



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND  
FORESTRY

**Reference: Impact on agriculture of pest animals**

WEDNESDAY, 25 MAY 2005

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY**

**Wednesday, 25 May 2005**

**Members:** Mr Schultz (*Chair*), Mr Adams (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Forrest, Mr Lindsay, Mr Gavan O'Connor, Mr Secker, Mr Tuckey and Mr Windsor

**Members in attendance:** Mr Adams, Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Michael Ferguson, Mr Forrest, Mr Gavan O'Connor, Mr Schultz, Mr Secker and Mr Windsor

**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**

**BAKER, Dr Jeanine, President, Branch and Research Coordinator, Sporting Shooters  
Association of Australia, South Australia ..... 1**

**DREW, Mr Rodney William, Chief Executive Officer, Field and Game Australia ..... 1**

**WOOD, Mr Colin Francis, Hunting and Conservation Consultant, Sporting Shooters  
Association of Australia, Victoria ..... 1**



**Committee met at 5.07 pm**

**BAKER, Dr Jeanine, President, Branch and Research Coordinator, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, South Australia**

**WOOD, Mr Colin Francis, Hunting and Conservation Consultant, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, Victoria**

**DREW, Mr Rodney William, Chief Executive Officer, Field and Game Australia**

**CHAIR (Mr Schultz)**—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. Today's hearing is the second in a series of five public hearings taking place in Canberra during the budget sittings. Today we are hearing from two professional hunting and shooting organisations—Field and Game Australia and the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia. In addition to further public hearings during the budget sittings, the committee will visit Western Australia and the Northern Territory in July prior to drafting its report. Before we start, I advise you that although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament and 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 committee yesterday received a supplementary submission jointly prepared by your organisations in addition to your earlier submissions. The submissions have been authorised for publication by the committee. Do any of you wish to make a brief statement in relation to these submissions or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Dr Baker**—I would like to make some introductory remarks and I would like to thank you all for having us here today. It is not often that we get a chance to present the role for hunting in terms of integrated land management, and it is an opportunity for which we are deeply grateful. I want to summarise briefly the salient points in the debate from our perspective, and then summarise where I think we can actually contribute. First, the overriding issue is that there is a rapidly escalating cost in terms of both economical and environmental damage to the Australian environment and Australian agriculture by pest animals. There is also a lack of information on pest numbers and distribution and the actual impact that they cause. Added to that is the fact that often the information we have is fragmented or uncoordinated on a national and local scale. This causes big problems when we are looking at emerging or new pest animals because we often do not identify them in time. It also causes problems if we are looking at national or regional coordinated programs.

There are problems with regard to over-regulation and red tape, and these flow into a number of different areas, from pest destruction permits and what happens with carcasses afterwards to the issues relating to firearms themselves. We have problems with transport and use, and this cuts across all spectrums—from hunters to professional shooters to primary producers themselves. Again, there are now issues in terms of public liability for shooting on private properties, and we have an insurance broker who covers us when we are engaging in hunting activities. There is an overall lack of personnel to assist private land-holders, crown lands and national parks with ongoing, sustained pest control programs.

Unfortunately, there is also a failure or lack of understanding in the public forum about the need to preserve ecosystems, be they agricultural or natural, and that means total ecosystems as opposed to single species. It is obvious to all of you here, I am sure, and it is obvious to us that pest control requires long-term and sustained efforts. It requires practical solutions as well as research solutions. The Sporting Shooters Association of Australia and, I am sure, Field and Game of Australia feel that we have expertise, personnel and the will to expand the current role of our hunters into becoming part of the solution for land-holders in terms of pest animal control. We recognise that it is not the only solution but it is one avenue that can be utilised.

We also believe that we can actually assist in terms of community education through the activities and actions of our hunting organisations. A prime example of this would be Operation Bounceback in the Flinders and Gammon Ranges National Park of South Australia. It is a sustained ongoing effort which has used hunters as part of the control efforts, and it has also been used in community education. So it is a prime example of what can be done if there is the will to do it. We as an organisation—and I can probably speak for Rod here as well—are prepared to do everything we can to assist in becoming part of the solution for land-holders, in terms of coordinating programs and trying to get people on the ground to help them, both locally and nationally. We are also currently engaged in the collection and collation of data for scientific research and we are more than willing to expand that role and continue it. We just want to be part of solving the problem of pest species, whether native or introduced.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your contribution, Dr Baker. Would Mr Wood or Mr Drew like to comment?

**Mr Drew**—I would like to add to some of Jeanine's comments by saying that the shooting sports have a proud history of contribution to pest animal management in Australia. Most of that work occurs at the local level, and it is fair to say it is usually at the request of land-holders with problems in their particular area. What we see across the states, and in fact right across the country, is that pest animal management is very largely uncoordinated. We do not see much cooperation between government agencies to coordinate these programs. We certainly do not see it even between stakeholder groups such as Landcare. You may see a huge effort going into a pest program in one particular catchment, but no pest work in the adjoining catchment. Whilst this inquiry is essentially looking at the impacts on agriculture, it is fair to say that a lot of agricultural land in Australia does adjoin public land. We see huge problems in those fringe areas adjacent to public land, and pest management efforts on public land as opposed to private vary dramatically. From our perspective, we are given very little access to some of these public lands, which are often the source of the problem, even though we have farmers who are pleading with us to assist with their problems.

**CHAIR**—Are you talking about national parks and state forests?

**Mr Drew**—There are certainly various land categories such as conservation reserves, national parks and state parks, which shooters and other members of the community who want to do pest animal management work are not permitted to enter. Having said that, we do have cooperative arrangements with some agencies where we do actually go into state forests to do programs, but these are usually isolated areas, and not part of an overall well-coordinated program. What we are looking for out of this inquiry is to see a much more strategic direction taken nationally on pest animals that the states can look to when they formulate their pest animal programs. It seems



now that the work of individual states is largely uncoordinated and I am sure the pest animals do not know about the borders.

**CHAIR**—Mr Wood, would you like to comment?

**Mr Wood**—I endorse what both of my colleagues have said. What is strongest in my mind are the problems farmers have where their land adjoins national parks and state forests. In Victoria, especially in the fruit-growing areas, there are a lot of pests that people do not really understand are pests, such as grey-headed flying foxes and things of that ilk. There are a lot of bird species that are fully protected. They are not able to be easily controlled; in many cases you will not get permits to control them. To give you an indication, within a 50-kilometre radius of the Melbourne GPO, there are probably somewhere between \$50 million and \$100 million worth of fruit grown annually. The birds that are involved in destruction in those areas are in very large numbers. There are quite a lot of orchards that employ people with firearms full-time to simply keep the birds at bay. In particular, I understand the figure for cherry orchard destruction in the last year was in the vicinity of \$1 million in that region alone.

The other area of concern in Victoria is to do with the eastern grey kangaroo which is destroyed by farmers. Obviously it is a bigger problem where the farms adjoin state forests or national parks. We have no means of using the carcasses at all. However they are destroyed, they are just left to rot, and we think that is morally an unacceptable state of affairs. Although we would say we are probably keeping it in reasonable check, the coordination is not as good as it could be with the farming groups. The last figure I had was that about 100,000 eastern grey kangaroos were destroyed in the last year in Victoria. Whether it is sustainable as an industry I am not sure. Nonetheless, we think we could help and do a worthwhile job if perhaps the species itself could be regarded as game species, as others are. It is a question of keeping the animals in control, not of course anything more than that.

**CHAIR**—I have just picked up a reference to gun control in your supplementary submission No. 90. We are not in the business of investigating the pros and cons of gun control; we are here to talk about the feral and pest animal problems in agriculture. I just want to make that point before we get under way.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Last week we had a visit from the Pest Animal Control CRC and I found it extremely interesting. You have talked about access, coordination, management, governments, boundaries, forests et cetera. Have you had any contact with the CRC in relation to what they are attempting to do? Could you elaborate on some of those problems, in particular the government access problems? What are they? Is it just all red tape or are there some philosophical issues about firearms going into certain areas and the owners of those firearms considered to be something that they are not?

**Dr Baker**—You have cut right across a whole host of the problems there. No, the CRC has not approached us, and as far as I am aware in my role within my CRC—which is for Australian weed management—they have tended to focus very heavily on research and future solutions as opposed to practical and immediate solutions. Where we have approached them we have been directed to our local plant and animal pest control boards. So the short answer is no, we have had no communication. Within South Australia, we are probably very lucky that the philosophy of our Department for Environment and Heritage has been very helpful in terms of looking at long-

term and regional programs, so we think we are well ahead of other people there. From what I have heard and seen, from working within other states, there is an issue of the philosophical acceptance of hunting as part of integrated land management.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Do you think your organisation, and the hunters who do have access to some of these areas, should be or could be providing valuable research information back to the CRC in terms of impact and numbers?

**Dr Baker**—Yes, we certainly do. Again, with Rod we are already heavily involved in waterfowl surveys. The hunting and conservation branch of the SSAA collects information for the Department for Environment and Heritage now. We also maintain our own database for other activities that we do with private farmers. So not only do we actually try to assist with national parks but we also have private land-holders who come to us with problems. When we go out we record what we can in terms of information on distribution and density of pest species. So all that is currently recorded, but we use the information internally and no-one has approached us from outside to use it.

**Mr WINDSOR**—How do you vet your members?

**Dr Baker**—The hunting and conservation people that go out to private lands all undergo a voluntary accreditation course—otherwise they do not participate. We have a copy here of the association's national code of practice. It is in a draft stage.

**Mr Wood**—And we could get you a copy in due course.

**CHAIR**—Just forward it to our secretariat when it is appropriate for you to do so.

**Dr Baker**—It has just undergone some major changes, and we are waiting for a few comments to come back.

**Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR**—This might relate to the material that has just been tabled. The issue of animal welfare, of course, is one that is growing in the minds of the community and in relevance to primary producers. There is a significant resistance in the community to large-scale practices that basically do not hone in on this issue of the welfare of the animals concerned. I am interested in the codes of practice, if you have them, under which you operate. Would you briefly explain the elements of those codes and are there moves to construct a national code?

**Mr Drew**—Yes, we do operate under codes of practice. We are so required under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act within the states. The hunting organisations themselves have codes of practice. As a hunting organisation, we do not place any difference on a pest animal or a game animal; all animals should be treated the same, and despatched humanely as per the codes of practice. We are very strong on this issue in terms of education with our member hunters. We are very conscious of community attitudes to animal welfare, and we give that a lot of priority.

**Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR**—But there is no national code—these are all state-based codes?

**Mr Wood**—That is the point I was making. This is a national code, albeit a draft.

**Dr Baker**—This is our national code, but there are also other state-based codes of practice that apply in terms of handling and transport of feral animals. We abide by all of those.

**Mr Drew**—We have a national code as well, but that is for our organisation.

**Mr SECKER**—You can tell us all the good things you are doing, but one of the problems we face is that there will always be a communication problem out there with people in cities who might think of vermin as cuddly, furry, nice animals, whereas those on the ground know they are vermin and we need to get rid of them. What is the best way we can actually get this message across? It is not something you can do with one article in a paper; it is something you really have to work at that you are actually providing a very worthwhile service.

**Dr Baker**—Just to follow up on that and using the CRC as an example, the CRC for Australian Weed Management has a very strong extension program. One part of its whole brief is extension. I would assume that the CRC for Pest Animal Control has the same thing and that is a good place to start. I can use our example of the Kangaroo Island koalas; they are cute and cuddly and no-one wants to shoot them. They are talking about sterilising several hundred females and meanwhile the others are merrily breeding away and eating us out of house and home. The academics are getting their message out and saying the only way we can do this is with shooting, in an immediate cull to bring the numbers back to a manageable level. This is another area where we need to coordinate far better. The CRCs in their extension role should be getting the message out. The academics already are.

**Mr SECKER**—But you have not been able to convince any of the state-based politicians?

**Dr Baker**—No, not yet. If hunting could become recognised as a legitimate part of land management we could start to again present the story of ecosystems rather than single species. Up to now—and it is partly philosophical—hunting has been pushed to one side and regarded as some sort of Neanderthal thing, which has been ably encouraged by groups like Greenpeace. However, they are now openly admitting that hunting never caused the extinctions that were attributed to it. So it probably comes back to a coordination role again—bringing it all together.

**Mr ADAMS**—We have had evidence that the difference between hunting groups and land management and pest control is that some hunters' organisations want to keep the pests as a hunting animal. I think we had evidence of pigs having been shifted from one area to another to encourage pigs in that area. What is your response to that? Do you support that view?

**Mr Drew**—I have heard that story too but have never ever seen it substantiated. I am not suggesting that it has not occurred, as it may have occurred—I do not know. Certainly that is not acceptable. There have been rumours at different times that pigs have been relocated, but I have also heard that hunters took foxes to Tasmania, but the jury is still out on whether there are foxes down there. We do not support that in any way, shape or form. I have to say that with the amount of pest animals that are available for hunters in this country I do not see why they would need to do that.

**Dr Baker**—I have to reiterate that SSAA would not support that in any way. One of the educational roles of our hunting and conservation branch has been to self-regulate and police that very strongly within our own organisation.

**Mr WINDSOR**—I do not want to take issue with Mr Adams, but just for the record could you clarify this: I think you said there were hunter organisations. We have had information about hunter organisations. Is it not fair to say it was about certain individuals? I cannot remember an organisation.

**Mr ADAMS**—Sure. If I said hunter organisations, I was wrong; the evidence we received was that hunters had shifted pigs from one area to another to encourage hunting opportunities. But I agree: there was no evidence put to sustain that; it was just words.

**Mr Wood**—It is possible, and we certainly do not support it officially or otherwise, that some hunters might take suckling pigs home to fatten for their own consumption—two or three or four—and then sometime, not too far down the track, they escape and they get labelled as being deliberately released elsewhere. It is more likely an accident than anything else, but we certainly do not support it officially.

**Mr SECKER**—Or unofficially.

**Mr Wood**—Or unofficially.

**Dr Baker**—I was just going to ask you to clarify that!

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON**—I was just looking at your commentary on the submission. At point 4 you are arguing that minimising legislative impediments to rapid response is paramount. Should we not be positioning ourselves to streamline a rapid response? The commentary refers to Kangaroo Island with its koala problems, and there is no land management program by the look of it. Alternatively with the Department for Environment and Heritage in South Australia—the same state—you are actively involved in controlling the goats in the Flinders Ranges. Should not the real recommendation be for a land management program on public and private land that is attended to regularly so we do not get the problems such as at Puckapunyal? There they have done nothing for years and all of a sudden it becomes a public issue about how you cull them.

**Dr Baker**—I have to concur with that wholeheartedly. You are correct.

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON**—Why in South Australia do we have a land management program in the Flinders Ranges but not on Kangaroo Island?

**Dr Baker**—You would probably have to ask the Minister for Environment and Heritage. We have had numerous state governments, both Labor and Liberal, who have failed to tackle the problem, and it just comes down to the fear of shooting a cute and cuddly animal. They say that it is because of the threats to our tourism industry from places like Japan and Norway that they will not come and visit us. I would like to remind those governments that those countries are actively involved in whaling, so they cannot apply a double standard. All it takes is political courage.

**Mr SECKER**—We have done it with kangaroos; why not with koalas?

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON**—You want to be part of a control process which is based on a proper, ongoing land management scheme of which you are one option in terms of eradicating

pests. You really do not think that we need to streamline the processes in terms of a rapid response if we actually got the program right?

**Dr Baker**—If we got the program right we would not have to do that.

**CHAIR**—Just picking up that point raised by Mr Ferguson, would you be positively inclined towards that process of harvesting of pest animals as a resource?

**Mr Drew**—It should be looked at that way. A lot of pest animals are just left on the ground, and yet there is a resource there that can be used. The inconsistency that Mr Ferguson just pointed out extends right across a whole range of wildlife issues in this country and is symptomatic of the urban-rural divide. I understand that politicians who have to make decisions on these issues need to consider the public perception that goes with the killing of animals. The reality is that the killing of animals is not something that you can make look nice—it is not nice. If we are serious and genuine about trying to protect our ecosystems and also our agriculture, we sometimes have to do that. We have to manage our wildlife, and that applies whether it is native wildlife or introduced.

**CHAIR**—I asked the question because, in Mr Adams's and Mr Michael Ferguson's state of Tasmania, they actually do that extremely well. They harvest very responsibly in a managed way where there are population explosions of possums, wallabies and deer. In fact, the wallabies and possums are utilised through a game abattoir for export purposes. I have a concern about wilderness declarations in national parks. When you lock up an area in a national park, what do you think that does in terms of impacting on the proliferation of noxious or introduced foreign species?

**Mr Drew**—There is plenty of evidence around this country to show that the lock-up and keep-out philosophy does not work. You only need to talk to land-holders who live adjacent to those areas. For example, in New South Wales, the Carr government has introduced the Game Council, and that game council has been established to facilitate feral animal hunting in New South Wales. As part of that process, a number of public lands not available to hunting in the past will now be open to hunters to assist the land managers to reduce their pest animal populations. The evidence right across the country shows that where these places have been locked up the pest animals have really proliferated.

**CHAIR**—I understand the Game Council of New South Wales has a code of practice that hunters with a game hunting licence are required to follow. Should that code of practice also be made applicable to those hunters hunting pigs, dogs, foxes and the like on private land where a licence is not required? Do you think that they should expand the process to those people who do not have licences to hunt on private land so they are controlled on private land as they are on public land?

**Mr Drew**—That act in New South Wales does not cover people who are hunting on private land. They can do that without a licence. It is fair to say that most of the people without a licence are possibly not members of hunting organisations. We do not have the opportunity to get to those people, but we could through the firearms licensing systems. They should have to comply with the same code of conduct and same criteria as everybody else.

**CHAIR**—Incidentally, I am not talking about people not having firearm licences; I am talking about licences to hunt. The other thing I want to seek your input on is the issue of controlled hunts, or exercises, that you have experienced in your groups. Could you describe any instances where you have been asked by government agencies and private land-holders to supply experienced shooters to carry out, say, a goat culling exercise or something on crown land or private land, and where it has been successful?

**Dr Baker**—That comes straight back to Operation Bounceback which began in 1992 in the Flinders Ranges National Park at a time when goat densities were over 25 per square kilometre. Now, 10 years down the track, with a joint effort from national parks people and the hunters from the hunting and conservation branch, those numbers are down below one per square kilometre; in fact, I think the last count was below 0.5 per square kilometre. The aim is to keep them that low, because we do not believe we can totally eradicate the goats because of immigration from elsewhere. That program has been expanded onto surrounding properties willing to have us.

**CHAIR**—Which government departments or groups did you work with? Did you work with the local farmers association and the land environmental people?

**Dr Baker**—We worked with the Pastoral Board, the Department for Environment and Heritage and the Plant and Pest Control Board.

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON**—What do you do with the carcasses in the Flinders? Do you have any relationship with industry?

**Dr Baker**—Unfortunately there is nothing we can do because there are no roads. You walk in, you carry your own water, you carry your own rifle, and you walk out.

**CHAIR**—You could only get them out by helicopter.

**Dr Baker**—Yes, that is right.

**Mr Drew**—In Victoria, we have quite a lot of fox control projects with DSE and also Parks Victoria where we go into reserve areas and conduct programs. Those types of operations are organised at the local level with the local parks ranger, and they work quite well. They are not formalised and are not recognised as a part of the formal structure of the organisation. That is just done purely at the local level. But they are effective, and our organisation has participated in those types of cooperative management projects for nearly 30 years.

**CHAIR**—I have heard positives and negatives about the fox lotto issue. Could you comment on that?

**Mr Drew**—As to the fox bounty that was run in Victoria in 2002-03, the shooters were on a hiding to nothing before it started because it was a trial bounty. As a major stakeholders group, there was no consultation either with the shooters or land-holders about the proposed bounty. We had no input into the design of the project. A report came out that heavily criticised shooting as a tool. Some 198,000 foxes were taken during that bounty. It was said that it had driven the population down, and that may cause a rebound breeding effect which would stimulate higher

rates of breeding. That may be so; I do not know. What I do know is that no-one ever said that shooting was going to be the total answer for fox eradication. We just see it as one of the tools that land managers should have at their disposal. Whilst the bounty may not have satisfied some of the academics, land-holders in those areas where the activity was carried out were certainly pleased with the results.

**Mr SECKER**—The councils across the border in South Australia wanted it as well.

**Mr Drew**—Yes, it is fair to say that foxtails were handed in from interstate, and that was always going to be a result of something that is not coordinated across borders. That is the point we make about coordination.

**Mr Wood**—The SSAA in Victoria is at the point of formalising a memorandum of understanding, or at least agreement, with Parks Victoria on culling goats, foxes and pigs in national parks areas within Victoria. It will be a formal arrangement and all our people will have qualified in something like our national accreditation course.

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON**—Who initiated that?

**Mr Wood**—Honestly, I am not sure. DSE came to us and then Parks Victoria got on board and now it is a mutual arrangement. On the other element, I was not quite sure whether the chairman was alluding to any difference between national park and wilderness as such. From a practical point of view, our observations of high country wilderness and high country national park are that neither is doing very well by being locked up and left alone. The animals run wild in all. Whilst hunting can take place in some areas in national parks in Victoria for deer, it cannot take place for anything else. The wilderness areas are totally forbidden and no-one can hunt in there at all. It is worse, but it would be hard to measure the degree that it is worse. Introduced weeds certainly run amok in the parks as well as the animals.

**Mr FORREST**—If we could foster greater cooperation between sporting shooters and land-holders, and could get around the accreditation problems with suggesting something like that, we are then left with the liability issue. We live in a liability nightmare today. Say you are a shooter and you are on my property and you shoot yourself in the foot crawling through one of my substandard fences. What are the current arrangements regarding liability?

**Mr Wood**—Our members are completely covered as a result of being a member of our organisation.

**Mr FORREST**—Through the association?

**Mr Wood**—We have across-the-board insurance.

**Mr SECKER**—If the insurance company is suing the land-holder, your insurance company insuring my insurance company will not stop them.

**Mr FORREST**—It just means someone gets a shotgun out and gets everybody, then hopefully one of them will end up with pay.

**Dr Baker**—We actually have an insurance brokerage which covers not only all of our members but also we offer it to other organisations, so Field and Game people are covered whenever they go out.

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON**—Is that done through your membership fees?

**Dr Baker**—That is done through our membership fees.

**CHAIR**—What is the extent of the coverage?

**Dr Baker**—I would probably have to get my computer because I cannot remember off the top of my head.

**Mr Wood**—We might have to take this on notice, but I think it is over \$1 million.

**Mr Drew**—It is \$10 million public liability cover.

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON**—Does the government accreditation in New South Wales require public liability insurance as a condition of accreditation?

**Mr Drew**—Through the Game Council, yes, that is correct, and that is the same policy as our organisations have.

**Mr FORREST**—Are the land-holders indemnified?

**Mr Drew**—Against damage our members cause?

**Mr SECKER**—No, against you having an accident on their farm because you turn your vehicle over in a hole?

**Dr Baker**—This is an area about which we have had some questions. In South Australia we have had a couple of farmers come back to us and say that their insurance company will not cover them for allowing people on their place to do pest animal control, and this is perhaps one of the problems with regulation. All of our people are covered, but if the farmer feels that his insurance company may not cover him for anything, then he will not take the risk. So this is an area that does need clarification.

**Mr Drew**—We have had to provide evidence of our insurance to farmers and also to state agencies to conduct activities in parks, and that has always satisfied those people. So perhaps we do need to get back to you with something more on this issue.

**CHAIR**—Yes, it would be useful if you could take that on notice.

**Mr WINDSOR**—I think that issue is very important. We could help each other a bit focusing on that issue and making sure that, at a national level, there is something that can happen, if in fact it is not happening now.



**Mr Drew**—You are talking about the farmer being indemnified?

**Mr FORREST**—Yes.

**Mr SECKER**—I tell people I will not give permission, but if I do not see them, well I do not know anything about it!

**Dr Baker**—We have suggested that you come to our broker and he will arrange farm insurance for you which will in fact cover you.

**Mr SECKER**—Which I have to pay for!

**CHAIR**—Being the devil's advocate, I can ask a question that might be seen as a little bit unusual or controversial. But would it be possible, in terms of the insurance you have, to talk to your insurance companies to make it flexible to the extent—and you can take this on notice—that, if a farmer indicates to you that his insurance company will not cover him, your insurance can also cover him so he will not be liable if your people have an accident of their own doing on his property?

**Dr Baker**—I can certainly take that one on board.

**Mr FORREST**—The only way you could do that is to abolish common law—

**CHAIR**—I do not know enough about law.

**Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON**—It would need to be in a way that gave the farmer confidence—more than just the paper that it is written on.

**Mr ADAMS**—He has to be confident that he is not going to be sued and lose—

**Mr Drew**—We are certainly aware that that is an issue. On the finer points of that policy we will have to get back to you later.

**Mr WINDSOR**—It is partly through my ignorance, but why were 198,000 foxes considered in some way not to be a success?

**Mr Drew**—That was the headline in the *Age* at the time. It said '198,000 foxes is not enough'. That is the question. That is measurable. That really happened.

**Mr ADAMS**—There was no justification of what figure would have been right—one million or half a million?

**Mr Drew**—That is right. The mistake was that it should have been ongoing.

**CHAIR**—That is an enormous number of foxes—it gives an indication of the problem.

**Mr ADAMS**—It knocked them down for a while, I would think.

**Mr FORREST**—Some \$2 million plus the cost to administer the scheme; they probably said it was too expensive. Is that why it was abolished?

**Dr Baker**—I wish they applied that to the koalas.

**Mr Drew**—As we understand it, the department did not want it, it was a political decision. It was just really never going to be—

**Mr Wood**—Mr Chairman, you did raise the issue of the Tasmanian game management arrangement, and we have recently looked at it in Victoria. We see it as being very satisfactory. It seems to be working exceedingly well and, as far as game management is concerned, we would be very pleased if in some ways we could follow suit.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your attendance today. It is appreciated by the committee.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 5.52 pm**