia. I am finding that all that is happening is the states, with their proportion, are sort of shotgunning their own people out of their own departments and into the executive positions. Then they are getting paid and virtually running the show. In fact, we have had a very notable resignation of a chairman over there. When the community committee made some decisions about salinity, their chief executive refused to implement them. Anyhow, I do not want to go too far down that road.

I am really asking how you would manage. The state government does not tell local government how to spend Roads to Recovery funding. Every local government tells us that the paperwork to get that Commonwealth money takes about half an hour a week to do whereas, where they have to administer state government money, they have to have a full-time employee and things of that nature. Would you see a local committee with a local secretary, who got a stipend, being able to use the rest of the money to get rid of dogs?

Mr Burston—Yes.

Mr TUCKEY—Would you favour that as compared to the current system?

Mr Connley—A lot more of it would end up out in the field where it is supposed to be, wouldn't it?

Mr TUCKEY—That is the question I am asking.

Mr QUICK—Who are what are the wild dog management group? Was I right in understanding they have been told they are not allowed to rock up here?

Mr Barry—They were not allowed to put a submission in, nor were the DSE guys, nor were the DPI guys.

Mr TUCKEY—Nor the trappers?

Mr Barry—The trappers were not allowed to—

Mr QUICK—Who told them they were not allowed to do that?

Mr Barry—Up above.

Mr QUICK—Who is up above?

Mr Connley—We tried to find out, but we could not.

Mr Barry—We could not find out.

Mr QUICK—How many wild dog management groups are there in this area?

Mr Burston—Two in Victoria: one in Gippsland and one in the north-east.

Mr QUICK—How do you get appointed to it?

Mr Barry—It is a government appointment.

Mr Burston—There were five land-holder members and four department people, which covered the parks et cetera. The chairperson was to be one of the community members. They were appointed after expressions of interest. The minister appointed the chairperson.

Mr QUICK—Can we get a list of the people who are on the two wild dog management groups?

Mr Burston—Yes.

Mr Barry—There was a lot of input from the local community and the VFF into setting up the wild dog management groups. As with a lot of these things, they are only advisory committees. But they were supposed to be managing the job. What has happened is the DSE has sort of set the agenda for the whole situation. People are getting sick of it because they cannot get any results. It is being bound up in red tape all the time. It was supposed to be driving the whole thing, as you were pointing out. That is the way it should be working, but it is not.

Mr QUICK—Where are they based?

Mr Barry—There is one in east Gippsland and one in the north-east.

Mr QUICK—What towns or cities?

Mr Burston—Bairnsdale and Wodonga, I think.

Mr QUICK—Do they have an office, a secretarial staff, a phone number, a fax?

Mr Connley—There goes more money!

Mr Burston—No, we work out of DPI offices.

Mr QUICK—Do they get paid a salary for going to meetings and the like?

Mr Burston—We get a few dollars, yes.

Mr Barry—But the whole reporting system, as you report dogs, it kills. It is ridiculous.

Mr Burston—I feel we were supposed to be able to report directly to the minister. We actually report up the chain. If what we suggest is not acceptable, it is sent back to be redone.

Mr QUICK—I am also interested in a statement from Mr Thwaites's spokesman in that article in the *Herald-Sun*:

We're also conducting further research to get a better overall picture.

Are you aware of any research that is being conducted in your area to get a better picture?

Mr Burston—No.

ACTING CHAIR—It has been going on for many years!

Mr Barry—There is a lot of money that comes out of the dog budget that goes into research.

Mr QUICK—Who is doing the research?

Mr Connley—I do not know, but we never see them up there.

Mr Barry—The Turnbull institute gets an awful lot of money out of it.

Mr QUICK—What is it called?

Mr Burston—The Keith Turnbull Research Institute.

Mr TUCKEY—A large number of people pray every morning that the problem—be it dryland salinity or feral animals or anything else—will never go away, because they make a living out of it. They have not committed to fixing the problem.

Mr Barry—That is the annoying thing. You sit there every day as a land-holder. We are surrounded on three sides by bush. We get up there and we look at it. We all love the bush. But we can see it is being destroyed by this bloody bureaucracy down there. They are not interested in outcomes. They are interested only in budgets. If they can spend the money and not solve the problem, then they are right next year.

Mr Burston—There are two issues. We were talking earlier about baits and people not being happy with baiting. The idea of buried bait in the bait station was another government introduction which was politically expedient at the time. But the work done on it proved that it had been very effective for foxes but not for dogs. Dogs tend to pick up a bait under a tussock or something like that much more readily than something they have to dig up and chew a couple of times, then carry it 10 yards and drop it. It is very hard to get that baiting process changed because it is seen to be the way to stop non-target species getting the bait. But there are very few non-target species that would tackle a bait the size that we have for dogs. They would have to eat probably four baits for the poison to kill them. So more work really needs to be done on baits.

In relation to the aerial baiting saga, I was talking to somebody last night and they felt that we would probably need to have a couple of baiting runs for two or three years to knock the

numbers down in the breeding areas. If you take the Crown land between Melbourne and Canberra and draw little Indian ink lines on the edges where the control work is done, you will realise that it is amazing there are any native animals left out there.

Mr QUICK—We have heard about bounties for foxes. Why not bounties for wild dogs?

Mr Connley—I thought they were talking about that at one stage.

Mr QUICK—If you got \$50 for a wild dog, would that go any way towards—

Mr Connley—That was the thing with aerial baiting years ago. They used to take the baits out to the dogs. Now the trappers wait at the back of your property for the dogs to come in instead of going out and meeting them halfway. With baits, you will probably find you will pick up a heap of young dogs; but there is no way an old, cunning dog will touch that. He will go and kill something. I have even put a few poisoned sheep on my property. I thought I might get a dog. But they will not touch that. They will go and kill something fresh and have a feed of that. You will usually find that the baits are picking up only young dogs that are not experienced. They are looking there for a feed. They are a bit hungry. 'I can smell something; I will dig something up.' There is no way known that a real old dog that is cunning and has had a leg chopped off in a trap will go and scratch up something like that. He is too cunning for that.

ACTING CHAIR—We have to wind this session up now. Is it the wish of the committee that these photos of this wonderful pig be accepted into evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

Mr Barry—The guys could not operate the date on that camera. The date was yesterday.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming. It is a long drive and a lot of time out of your schedule. We really appreciate it.

[2.58 p.m.]

SAXTON, Mr David Maxwell, Land-holder Member, Tumbarumba Feral Animal Working Group

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the representative of the Tumbarumba Feral Animal Working Group. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament.

We do make you very welcome. Time is limited. I do appreciate you coming along, and I know you have a wealth of experience in this area. Can I ask you to make a short statement based on what you see as the issues. I know you have been here all day, so you probably have a good view of where we are at in our considerations.

Mr Saxton—Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee. I will not go back over old ground. On a positive note, I will endeavour to give a broad-brush outline of what our group has done because I feel that it has a lot of potential as a model and could go a long way towards controlling the feral animal problem by a cooperative approach.

The group was set up some three years ago in response to ever-increasing attacks on domestic stock by wild dogs and by increasing numbers of pigs and other ferals. The group consists of land-holder members, the local head of State Forests and members from the Hume Rural Lands Protection Board. We are 160 kilometres east of here. The base for that group is in Albury. The other group is Kosciuszko National Parks based in Khancoban. The local manager is there. It took us 12 months to thrash out this to the satisfaction of everyone involved. What we have come up with is the different agencies putting in money. The amount of money varies depending on whose land the trapper or whoever does the trapping or control of vertebrate pests is on.

ACTING CHAIR—When you say the amount of money varies, how does that work?

Mr Saxton—Everything is documented. We have a huge wealth of information—scientific information as well as recording all sightings and kills. I do not have this at my fingertips, but it can be forwarded on. It is available from the Tumbarumba Shire Council, which I neglected to say is a valuable member of this feral animal working group. If 40 per cent of the trapper's time is spent in state forest, for that month they will contribute 40 per cent of the budget. That is how it works.

We have had a lot of success. But, like all these things, it is hard. We are a volunteer group—there are about 12 of us—and we meet month to month. It is a lot of hard work. You have all the issues of different groups wanting different things. We have done a lot of monitoring. We have tried to do a lot of education as well—getting people not to be apathetic and to report every stock loss; educating them to look after their stock better, to get out there, to peel the skin back and to find out what is killing the stock.

ACTING CHAIR—Isn't that reasonably obvious?

Mr Saxton—No, it is not. A lot of deaths of stock are unreported or misdiagnosed. Without getting into details, after a few days it can be not obvious at all what has killed animals.

ACTING CHAIR—Earlier today we heard some fairly alarming figures from Russell Murdoch of Khancoban. Would you agree with those losses that he reported or would you say there might be other causes?

Mr Saxton—I concur with the majority of what Russell said. There were a couple of things. The total number for dogs eliminated was over three years, not one year. I thought I had better correct that. That was not just by trapping. We have adopted a fairly scientific approach to baiting. If you mount a bait station in the centre of a pad of fine sand, you will know what takes the bait. National Parks and Forestry have done extensive work with Dr Dave Jenkins from the CSIRO. We are collecting a lot of information and dispelling quite a few myths.

But it basically boils down to the fact, as everyone has said here today, that the money has to be thrown at it. You have to be proactive as well as reactive. You cannot wait for them to come onto your land; you have to go out there. We have a buffer zone—it is nearly 160 kilometres long—going from Khancoban on the Murray River right through towards Tumut. We use all means. There are over 100 pig traps out at the moment. They are catching pigs all the time. But the number of pigs increases when you drop the wild dog numbers. The DNA sampling of these animals has shown there are practically no purebred dogs.

We are working on this four-kilometre buffer zone. Another tool that is being used is radio-tracking collars: capture, radio collar and release. This is being done by State Forests and National Parks. It is also being done with pigs. They are finding where the sleeper colonies of some of these pests are, and they can go in and wipe them out. Everyone is a winner in that situation, including the wildlife.

ACTING CHAIR—You mentioned that you had dispelled a few myths with your research. I know that whenever I go to Tumbarumba extreme frustration is expressed about the amount of research that is being done and there is the view, 'We know where they are. We know what they are. We just want to get rid of them.' Can you indicate what myths we may have heard this morning as a committee?

Mr Saxton—That is a difficult one because it varies all over. The fires have turned things upside down. It seems that, if you leave a colony of dogs alone in the bush in a stable situation, most of the time they will stay stable there until they are disturbed. A lot of people may dispute this, but the radio tracking is showing this. I can only repeat that.

ACTING CHAIR—What will they eat?

Mr Saxton—They are eating wildlife. We have done extensive scat analysis. In our area, when the scat analysis was done it showed that the primary food source was echidna and wallaby. It includes lyrebirds. The dogs come out of those huge areas of crown land and forestry and national park and get stuck into the livestock when the food source becomes short.

ACTING CHAIR—Although we did see some significant stock losses before the bushfires.

Mr Saxton—Correct.

ACTING CHAIR—They were not stable within their population areas within national parks then.

Mr Saxton—The problem, despite the trapping, has increased. One thing that has exacerbated this or added to it over the years—and you have seen this thread come through today—is the fact that up in our area, where there is a lot of pine forest, there is extensive illegal pig hunting. These people have the meaner, savage dogs. They get away. We have had grown cows and domestic and feral horses killed by some of these dogs. I do not need to say what will be next on the menu. One of these days it will happen. So the dogs are becoming bigger and bigger for that reason of the cross-breeding.

The Tumbarumba police over the years have instigated night patrols. They have been catching pig hunters. They have lost their dogs. The same sort of people have been thieving fuel. They have also caught them committing vandalism, with drugs and DUI. So there is quite a thread through there. There is a million hectares of pine forest in those adjoining shires. When you have cover, anything can go on under it. So there needs to be legislation addressing some of these causes of the increasing problems of feral animals. There are other ferals in our area. Deer are becoming more widespread—they will become a vector for Johne's and other diseases if they get in—and there is the feral goat population.

Our organisation is severely stretched because you cannot get blood out of a stone. The money has to come from somewhere. At the moment Forestry, for reasons known to themselves, have pulled out of our group and have employed their own trapper. That is great if we can have two trappers, because one cannot cover the area from the national park to Woomargama down here. But the funding to support ongoing feral control must come from somewhere, and that is what I would like to leave you with. That is the secret to it.

Mr TUCKEY—It would appear that Forestry have doubled their contribution or thereabouts in employing their own dogger. But wouldn't they have been better remaining with the cooperative group and putting twice the money in for twice the effort?

Mr Saxton—Yes, you would think that, and you would have to ask them why they will not contribute to our—

Mr TUCKEY—Probably the previous witnesses answered the question. It is all about some internal budgeting exercise or fiddle.

Mr QUICK—Can you tell me about the Hume Rural Lands Protection Board? Who are they?

Mr Saxton—The Hume Rural Lands Protection Board are a New South Wales organisation. They do not have that organisation in Victoria. They are a regulatory body. They control all aspects of animal health, with stock on properties, and also land management—weed and feral pest control. They are a legislative body. They do a lot of the roles of the department in Victoria—I cannot remember its name.

Mr QUICK—So how many rural lands protection boards are there in New South Wales?

Mr Saxton—I am unsure. There is quite a large number.

ACTING CHAIR—There are about five in my electorate, so 40 probably.

Mr Saxton—They have been around for 100 years.

ACTING CHAIR—It is a land-holder funded model. So the land-holders pay rates.

Mr QUICK—How many shires in New South Wales have feral animal working groups?

Mr Saxton—We modelled ours on the Brindabella-Wee Jasper feral animal working group. That is the only other one I know of. I am sure there are others. I know of some people trying to form one.

Mr QUICK—How much money does your working group receive? Who do you get money from?

Mr Saxton—A huge amount of volunteer work has gone into it in the last 12 months. We ran out of money after spending \$70,000 with the dogger. For a dogger to start work, he has to spend \$12,000 to have public liability before he gets out his garden gate.

Mr QUICK—In this document *Cooperative wild dog/fox management program* it says ‘NPWS is responsible for the control of wild dogs’—in the national parks, I guess. So what does it do? Does it have its own separate plan?

Mr Saxton—No, they are part of our plan, but they also do work on their own. They contribute a large amount to the group.

Mr QUICK—In areas where there is no feral animal working group, what does the National Parks and Wildlife do in controlling wild dogs in national parks?

Mr Saxton—My understanding is that they control feral animals—for example, wild dogs—on their land and the adjoining land-holder’s.

Mr QUICK—Do they use doggers or do they just use baits?

Mr Saxton—I am unsure of other groups. I know they use baiting. I am not sure about doggers.

Mr QUICK—All this information here like bait station location, property, dog trapping records, who does it go to? Does it go to each of the agencies—Forestry, National Parks and Wildlife? If it goes to each one individually, is there another layer of bureaucracy that receives these reports and says, ‘We have a problem as a group of people,’ because there are four or five different agencies working collaboratively, one hopes? How does someone at the next level above, where all this information goes up to, evaluate the effectiveness of your feral animal working group and then say, ‘These people are going well. We need to give them more money’

or 'They are hopeless and we need to redirect the money and shut them down'? What sort of process is there between your feral animal working group and the next layer of bureaucracy?

Mr Saxton—I understand what you are saying. That information goes out to each agency and also comes back to the feral animal working group to prioritise where the worst areas are. It is a constant matter, like trying to put out a bushfire. Because we cannot get around the whole thing, we have to be reactive most of the time. But, if we are proactive, it is much better. You do not get the anxiety and all the things that come with getting a problem. All the facts and figures on kills and where they have occurred going back to the agency should increase the funding, but it does not appear to be happening.

Mr QUICK—Do you get to meet the people in the next layer above you? Does a representative from each of those organisations come down and say, 'You obviously have a crisis. All the evidence we have received today is that the problem is exploding'? Does that next layer of bureaucracy come down? Do you get representatives from the next layer up or from the minister's office come and say, 'You have provided all this wonderful information. Obviously the problem is exploding. What can we do to contribute to some of the ideas that you have,' or do you just operate in a sort of vacuum and just ponder, 'Are we going to get funded next year? How do we survive?'

Mr Saxton—We have been asking the various representatives of these organisations to take it to their next level to get more funding. But we seem to be up against a brick wall. It is not happening. We are not getting on top of the problem. We have reduced it dramatically, but we need more action.

Mr QUICK—As Wilson said, do we say to National Parks and Wildlife and Forestry, 'You are hopeless. As a shire and as landowners, we can do it a lot better. We will now go somewhere else and try to get the money'? If necessary, go to the Commonwealth, as Wilson suggested, and say, 'We can give you an extra 20 per cent of money within the same bag of money because we have cut the state out,' if this next level of bureaucracy from those different departments is not responsive to your concerns, as it appears not to be today.

Mr Saxton—I understand your question. Our success has been achieved by all these groups working together, because there are such big areas of national parks and forestry. We are using their resources and their knowledge.

Mr QUICK—So you would say this management group is successful in solving the problem?

Mr Saxton—We have been successful in—

Mr TUCKEY—Except that one of your partners just left.

Mr Saxton—That is the problem at the moment, yes. The group is still working.

Mr TUCKEY—I have always held the view that if there is a joint agreement, be it road funding or anything else, a virtual trust fund should be created. If the Commonwealth is putting in 20 per cent, we send the 20 per cent. If the states are putting in 20 per cent, or obviously a larger amount in this constitutional area, that goes in. If the locals are putting in 10 per cent, that

goes in. That money is administered by a local group with the determination, I hope, to put most of it out in the paddock. Do you have a comment to make on that concept, rather than everybody doing a fiddle and giving you some money and taking half of it back?

Mr Saxton—I understand what you are saying. The way it has been working had been working all right until now. If we could get the money and then the legislation for the person we employ to go onto those various lands—because you must go back into the park and the forestry to control those things—that would be a great model.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for coming along and for taking the extra effort to make sure we received your submission. Is it the wish of the committee that the management program be accepted into evidence?

Mr TUCKEY—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—I assure you that the model and the remarks that you have made will be considered by the committee when we release our final report. Thank you.

Mr Saxton—Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 3.18 p.m. to 3.34 p.m.

BREADON, Mr Garry William, Partner, G.W. and J.A. Breadon

O'BRIEN, Mr Gregory John, Chairman, Mansfield Wild Dog Group

SINCLAIR, Mr John Richard Hilliard, (Private capacity)

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the representatives of the Mansfield land-holders group. For the *Hansard* record, would you each please state the capacity in which you appear.

Mr Sinclair—I am from Yea-Alexandra, not Mansfield. I appear as a private farmer, but I am also a member of the wild dog advisory committee. My own opinions have been coloured by my work on the advisory committee over the last two years, and the information that I have of areas with wild dog problems outside my own area has been gained from that.

Mr Breadon—I am putting in a submission on behalf of my farming partnership. Unfortunately, I cannot represent the North East Wild Dog Management Group, of which I am a member.

Mr O'Brien—I am a fourth generation farmer and am representing myself. I am also currently the chairman of the Mansfield wild dog control group.

ACTING CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament and consequently warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament.

You are all very welcome. With the formalities over, I ask each of you to make a brief statement in relation to your submissions. You do not need to read from your submissions, because we have copies of them. Then we will go to questions. Thank you for waiting around all day.

Mr Sinclair—The advantage of appearing before you at the end of the day is that most of what I wanted to say has been said—your concentration must be absolutely magnificent to have understood it all—so I will be as brief as possible.

The federal government should ensure that the authorities that control public land acknowledge their responsibilities with regard to pest animals and plants on that land. Just as I would be responsible for my dog eating, for example, my neighbour's sheep, I see no difference whatsoever in relation to public land managers. This is the key to what I wish to say. It is only through acknowledging that responsibility that suitable funding and management of that problem can be achieved.

The federal government also, in my opinion, needs to oversee cross-border uniformity of the action taken with regard to such pest animals; otherwise the system becomes disjointed and very inefficient. It also needs to recognise the effect on a number of factors, and I will quickly run

through them: health, obviously, and it has been mentioned today many times—hydatids, *Neospora caninum* in cattle and danger to life, which cannot be disputed after what happened with that child and the dingo. The live cattle export business could certainly be affected by *Neospora caninum* if in fact that got up. These days it seems as though most live exports are being objected to on very small grounds to try to stop them, and I can see that being used, which of course would affect the viability of the country affected.

The native fauna discussion has been covered very thoroughly today, and I would certainly endorse what has been said. It has been said time and again. Everywhere I go it has been said that native fauna would benefit from the removal of wild dogs—and I say ‘wild dog’ as opposed to dingoes. Whatever system is used, be it baiting or trapping, the result is the same.

I am a sheep and cattle farmer. I have a certain concern about what is happening to the Australian sheep flock at the moment. For various economic reasons, mainly the marketing of Australian merino wool, the Australian sheep flock is decreasing alarmingly. Bearing in mind that the Australian merino industry is the cornerstone of the Australian sheep meat industry, if in fact the merino flock gets too small the meat industry will be affected, because merino sheep are the basis for the breeding of meat sheep, as you would be aware.

This morning we went through a group of farms and the chap who was guiding us was saying, ‘That farm now runs no sheep. That farm is out of sheep.’ We saw sheep yards with phalaris three feet high in them, and that seems to be happening in every area we go to. The number of sheep in Australia can be adversely affected if that continues in all the areas that are affected by wild dogs, along with the other things that are driving that down; and that will adversely affect us nationally.

In relation to agricultural viability, the gross margin for sheep as against cattle in our particular high-rainfall areas is sheep at a base one and cattle about two-thirds. So the profit from cattle on a gross margin basis is about two-thirds of what it is for sheep. With the wild dog problem influencing people to move from sheep enterprises into cattle enterprises, the viability of our farms is being affected. Where farms are of a marginal size, and there are many of those, a family farm moving from sheep into cattle can certainly tip its viability over the balance. I would have thought that is of great concern not only for the people concerned but also for the Australian economy.

The calf kill was mentioned, as were the numbers. I would certainly like to draw your attention to the fact—you are probably well aware of this—that, if one calf is killed, that is equivalent to approximately 10 sheep; if 20 calves are killed, that is equivalent to 200 sheep. The numbers quoted in the calf kill statistics look very small, but in fact in dry sheep equivalents they are quite considerable.

The dogman has been talked about at great length today. My experience both at home and through my work with the wild dog group is that having a local dogman is the key to controlling wild dogs. We can look at fencing and aerial baiting, but without the dog trapper there we have a lot of trouble. At the moment in this area and in other areas in Victoria where the problem is getting worse the number of dogmen is being reduced.

In Corryong, a very good, young trapper who has been employed for three years—he has done two years on his own as a trapper and has caught in the vicinity of 140 dogs, as was mentioned by another speaker—will be terminated as at 30 June. I spoke to him the other night and asked him, ‘Have you had a good day?’ He said, ‘I have had a terrible day.’ I asked him what was wrong. He said a dog had chewed the wire of a trap and got out. Despite the fact that he had about 10 days to go until he no longer had a job, he was still concerned enough to be worried about the dog that had got out of his trap. I feel we need to be continuing to encourage our state government to employ that sort of person.

One possible reason for his termination is that, after being on a contract for three years, it is obligatory that either he is terminated or he gets put on full time. That could be the reason why he is being terminated, and that is an atrocious situation.

Mr TUCKEY—They are caught by their own laws.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you; that was very informative.

Mr Breadon—I take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me to appear before you. Specifically I want to talk about wild dogs and their impact on agriculture. I believe the evidence of this impact is readily available. With this in mind, I present to you for copying the documents that I have already identified in my submission, plus a few others.

It disappoints and frustrates me that here we are today once again participating in another inquiry into the impact of these animals—not only the economic impact but also the impact on the emotional wellbeing of the farming community. Farming communities of this country in all states have lived with these predators since the country was settled and have dealt with them in various ways. With urban encroachment and the expectations of the urban community for public access to natural environment areas, the situation has arisen that land is being continually closed up for the public good. What is not happening, however, is appropriate corresponding management of these areas. This is causing a build-up of these predatory animals sitting at the top of the food chain.

Governments of all political persuasions at both federal and state level first of all need to recognise some of the following points. The problem exists and will not go away. It is ongoing. There is no magic solution to this situation. Ongoing adequate funding to implement the already identified best practice control techniques, which are in these documents, must be implemented. We need governments to stop trying to score political points. We need to work cooperatively with all stakeholders, both public and private land-holders, state and federal governments and even local governments. We need to get off the merry-go-round of inquiry, investigation and report, as the time has come to finally deal with the problem.

In summing up my opening statement, I believe that if we can institute some of those dot points that I have mentioned we could have a positive outcome. The one overwhelming impediment, as I see it, is the lack of will and/or commitment of public land managers and governments in general to fully fund and resource the required appropriate public land management. Thank you.

Mr O'Brien—Firstly, I would like to reiterate what Garry just said. My major concern is basically about funding, the threat to it all the time, and how much money is wasted by departments managing it. There are so many different levels of management that not enough of the budget actually gets onto the ground, and there is always a battle every year to maintain funding. At the moment Mansfield is probably pretty lucky. This is the first time in a long time that the number of dogs killed is higher than the sheep losses. The trapper is still catching as many dogs as ever. He is finding it easy. In fact, this year he has already nearly passed his annual total. I assume that is partly the result of the fires.

In some cases the government departments do not cooperate with one another or you get someone who is a little bit power crazy, especially in relation to fence line clearing regulations as to how much vegetation you are allowed to clear and things like that. It is not just wild dogs that are a problem. A few pigs have just started work again in the Mansfield area, and there are other animals as well, such as kangaroos and wombats. Even though they are supposedly nearly extinct, they are not in certain areas. They are in plague proportions. Thank you.

Mr TUCKEY—Two of these gentlemen are associated with these advisory committees. A document has come to me, and I would like you to look at it and tell me whether or not it is a true example of the administrative structure of employing a dogger through that system. If you do not want to answer, that is okay. It is my document, but can you confirm that that is the sort of ministerial structure?

ACTING CHAIR—Greg, you are not part of the same wild dog management organisation as Garry. Can you tell us again what your organisation is?

Mr O'Brien—We are the Mansfield-only group. It is like a little Landcare group. They threw us in as a Landcare group because they could not think of any other group to put us in.

ACTING CHAIR—So you are a Landcare group with a focus on wild dogs?

Mr O'Brien—Basically, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—And Garry is part of one of the two dog organisations in Victoria; is that right?

Mr O'Brien—Yes. Garry is on the North East Wild Dog Management Group.

Mr Breadon—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Which is one of two wild dog management groups in Victoria?

Mr Breadon—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—You said in your opening remarks that you could not make comments on behalf of that group.

Mr Breadon—Our submissions were not meant to come as being part of that group, that is correct.

ACTING CHAIR—So you have made your submissions as a land-holder?

Mr Breadon—That is right.

Mr QUICK—Is the group going to make a submission to the inquiry?

Mr Breadon—No.

Mr TUCKEY—They have been told not to.

Mr Breadon—They have been told not to.

Mr QUICK—By whom?

Mr Breadon—His name is on that page.

Mr TUCKEY—Would you confirm that that is a reasonable sort of reporting structure that your organisation operates through?

Mr Breadon—Absolutely.

Mr TUCKEY—Thank you. Can we have that back. We can give it an exhibit number now.

Mr QUICK—Page 17 of this *Draft wild dog action plan north east Victoria* states:

An annual report on the implementation of management prescriptions described in this Plan will be prepared by the WDMG and presented through Catchment & Water to the DSE Secretary.

What does he or she do with it?

Mr Breadon—Presumably they present it to the minister and the minister presents it to the state government, and they progress from there.

Mr QUICK—In our system if you present a report to the minister or the government there is usually a period in which they have to respond. I am not too sure how many annual reports have been presented to the DSE secretary. Is there some feedback mechanism whereby someone can say, ‘You are absolutely bloody hopeless,’ or, ‘You are doing a good job’?

Mr Breadon—The draft report that you refer to has yet to be ratified by the minister.

Mr QUICK—The annual report?

Mr Breadon—No, the draft report that has in it the need for an annual report has yet to be ratified by the minister, even though it has been out there for six or eight months. So I would dare say that an annual report is yet to be provided.

Mr QUICK—I am not sure what ‘DSE’ stands for.

Mr Breadon—The Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Mr QUICK—Who is the state minister in Victoria?

Mr Breadon—John Thwaites.

Mr QUICK—If I were John Thwaites, could I find out how many days are free of dog attacks in Victoria, how many dog attacks there are in Victoria, what stock losses and injuries there are in Victoria, how many dogs have been caught and baits taken by dogs within target areas, and the kilometres of dog fencing working effectively?

Mr Breadon—Yes.

Mr Sinclair—He could find that out if he asked.

Mr QUICK—As a committee, could we find out the answers to those questions?

Mr Breadon—Yes.

Mr QUICK—So someone could tell me?

ACTING CHAIR—You would have to go through that complicated chain of command.

Mr QUICK—But someone could tell me how many dog attacks there were in Victoria in 2003?

Mr Breadon—Yes.

Mr QUICK—Compared to 2000?

Mr Breadon—Yes.

Mr QUICK—So, when we talk to the Victorian department, we should be able to get that information?

Mr Breadon—Yes.

Mr QUICK—To my mind, as a politician, if we are going to expend millions of dollars, if we are not too sure how large the problem is, it is a bit hard to figure out how much money you are going to need to spend and how all the strategies that your working group and all the other people have given evidence about today fits in. We hear stories of doggers catching 140 dogs here and 230 dogs there, but I do not have a picture. I used to live in Victoria. Last year did we catch 4,000 dogs or—

Mr Breadon—Those figures are available.

Mr Sinclair—It has always seemed to us, the land-holders, that equating value of stock lost with cost of dog control is not something that should be done because there are so many other factors, as you have heard today.

Mr QUICK—Yes.

Mr Sinclair—But some of the bureaucrats tend to look at it and say, 'It is costing the Alexandra area so much to run a dogman for a year, but the sheep losses are this much; it is only half.' What they fail to understand is that, if the dogman was not there and the dog population were allowed to expand further, the whole thing would blow out as it has up in this upper north-east area.

Mr QUICK—Why do we have only two dog management groups? There are two in Victoria. Victoria is the same size as Great Britain, for God's sake. Do we need 10 or—

Mr Sinclair—The people who were put on the two dog management groups came from each area within the north-east or within Gippsland. So they tried to cover each area. For instance, I am representing Alexandra, Garry is Mansfield and then the other three are up this end. So they attempted to cover. But I do not think that more dog advisory groups would help, because the budget which we are supposed to work within is not sufficient to do the job that we are asked to advise about how to do.

Mr QUICK—I am an old Mallee boy. Are there no dog problems in the Wimmera and the Mallee?

Mr Breadon—The situation, to clarify it a little bit for you, is that within the umbrella of the North East Wild Dog Management Group there are to be set up seven local area control plans based in those areas which would determine the best control techniques for their isolated areas. There is a management group based in the western district. I do not know how they get funded.

Mr TUCKEY—Are you as a committee made aware of the gross funding allocated for the operation of your body?

Mr Breadon—Only to the extent that Tony Plowman said today.

Mr Sinclair—That is not quite right. Our area, the north-east, has a budget of \$720,000.

Mr TUCKEY—That is nine doggers, if no other money was spent.

Mr Sinclair—That is right.

Mr TUCKEY—How many doggers do you have?

Mr Sinclair—We have nine at the moment. I have just lost count at the moment. There were some doggers put on with fire money. Three of them were terminated about a fortnight ago, two of which have been reinstated on an extra amount of money that had not been spent from the fire money and were put on short-term contracts for 12 months. The other one, the three-year man, has not got a job and will not get a job. He has trapped 150 dogs in the last two years. Three

years ago he did not know how to trap dogs. They have trained him. He has been very successful in what they trained him to do. Now he is terminated.

Mr QUICK—On page 8 of the draft wild dog action plan there is a graph, ‘Fig. 2 stock losses and dogs caught in the Mansfield area, 1988-2002’. It says:

Data from the Mansfield area shows a significant decline in stock losses following the implementation in 1991 of a multi faceted and strategic control program tailored to the area ...

Looking at that graph of stock losses and dogs caught, it is like you do not have a problem. What was the multifaceted program? Why isn’t it being implemented everywhere else in Victoria?

Mr O’Brien—That is the case. As I said before, we catch more dogs now than there were stock losses in the last 12 months or the last two years. The multifaceted approach threw everything at them—poisoning, electric fencing, trapping—and it took probably 20 years to achieve that. It does not show that, but it took at least 20 years to get it back to the stage where now the trapper is proactive trapping rather than reactive trapping.

Mr Breadon—One of the important assists to that was the formation of the local Mansfield wild dog control group, which consisted of farmers at the time working very closely in consultation with the dogmen and the catchment management officer.

Mr QUICK—In 1988 there were over 1,000 stock losses. In 2002 it looks like there were 20.

Mr Breadon—Twenty, or something like that, yes.

Mr QUICK—I am not too sure what the figure is for 2003.

Mr Breadon—For that reason, we are using the Mansfield area as a plan to try to implement better strategies up here in the upper north-east.

Mr QUICK—The Mansfield plan is best practice without a doubt?

Mr Breadon—I think it is as best practice as we can get at the moment.

Mr QUICK—With all this stuff about reporting to the DSE, why are we having this meeting, apart from finding out that Mansfield is doing it better than anyone else? Why isn’t this being implemented and funded and put in place in other areas in Victoria?

Mr Sinclair—Mansfield have put up their local area action plan, which is based on what they have been doing successfully. It is being used as the model for these areas up here. The committee did some investigations into what was needed. The budget available was not sufficient to implement the local area action plans up here. So it was not any good going on and getting a lovely local area action plan in place until we sorted out that we had the personnel the committee felt was necessary to implement it.

Mr QUICK—If I were the minister and I saw Mansfield working really well, I would be making sure that I got the money for my department to make sure it was implemented in a whole lot of other areas so I could take the kudos for it.

Mr Sinclair—You are not interested in a little job down here?

Mr TUCKEY—Is Mansfield—and my understanding is that it is closer into the city and everything—typical of the areas in other parts of these regions? In other words, is it an easier place to manage this problem?

Mr Breadon—It is slightly easier. However, Mansfield is in that situation with one dogman. As John quite correctly said, if we could sufficiently resource in the upper north-east, it may require the employment of three or four dogmen for a period to get it under control because the terrain is different, the environment is different.

Mr TUCKEY—The other question I have you probably cannot answer, but you might like to make inquiries of other people who are virtually the source of your funds. John talked about fire money. I, in a past role, was the minister who administered the NDRA, the national disaster relief arrangements. I remember the Victorian government asking for \$50 million. There is a formula. Once you get past a certain amount of state expenditure, up to 75 per cent of the moneys expended are in fact Commonwealth moneys. You are probably unable to say whether that is the case. But you are saying that a substantial amount of your funding has been coming out of ‘fire money’, and that that more than likely would be under the Commonwealth NDRA and that the Commonwealth is presently a contributor?

Mr Sinclair—I think the three dogmen I am very familiar with who have been terminated were all on money outside the normal budget, and it was fire money.

Mr TUCKEY—We might be able to get some further information on that. It is of some interest to me. It is only a where the money comes from type argument. It does not have any other value.

Mr Sinclair—I think the point needs to be made that short-term contracts in the context of dogmen are very bad business.

Mr QUICK—Yes.

Mr TUCKEY—That is right.

Mr Sinclair—Absolutely disastrous business.

Mr QUICK—I could not agree more.

Mr Sinclair—If I went out to trap a dog, all I would catch would be a cold at the ends of my fingers. It is a very skilful business when you are trying to get a dog in thousands of hectares to put his foot on a plate about that big. So you cannot switch them off or turn them on like you can perhaps a crane driver or something. I better not say that because I will get in trouble with the crane drivers, but you take my point. It is a very skilled task. If we lose good people because

they are on short-term contracts and suddenly the money runs out for a short period and then say, 'Heck, we want him back again,' guess what: we cannot get him back again.

Mr TUCKEY—As I mentioned earlier, you would also have to add local knowledge to that. You could have the best of doggers but, if you shift him to a new region, he has to put the first year in virtually finding his way around.

Mr Sinclair—The Alexandra area has a pattern similar to that. There was talk at one stage of moving dogmen up from Mansfield to Alexandra, Corryong or Tallangatta on a short-term basis. They would not know where the hell they were for the first 12 months and where the dogs run. The dogmen will say, 'There is the hill. I know the dog. That is where the dogs run.' A bloke unfamiliar with the area would set all his traps in the wrong place until he learned the territory. It is not possible.

Mr QUICK—Surely people administering and departmental secretaries would understand that?

Mr TUCKEY—It has not been my experience, Harry, unfortunately, having been up in those higher echelons. Do you wish to make any comment about bottom-up funding that we have talked about with other witnesses—the concept of a package of money, whether it has co-contribution or it is like Roads to Recovery funding and is made available directly from the Commonwealth? Would you see yourselves delivering better outcomes if a group like yours or sub-branches thereof had the money to spend on the problem?

Mr Sinclair—Without having much time to think about it, and I did pick it up in the discussions you had with previous speakers, what immediately struck me was the administration of dogmen—the labour, the insurance, the superannuation and all these complicated things.

Mr QUICK—Public liability.

Mr Sinclair—Committee members are paid—somebody was a bit reticent to say but I will tell you—\$130 a day, and when I leave my shearing shed I pay a bloke \$50 more than that to replace me.

Mr QUICK—Thanks for putting that on the record.

Mr Sinclair—We are not in a position to do that administration. We would have to have an administrator to do it. Maybe within Victoria, one administrator, from the point of view of wages and insurance and what have you, could look after the business up in the north-east and down in Gippsland. But I have never been in administration. I do not know the problems associated with that.

Mr TUCKEY—Can I interrupt you for a minute to give you an example of how Landcare officers are dealt with in parts of my electorate. They are just on the local government payroll. The Landcare banks whatever money. The Landcare has money to spend. But, rather than have their secretary have all those problems, the person becomes an employee of the local council. It is just another name on the computer. There is a transfer of X dollars which covers their superannuation and all of those things. So there are options like that.

Mr Sinclair—It would certainly be well worth looking at it in detail. But, being a cynical farmer, I would worry that it would be said, ‘You are going to save 20 per cent in administration by not going through state government and by doing it directly, so maybe instead of getting the \$1.2 million that Victoria gets now we will give you \$1 million.’ But if the money were the same and the administration was less—

Mr TUCKEY—I understand that.

Mr Sinclair—We have to look at it from a long-term point of view. Dogging is a long-term operation. The fact that Mansfield has got to that situation means that—

Mr QUICK—14 years.

Mr Sinclair—The dogman is proactive now. He is chasing dogs that have not attacked the sheep. That is the situation we need to get to up here.

Mr QUICK—That is right.

Mr Breadon—I would like to make one point on that philosophy, Wilson, you are proposing. It would need further investigation to do it the best possible way. Federal governments also offer money apparently on a 12-month contract basis—Natural Heritage Trust funding, Landcare funding. It may go for 10 years. It may go for five years. It basically is at the whim of the federal government and how much money they have available for that.

Mr QUICK—Good point.

Mr Breadon—It would concern me that we would just simply be dealing with a federal department as opposed to a state department.

Mr TUCKEY—That is a valid point to make. But the recommendations that we might make in the end should deal with that rather than say it will not work. As I understand it, the local government authorities that do this arrangement in my electorate do not charge anything for it. It just simplifies the administration, the wages, the superannuation, the compensation and everything else. The transfer of money out of the budget of the body is equivalent to that. You are talking about a cash amount of money that has been allocated to employ nine doggers or something. I bet you when you read the state government’s budget you will see that it does not say \$770,000. It would say \$3 million or something, because the tea lady has to get a bit. This is the way the system works.

I am not putting a case here at the moment that the Commonwealth government would become fairy godmother again either. I am talking about a concept where, as I said earlier, if there are three contributing bodies, there ought to be a trust account in which there is real money. This has been the great blue with NAP, this salinity money. It is still going on in my state, the state with the worst problem, because the Prime Minister insisted that it be new money and real money. In Western Australia, they are still trying to say, ‘We are spending \$40 million a year.’ I do not know how much the tea lady gets of that, but there is no benefit in my electorate.

Mr Breadon—Certainly the concept of having control techniques driven from the ground is a much better idea than having them driven from above.

Mr TUCKEY—What you might want to do, from your own experience, is write us a letter about how you would make that work.

ACTING CHAIR—That would be useful, because your group has a widespread grasp of what is happening at the moment.

Mr TUCKEY—And invite anyone else you like in to help you. If we had a model, we could deal with it.

Mr Sinclair—What is the time frame for that?

Mr TUCKEY—It will be a little while before—

Mr Sinclair—As you said this morning, it depends on the election.

ACTING CHAIR—The committee can continue its inquiry after the election, depending on the new government, the appointment of the new members to the committee and the decision by that committee to continue the inquiry. I do not know what our permanent chair thinks, but I would like to get it done sooner rather than later.

Mr TUCKEY—We have to do the job properly, and we will take the time necessary.

Mr QUICK—We will keep working. If the election comes—

Mr TUCKEY—The media are playing up these early dates. I am more inclined to think—and I will be the first to admit I was wrong if it is otherwise—the election might be as late as October. I have not had a wink, wink, nod, nod from anyone. I think the Prime Minister, if he were sitting here, would honestly say he does not know when it is going to be, other than it has to be before 5 May.

ACTING CHAIR—As Harry said, we will work to do the job properly until it is done. But we are not going to be wasting time either.

Mr TUCKEY—It is no good your rushing it, but do it as soon as you think you practically can. Address those problems.

Mr QUICK—It could be the model that solves a lot of problems.

Mr Sinclair—There is a lot of money that is coming out of the top and not getting out the bottom. The people who seem to be put off first are the people at the bottom who make the difference.

Mr TUCKEY—Exactly. As I said, politically, too many people measure excellence by expenditure, and it is totally meaningless.

Mr Breadon—Ten years ago when Mansfield was in that situation the local group produced this video. It is a very succinct educational tool, if you like, on the impact and problems of wild dog control.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. We really appreciate that. Are all of those documents to be presented as exhibits?

Mr Breadon—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Would you like us to copy them and send them back to you?

Mr Breadon—I want them back.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the document Mr Tuckey presented be taken as an exhibit? There being no objection, it is so ordered. Thank you to you and everyone else.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Quick**):

That this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 4.12 p.m.