COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Reference: Impact on agriculture of pest animals

WEDNESDAY, 20 JULY 2005

PERTH

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Wednesday, 20 July 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 and Mr Secker

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

Committee met at 12.36 pm

JONES, Mr Bart, Member, Pastoralists and Graziers Association

RICHARDSON, Mr Edgar Ronald, Director, Pastoral and Wool, Pastoralists and Graziers Association

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Adams)—Welcome. 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 a contempt of parliament. I understand that you wish to begin with a brief presentation. If you would like to present that now, please continue, and we will come to some questions after that.

Mr E Richardson—Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I wish to apologise for Mr Scott Pickering's absence. He is a farmer and he is also chairman of the North Mallee Declared Species Group, which is actually a dogging group. They have forwarded this presentation to me, and I am going to do my best to explain to you what has happened.

A PowerPoint presentation was then given—

Mr E Richardson—As you can see on the first slide, the dog attacks commenced in December 2003. They had up to 100 head of stock killed in December 2003 and 2004. They decided to form a dogging group at a Salmon Gums meeting in February 2004. They officially employed a dogger called John Cahill in April 2004. Between January 2004 and March 2005 this gentleman trapped 41 dogs in the North Mallee area. The slide we are now looking at shows the area I am talking about. The furthest point you can see there is Cape Arid, which is just about on the Great Australian Bight. It runs back in towards Ravensthorpe. Those numbers that you can see show where the dogs have been taken from and either trapped or shot.

Mr SECKER—On that map, this is coming in from the scrub in the north?

Mr E Richardson—Yes, from unallocated crown land. The attacks of recent times have been more in the Mount Ney-Beaumont area, which is north-east of Esperance. Between 18 March and 30 June, 18 dogs have been trapped in this area. Those numbers on the next slide are in fact GPS references showing where dogs have been and numerous sheep have been lost. This is the same map that I mentioned earlier. Cape Arid is on the right-hand corner of the map and it goes back into Ravensthorpe. It is about 200 kilometres from Cape Arid, which is an important part of what we want to get on to later. It is 200 kilometres from Israelite Bay and on towards Balladonia.

ACTING CHAIR—How many properties are in that group, would you say, through there?

Mr E Richardson—About 500, I suppose.

ACTING CHAIR—That is the developed area we can see there—the farming area, the Esperance area?

Mr E Richardson—Yes. That is the Esperance farming country. To the north-west of that—

ACTING CHAIR—The farming is predominantly sheep and grazing—and cropping?

Mr E Richardson—Mixed farming, yes. Cropping and grazing cattle and sheep. There are some numbers of South African-bred Awassi sheep.

Mr SECKER—And some blue gums.

Mr E Richardson—That is right. There are more every day. The slide there is a bit wrong: since Sunday night a farmer in the Beaumont area has lost 300 lambs because of dogs. So the number is now up to 1,700 sheep in the last 18 months. It is not the number of sheep that concerns them so much; it is the amount of production they are losing, with the lambs and that sort of thing. Farmers will say to you that it is not so much the killing of the sheep that worries them—because if 15, 20 or 25 get killed they can live with that—it is more when the dogs play with the sheep and bite them in the flanks, on the tail and on the rear end and then they either bleed to death or die of blowfly strike.

Now I am showing another map. It is of the area directly north of Esperance. There are areas there on the fringe where farmers are getting only 20 to 30 per cent lambing. While that loss is not all attributable to dogs, the main proportion certainly is. Wedge-tailed eagles take up a little bit of the slack there as well, but 20 kilometres inside the so-called boundary their lambing percentages are up to 80 to 85 per cent, so a lot of their production—

ACTING CHAIR—Do you mean they are losing 80 per cent?

Mr E Richardson—No. Twenty kilometres inside the so-called boundary, the lambing percentages on farming properties are about 80 to 85 per cent. But out on the boundary they are down to 20 or 30 per cent. Not only is there lost production for the country but there is lost production for the farmer as well.

Mr SECKER—What about foxes in the area?

Mr E Richardson—No, they are pretty well on top of the foxes. The 1080 baits seem to work on the foxes, but they do not seem to work on the dogs. Maybe previous speakers have told you that. In Western Australia we are having a huge discussion about dried meat baits, considering there are many places where the dogs just keep walking past them, particularly if they are in an area where they are now where they have fresh lamb to eat every day. Rather than taking whole dried donkey bait or kangaroo bait, they take fresh lamb. Most of the dogs are coming in from the lake country—that is where the arrow is pointing towards Salmon Gums. There are issues there with mining companies putting in survey lines and the dogs are just walking in down the survey lines and into the farming country.

The next slide concerns Mount Ney. That is all unallocated crown land. CALM—the official landlords, I suppose, of that unallocated crown land—are having extreme difficulties funding any sort of operation to halt the increase in vermin in the farming areas and, as I said, the dogs are coming down the survey lines and going into the farming area and creating full-scale havoc.

This slide is probably a bit difficult for you to see, but there is a copy there. It is interesting that they had government doggers up until 1997 and 1998. Then the doggers went away, and then they had drought for about three or four years and the government in its wisdom—and the APB to a large extent—stopped this, and of course the doggers were the first people to go. In the last two years that is the number of dogs that have been taken, and you can see that it is an extremely large number. The increase is quite dramatic.

ACTING CHAIR—I take it that the figures that correspond with the years are the dogs that were taken—is that so?

Mr E Richardson—That is right.

Mr Jones—On the last ones you have to add together the two numbers—for the Ravensthorpe area and the Esperance area—to get the total number.

ACTING CHAIR—In 1998 were there 22 dogs?

Mr Jones—Yes. In 2005 so far there have been 57.

Mr E Richardson—It probably is somewhat related to rainfall. When we have had dry years the dogs have not come in. All of a sudden we get wet years and they move down and get a bit closer. The North Mallee Declared Species Group have put in a proposal to have a fence taken out past Cape Arid. They are probably looking at a $10,000 per kilometre cost for labour and materials to extend the state barrier fence. The state barrier fence starts at a place called Kalbarri, north of Geraldton, and runs to the east and then down to the south-east. There is a gap in the state barrier fence and then it extends to a place which is about 30 kilometres from the coast between Hopetoun and Ravensthorpe.

Mr SECKER—What is the distance of the gap in the fence?

Mr E Richardson—There it is about 30 kilometres. Up here on this map it is about 40 kilometres from memory.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—And you are saying the fence is about $10,000 per kilometre?

Mr E Richardson—Yes. The North Mallee group are proposing that, instead of joining up this—the 40 kilometres here, where it is short—they take it up over the thing and down on the east side of Esperance.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you give the names of the areas that you have been talking about? You started on the map with where the fence started from.

Mr E Richardson—Yes. It goes out to Kalbarri, almost to Yalgoo, and then it moves down through Morawa and out south-east between Southern Cross and Coolgardie. It stops there and then this one takes up from about Lake Grace and runs down toward the coast to just between Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun.

ACTING CHAIR—And the proposal is to go from?

Mr E Richardson—The proposal is to go across from here, Ravensthorpe, and then out and over the top and back down onto the east side of Cape Arid.

ACTING CHAIR—How many kilometres would that be?

Mr E Richardson—It is on the bottom of the paper. It is 460 kilometres. Mr Jones will explain to you about these other fences when we get to that presentation. So that is the proposal that the North Mallee group are putting on that thing. You can see on the map where it is going to go. They have areas where they think it should go. You can see that they have tried to fence in the agricultural area. Ravensthorpe had some really big fires only a matter of two or three years ago. That has probably helped accentuate it: the dogs will walk through the bush and the survey lines are not helping at all. They have also had a look at other designs for fences. They are looking at 390 kilometres of fencing—and all the site works and all the costs of putting that fence up. The other one is from Lake King and down the Norseman Road.

Mr SECKER—You would have to cross the Esperance to Kalgoorlie main road, wouldn't you?

Mr E Richardson—Yes.

Mr SECKER—Wouldn't that cause some problems?

Mr E Richardson—No. There is a fence that runs across the road between Southern Cross and Coolgardie. Where the state barrier fence runs across the Great Eastern Highway there is a part where it runs across.

Mr SECKER—What do they use? Is it a ramp?

Mr E Richardson—A grid.

Mr SECKER—That would not stop a smart dog.

Mr E Richardson—No.

Mr Jones—There is a system we saw this morning, which is being used in Queensland. It is solar powered. There is an eye and when anything goes into the funnel—it is fenced back alongside the road to make a funnel—it sounds a siren. Supposedly, that is working quite effectively in Queensland.

Mr E Richardson—About a third of the dogs that they are catching are dingoes and the others are feral dogs or the product of those that have mated with dingoes and what have you. At Merredin, where the doggers come down as far as Lake Grace, they are now making records when they trap a dog and get there in time to do that—when it has not decomposed. They are weighing and measuring them—measuring the skull and working out their sex and where the dogs are moving.

ACTING CHAIR—That statistical information goes where?

Mr E Richardson—The APB. I can get that information for you if necessary. In the last 12 months around Westonia, which is just before Southern Cross and into the farming country of Lake Grace, they have trapped 50 dogs.

Mr SECKER—And the APB are who?

Mr E Richardson—The Agriculture Protection Board. They have weighed those dogs and they are in the dingo range of 15 to 18 kilos. So the wild dogs are definitely in there; the purebred dingoes are definitely inside. They are hoping that some funds can be made available to help them get more people on the ground, doggers in particular, to try to curb the effect that is having on their bottom lines.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—What would it have cost per dog since you put your own dogger in the field? What does it cost to catch a dog?

Mr Jones—The estimate on maintaining a dogger and his vehicle for a year is approximately $100,000.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—And in that year how many dogs would you catch?

Mr E Richardson—That one dogger at Westonia has got 50 dogs for the year. Remembering that he is working behind the barrier fence, he has not caught a hell of a lot of dogs. That is only my opinion. He has probably got every dog that is there, but 50 dogs is not a lot of dogs for a dogger.

ACTING CHAIR—What would an average dogger get in a top season when there are a lot of dogs?

Mr E Richardson—In our country probably more like 100 to 150.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—How many dogs do you reckon are there?

Mr Jones—More than the doggers are catching. But remember that that figure is only dogs that are shot or trapped. They also set baits, and those dogs are not counted.

Mr E Richardson—It is interesting that they were baiting in the Esperance area only a week ago, and they saw five dogs in the daytime. Any dogger from 15 or 20 years ago that was worth his salt would tell you that, if you see one dog during the day, there could be as many as 20-plus at night-time. When dogs are seen in the daytime you can bet they are there in large numbers.

Mr SECKER—I was interested that at your recent conference there was talk about a dog lure. How does that work?

Mr E Richardson—Are you asking about Kalgoorlie FeralMone?

Mr SECKER—Yes.

Mr E Richardson—It is a lure that has been produced for trapping. You put a dog trap down and then spray the lure on the ground. The dogs come and, hopefully, put their feet in the trap. People have used it on baits. Up until this morning, the only comments that I had received were extremely favourable, but I do understand that some people in the wheat belt have not had as much success as others. We are using it in the area that runs from Kalgoorlie to Meekatharra, and most of the reports we have had from that area are that it is working. It just depends on the user, I think.

Mr SECKER—How does that go with farm dogs, for example?

Mr E Richardson—Pestat Pty Ltd are the people that produce the product. Dr David Dall is the general manager of Pestat. He was in Kalgoorlie, and he says they are not concerned with domestic dogs. It should not attract them. I do not know why it should not attract them, but that is what he is telling us.

Mr Jones—I would like to expand on that a bit further. Our family has five properties, all running sheep, in the eastern goldfields. All those stations border on unallocated crown land. We go from the line on the map here to Lake Kerry, which is over 200 kilometres. What we and our neighbours have come up with is that we need a dog fence, or a barrier fence, that incorporates these Esperance guys and comes up, starting in the station country here at Madoonia Downs and comes out at Cunyu Station, which is north of Wiluna. That is a total distance of 1,500 kilometres. The cost of that fence is about $15 million.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—How high is this fence?

Mr Jones—The fence is 1.8 metres high. I have some photographs for you to have a look at. That is the new fence that the APB have been building as a state barrier fence. That is a 15 line fence.

ACTING CHAIR—What does 15 line mean?

Mr Jones—There are 15 wires running horizontal.

ACTING CHAIR—With two barbs on the top?

Mr Jones—With two barbs on the top. They have done some experimentation with only one barb on the top and banging the post in a bit further. I actually measured that fence as 1.85 metres high. The footing mesh is in a trench in the ground. There are some photographs to show you how that is done. The footing mesh is to stop dogs digging a hole under the fence. It is in a trench about 10 inches deep.

ACTING CHAIR—There are other native animals that dig holes. You do not have wombats?

Mr Jones—No. There are no wombats—not over here.

ACTING CHAIR—It is a particular Tasmanian problem.

Mr Jones—They are on the other side of the border. That figure of $10,000 a kilometre is the budget the APB are using. It covers, basically, clearing the line and constructing the structure as a finished product.

ACTING CHAIR—What would the maintenance of that fence then be per annum?

Mr Jones—The number that they are using is $65 per kilometre.

ACTING CHAIR—What is the ballpark figure there? What is the length?

Mr Jones—It is 1,500 kilometres.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you multiplied that out?

Mr Jones—It is about $100,000 a year.

ACTING CHAIR—You would still need doggers though, wouldn't you?

Mr Jones—You would still need doggers initially to clean out the inside. They have doggers behind the state barrier fence now, but you would not need anywhere near as many.

ACTING CHAIR—Can we get some sort of figure here on the actual economic loss to stations? What would your loss be?

Mr Jones—On our properties, we basically believe that if we cannot do something in the next five years we will not have any sheep left.

ACTING CHAIR—This is not only the killing or eating of one sheep per dog. I think we better establish this.

Mr Jones—No, they are thrill killers.

ACTING CHAIR—You call them thrill killers?

Mr Jones—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—They kill, maim and damage sheep?

Mr Jones—There is proof in my saying that. If you look at the Laverton area of Western Australia, you will see that their dog issues probably started five years ago.

ACTING CHAIR—We will accept your evidence. You are a person who has an economic issue here. If it affects you as you say, you will not have any sheep left on five stations. Is that your evidence to this committee?

Mr Jones—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you give us a money figure at the moment per annum? Would a 20 per cent loss be the figure?

Mr Jones—We tend to put wethers in the paddocks bordering the crown land and then try to—

ACTING CHAIR—They are bigger and stronger?

Mr Jones—And they can run faster. We are not allowed to go onto crown land and bait, trap or do anything. We then use those paddocks as a barrier whereby we try to get the dogs before they get through but, at the moment, we are being overrun, so the dogs get through our property to our neighbours'.

ACTING CHAIR—So you cannot give me a figure?

Mr Jones—I cannot give you a figure. We put over 300 wethers in a paddock last year at shearing; in May this year, we only got 80 out. There is a normal loss number: we work on 10 per cent.

Mr E Richardson—The wethers are worth about $60 each.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—So you are losing roughly two-thirds of the flock in those paddocks as sheared adults?

Mr Jones—Yes. It is just about so bad that we are on the verge of going and employing our own dogger.

ACTING CHAIR—We have to look at the public interest in what the expenditure would be et cetera. I am trying to build some argument for you. What other methods, such as baiting, could be used to try to knock over the dog populations in the crown lands?

Mr Jones—My opinion is that aerial baiting is not effective anymore. The poisons we used to use were strychnine in pill form.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—That worked.

Mr Jones—That worked, and it has been removed now; it is not available. We use 1080. I know 1080 kills dogs, because it has killed two of our sheepdogs—and I have watched the poor bastards die—but I do not believe it is as effective on dingoes. I know there is research to say that I am wrong, but baiting with 1080 does not seem to dent the dingo population. I think you will find a lot of pastoralists who are on that crown land will say the same thing.

ACTING CHAIR—That is anecdotal. If a farm dog will die taking 1080, so will a wild dog. You do not really need to be a scientist to—

Mr E Richardson—The dingoes do not seem to take it.

Mr Jones—They do not seem to take the bait.

Mr E Richardson—It depends on how long the bait has been there. If you put fresh bait out, any animal will take it. The current procedure now is to use dried bait. There is a big difference.

ACTING CHAIR—Does the management of the crown lands have any science or knowledge of where these dogs are coming from and where they are breeding? Is any research going on out there to that extent?

Mr Jones—I do not believe so. I may be wrong but not that I know of.

ACTING CHAIR—You are not a part of any consultation on that process?

Mr Jones—No.

Mr E Richardson—The APB will tell you that their theory is that that is where they are. That is where their natural habitat is, so to speak. When they get short of feed, then they come.

ACTING CHAIR—The dogs, of course, increase in number when it is a good time out there, or, presently, when they are coming down taking lambs and other things, they will be building up their numbers.

Mr Jones—Yes. We have knocked off a number of pups in the last month.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you know how many pups there are to a litter, on average?

Mr Jones—I do not think there is that many. It is normally probably two or three but we have seen larger litters than that.

ACTING CHAIR—We have had some evidence about doggers. You become a specialist, I think, and it takes some years. The smart doggers become as smart as the dogs, we have heard. Is it your opinion that you need people who have been trained and know the skills?

Mr Jones—Number one, a dogger is a strange sort of person, and I have known a lot of them over the years. Number two, he is a loner. Number three, he is a bushman. He is a hunter. He thinks like an animal.

ACTING CHAIR—There are no courses that you know of that are presently being run to—

Mr Jones—Agriculture at WA are running dogger courses.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—What is the length of the course?

Mr E Richardson—I would have to check but I think it is about four weeks of in-house type stuff and then you spend a period out in the paddock, so to speak, getting some skills.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—In terms of this fence, you just said you were thinking about putting a dogger on, which is 100 grand a year. To get the fence, is industry prepared to join in a partnership with government to partly finance the construction?

Mr Jones—I am not sure if we can raise that sort of money. I am only speaking for our family but we certainly would pay the cost of the maintenance of the fence.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—So you are saying that if the government were prepared to do it you would then accept responsibility for the maintenance of the fence?

Mr Jones—There are issues with that. If you built a fence on that basis, there would be lot of fence that goes past stations of people who might not have that same attitude.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—It would be silly not to have that attitude if you could get it up and running.

Mr SECKER—In South Australia, every farmer, whether they are 1,000 kilometres away from a dog fence or not, pays a levy because if they do not—

Mr Jones—That is probably the fairest way.

Mr SECKER—With the dingo fence in South Australia, they actually pay a levy for maintenance which they can forgo if they are prepared to do the maintenance themselves on their bit of land. Why don't you put a fence around the lakes area, make it a national park then look at exterminating the dogs?

Mr Jones—Dogs have routes that they travel. You tend to find dogs in the same sorts of places. If you put a fence around a certain area they will end up dispersing. If you look at a map of Western Australia and note how many salt lakes there are, you will see they are about 50 kilometres apart.

Mr SECKER—What I should have said was around the unproclaimed crown land, so it would be around that area.

Mr Jones—A good idea.

Mr E Richardson—Fifteen to 20 years ago, when there were doggers here—I think there were something like 14 residing in Kalgoorlie; there is only one now—there was a buffer around the goldfields. It went down from here on this map and all around there for about 50 to 100 kilometres.

ACTING CHAIR—What is a buffer?

Mr E Richardson—A buffer is a no-go zone. These doggers would have 200 to 300 kilometres to maintain all the time—that would be their job. The no-go zone was always there. Since those doggers have gone the dogs have been moving in. While we can talk about what the cost of this fence is going to be compared to the cost to agriculture right now, it will be extremely difficult to put a cost on it. We have to try to put together the lost production that individuals have had and the lost stock numbers. We also have to think about the public good from the operation. We have already had a couple of incidents in which people have been caravanning or camping at stopovers and dogs have been around the caravans or tents all night waiting for scraps. We had an incident in the Pilbara. A guy checking the railway line was

driving along, hit a dog, pulled up, then went back, got off his cart and about six or eight of them attacked him. He got back onto his cart just in time. So there is that and there is also the environmental issue. Up in this country, where the dogs are, they have pushed people out of sheep and into cattle but there is a good reason to believe that a lot of this country is not cattle country anyway. It is not suited for cattle. The expense or cost of that is going to be pretty difficult to define.

ACTING CHAIR—I wish to ask about the levies we organise to fund research in Australia in relation to primary industry. Do you believe that our research corporations should be playing a role in finding some of the solutions for this? We have received evidence that these are big issues to which we need to be putting our best brains to find new technologies and new ways of trying to find solutions.

Mr E Richardson—I do not want you to get the impression that we do not believe that the APB are trying to do something about them. For quite a number of years they have been trying to find a bait more readily accepted by dogs. That does not seem to be working. While we all agree on research and development, there is a case here for some good, cold, hard money on the ground to try to prevent it. I do not disagree with your comments.

ACTING CHAIR—But you are not opposed to it?

Mr E Richardson—No, we are not opposed to it at all.

ACTING CHAIR—What about eagles? There was some evidence given to us about issues to do with wedge-tailed eagles. How bad are they? Do they build up in numbers after droughts? Are they a problem during droughts?

Mr Jones—Wedge-tailed eagle numbers have built up quite significantly over the last 10 years. There is a period of a couple of months when they are a problem to lambs in the ewe paddocks. They are not as big a problem in our area as they are in an agricultural area like Esperance. The Esperance guys have a lot of sheep concentrated in open paddocks and when the lambs drop there is nowhere for them to hide. I do not believe that eagles are a major issue in our area, although we would still like to have the right to shoot them. I know they are a protected animal, but if their numbers get too high they have to be controlled somehow.

Mr E Richardson—I think it would be fair to say that their numbers have increased only since they have been protected. I know that further north—if you go up to Leinster to the new country there—they are in big numbers. I happened to be up there myself a few years ago on a pastoral lease and I know that they are some problem.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you had discussion with Birds Australia, or any of those groups on this issue? What is their opinion?

Mr E Richardson—No.

ACTING CHAIR—No consultation?

Mr E Richardson—Maybe it is something we should take up.

ACTING CHAIR—We have to see if we can find solutions with all the groups that have an input into this and work through the issues that are before us. Anything else you would like to add?

Mr E Richardson—No. You have copies of our presentation from the previous time. I hope you enjoy yourselves up at Warrawagine.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. Your presentation was excellent. It adds to our evidence. You will get a copy of our report.

[1.20 pm]

RICHARDSON, Mr Chris, Chairman, Agriculture Protection Board, Western Australia

DAVIS, Mr Peter, Senior Entomologist, Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

DELANE, Mr Robert, Executive Director, Biosecurity and Research, Department of Agriculture, Western Australia

WYRE, Mr Gordon, Acting Director, Nature Conservation, Department of Conservation and Land Management, Western Australia

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that committee hearings are formal proceedings of 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 a contempt of parliament. The committee thank you for your recent submission in relation to invertebrate pests, and we thank Mr Wyre for returning to answer some further questions in relation to the pest issue. Do you wish to make a brief statement to start? We have some questions for you after that.

Mr Wyre—I do not want to make a statement.

ACTING CHAIR—Following the visit by some of the committee members to Leonora and Yuin, they feel there are some questions that they have not yet had any answers to. One issue was that the government seems to be removing restrictions on culling and the commercial use of emus in times when the populations are exploding. Some of the evidence was that at times when there are enormous numbers of emus they are so thin that they cannot be used in any commercial capacity. Do you have an answer to put on the record concerning that?

Mr Wyre—Emus are declared under the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act. They can be taken under damage licence in pastoral areas where they are impacting on agriculture. However, where they are to be commercially utilised a specific authorisation is required. We have done this from time to time over the last 10 years or so but mainly it happens when you get what is called a 'migration' of emus coming back into the agricultural country and they aggregate around the barrier fence. There you get sufficient volume of emus—all of poor quality—that can be used for crayfish bait and things like that, and we do have commercial licences in those areas. The commercial taking from the wild was brought to a close at the time that the state was developing an emu farming industry, because it was seen to be potentially unfair competition if people were putting the effort into raising emus on farm.

ACTING CHAIR—As a farm animal?

Mr Wyre—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—So it is farming emus in a commercial situation instead of taking them from the wild?

Mr Wyre—Yes.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—So when they assemble around the fence during a drought or some such thing you issue temporary quotas for the purposes of farming them to overcome that problem?

Mr Wyre—It is not for farming them but for destroying them, and that is done by either poisoning or shooting them.

ACTING CHAIR—The issue is also about quotas for taking kangaroos in a commercial sense and the failure to increase the quota when there is a lot of kangaroos. I understand that at the present moment kangaroos are shot and left in the paddocks, and that kangaroo meat is even imported from interstate for baiting purposes. Is there a plan to redress this issue? Could you comment on that?

Mr Wyre—What happened last year—and people who have been speaking to you have been referring to this—was that we had a situation where the quota was almost exceeded and we had to petition the Commonwealth minister to actually get an increase in the quota during the year. We also undertook additional aerial surveys because aerial surveys have been used for the past 20-plus years to estimate the grey kangaroo population in the state. Historically there was very little interest in grey kangaroos. The interest in Western Australia has focused on red kangaroos. Grey kangaroos have never been taken in huge numbers. There is an average harvest of around 40-odd thousand a year up until the last four or five years.

ACTING CHAIR—Are they a smaller kangaroo?

Mr Wyre—The grey kangaroo is almost the same size as a red kangaroo. They have a very strong smell about them, though. So, in terms of the leather industry, they are not as desirable as the red kangaroos. But technology has overcome that, obviously, so it is not a big issue now. With agricultural development throughout the south-west a lot of areas have been opened up and kangaroo numbers in that area have increased very dramatically over the last 10 years. So we did additional surveys last year in that area. That area had not been surveyed for a long period of time. The quota we have actually got for this year is 180,000 for grey kangaroos, whereas traditionally the quota has been around 80,000 to 100,000. So I think we have addressed that.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You were seeking an increase in the quota last year. How long did it take? What processes should be in place to facilitate streamlining the approval process?

Mr Wyre—I think that, to be fair, the main delay was actually getting the data to demonstrate that the population had increased. I do not think it is fair to apply under the legislation for a quota just because more kangaroos are being harvested, so we had to get the data. We got the data around the middle of the year and we negotiated with the Commonwealth. The quota increase came through towards the end of the year.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—That is six months?

Mr Wyre—No, it was probably two or three months between completing negotiations and getting approval. It might have even been less than that. I do not think there was a problem there. It is just that it had never been done before. So there was not a set procedure. If you get a quota under pressure, how do you apply for increase A, B or C? We had to basically invent it with the Commonwealth. As I said, we have a very major increase in quota for this year and I do not think we will have a similar problem again.

ACTING CHAIR—There is evidence also about the wedge-tailed eagle issue. I understand that the wedge-tailed eagle is a protected species. I think that is all over Australia, actually, for all of the eagles that exist in Australia. Evidence the committee has received is that wedge-tailed eagles take a lot of lambs. Do you monitor and check the science of all of that? Can you give us any comment in relation to that? There was a real concern that, in some areas, maybe you need to be licensed to be able to shoot them when their numbers go up.

Mr Wyre—Yes. We do have a system of licensing people to initially shoot to scare but in exceptional circumstances shoot to kill wedge-tailed eagles. There are a whole lot of complicating factors going into the situation that arose last year, one of which is the change in land use, the type of sheep that are being raised and where they are being raised, which may have an impact on whether they are subject to predation from wedge-tailed eagles. The other thing was pressure on the industry. Losing a few lambs is probably more significant than it was in the past. Margins are fairly tight. But also wedge-tailed eagles are a learning bird. They do learn to take stock. One of the reasons that we do actually allow wedge-tailed eagles to be killed, despite a fair bit of pressure from some elements of the conservation community, is that there is evidence that, once a wedge-tailed learns to take lambs, it will continue to take lambs.

ACTING CHAIR—Is the wedge-tailed eagle in pretty good numbers in the state?

Mr Wyre—There is no official survey of wedge-tailed eagles, but we get reports. There is an organisation called Birds Australia that has a voluntary network of people who count and record birds that they see right across Australia. There is no evidence at all of any decline in wedge-tailed eagles. There was thought to be the possibility of a decline at the time when rabbit numbers were declining as a result of RHD.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there any recording for science of numbers of those that would be shot?

Mr Wyre—Yes. When someone wants to get a permit to shoot or scare wedge-tailed eagles there is a number placed on that permit and they are required to give a return. Before a lethal permit is given, except in very exceptional circumstances, there is also a site visit and the carcasses are inspected to see if they can determine whether the lambs were alive when they were taken or whether the eagle has been feeding on carrion.

ACTING CHAIR—Fair enough.

Mr SECKER—I am not sure whether you have been asked any questions about emus, but at times they tend to be of plague proportions.

ACTING CHAIR—I did ask about that.

Mr SECKER—You did? Okay.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—There has been some criticism that you should be doing more in trying to fund the provision of doggers. What do you say about that? For example, we were told today that doggers are costing the private sector $100,000 a year at the moment. They think the government should be doing more on this front to assist them.

Mr C Richardson—I guess the issue is that under the legislation in Western Australia the control of dogs, or animal and plant pests, sits with the owner of the land. There are issues where there are pastoral leases. The mechanism we have in Western Australia is a declared plant and animal fund which the pastoralists contribute funds to. The government matches that dollar for dollar. That is the deal with issues that are on government land. I think one of the major issues with the pastoral industry is that in years gone by—if you go back about 20 years ago—there was probably about 13 or 14 doggers working on the government estate. Over time that number has drifted down. I was at a meeting in Kalgoorlie on Monday and we discussed and highlighted this very issue. So now it is a matter of us, as part of the statewide dog strategy and plan and the process we are going through at the moment, in conjunction with industry establishing the areas where we need to have buffers and where we need to pay some extra attention to government lands to make sure that we can be in a position where dogs that live on government lands are not having an impact on neighbouring livestock businesses.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—One of the biggest criticisms at the moment is that the government is not pulling its weight. I look around—

Mr C Richardson—In the last financial year the government spent about $1.9 million on dog control in Western Australia.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You said before that there was 13 or 14 doggers in that area. How many have you got now?

Mr C Richardson—There is two. This issue was addressed. Under the APB's consultative framework we have ZCAs, and zone 9 is the Kalgoorlie one.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you expand on that?

Mr C Richardson—Your visit to that area last year would have been to what is known as zone 9—the Kalgoorlie ZCA. We had a planning meeting on Monday with those individuals—the pastoralists—and also government people. There are two issues. One issue is that traditionally, until two years ago, most of the control work in zone 9 was done by aerial baiting. They opted not to have doggers. They have now reassessed that and said, 'We need to change.' So we now have seven doggers employed to manage dog issues on the stations. Their assessment is that they need to have some more and that to manage the government estate in that area they need to do it in two ways. One is to have the existing doggers that work on pastoral lands be able to go and work on government lands—so they can go and chase dogs on the government lands. One of the issues in the past has been that under the legislation CALM work under, people who work for gain have to have complete licences. From a dogger's perspective, a dogger who works on CALM land who is employed under contract by another organisation needs to have a pest control operator's licence for poisons. We have addressed that.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Part of the solution is not just about numbers; it is about freeing up the capacity to pursue?

Mr C Richardson—It is to use more capacity. For instance, we have some doggers out there who are working, say, 100 days for pastoralists. Those doggers could be doing 100 days on government land, too. It is a planning issue, which we are addressing. We identified some areas where there needs to be some more doggers. To give you an idea, their assessment was that they needed three times as many doggers in their own area as opposed to what is required in government areas. Their assessment, once they had looked at everything, was that we needed to do some more on government lands—which we accept—but they have to do a lot more on their lands as well.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—The bottom line will potentially be change by the private sector and the government to confront this problem?

Mr C Richardson—That is right. We have taken an approach in Western Australian which we call the nil tenure approach. We look at what the issue is, what the problem is, how we best deal with it and then we work out how to apportion the cost by establishing who owns the land afterwards.

ACTING CHAIR—I invite Mr Davis to join the table now. I think you are involved in this area?

Mr Davis—Mainly invertebrates.

ACTING CHAIR—We will discuss that matter now. We have received some evidence that government departments now take the attitude—and this attitude comes through in other states as well—'We can lock up crown or state lands and then we've done the job without actually managing them, and the issue of animals coming from the crown land into the farming areas is causing us problems.' I suppose the attitude has been there a long time, but there seems to be an attitude about removing 10 or 12 doggers. We have also had evidence regarding aerial bating: maybe it is not as efficient as it used to be, maybe the dogs are not taking the baits as much as they used to. Would you like to comment on that, Mr Richardson?

Mr C Richardson—I think there are several issues. This is typically what we did 10 or 20 years ago, so obviously we are going to have changes there. Dogs taking bait is an issue and it is often related to how much of a feed they have on offer. Recently, I ran a trial in the Pilbara where we were looking at whether we could use for dogs a salami type bait that CALM have developed for fox control. In this particular trial we had quite a low uptake of the salami bait compared to the dried meat bait. Overall, it was still quite a low uptake of all the baits that were on offer. The researchers who were there noted that there were ample fresh dog kills in the area of both kangaroos and calves. Often with those issues we do have uptake. Regarding the issue of them not working, I do not think any pastoralist would be prepared to feed a 1080 injected bait to their pet dog and say, 'This will not work.' What was your other point?

ACTING CHAIR—We changed the philosophy in the way we managed the crown lands. The thinking now is that the community also has a responsibility to look after its areas.

Mr C Richardson—I will also comment on that. That is something that the Department of Agriculture, CALM and APB in Western Australia have identified, and we have been working collaboratively on that issue. In Western Australia, CALM have responsibility for the management of nearly 40 per cent of the land area—about 110 million hectares. We have recently done an assessment of that. We have done an assessment within our area of responsibility as to how we are able to deal with biosecurity issues, and CALM have done an assessment. We have provided them with advice along the lines of: what do we need to do to ensure that animals or plants that are on your land do not impinge on the neighbours? Currently, I think the figures are roughly right. There is roughly a $4 million investment on that 110 million hectares for declared plant and animal control. Our assessment is that that amount needs to be about $20 million.

ACTING CHAIR—That is on weeds?

Mr C Richardson—Yes, weeds and declared plants and animals.

Mr SECKER—But it is $1.9 million that is spent on dogs?

Mr Wyre—That is across both agencies. There are a couple of issues there that I have to bring to your attention. One is that 89 million hectares of that 110 million hectares is unallocated crown land. In Western Australia we have a huge resource of land that is not vested with anyone and is not allocated to any particular person or group. On a lot of that land there are Aboriginal people having either a traditional or a semitraditional subsistence living in some of those areas. Where CALM as an agency finds the greatest difficulty is the new responsibility that we got a couple of years ago, which is for managing the pests and fire on that unallocated crown land. There are 90 million hectares and we have got a budget of just less than a million dollars for the pests and weeds in that area so we focus, as you could imagine, on the border with pastoral lessees, but even then the resources are spread fairly thin. So the process that we are doing is to try to get increased investment from the pastoralists and also increased investment from the government. You cannot expect one side of the coin to have the increased costs, so we are trying to balance that out and get resources more befitting what the real scale of the problem is.

ACTING CHAIR—What do you think of the philosophy that I mentioned? I have noticed in other parts of the country, in other states, that we are dealing on the edge; we are not dealing with the problem as it exists. If there are wild dogs out there, we say that is their domain and we do not have to worry about them and we forget about the problem. We say we have locked it up or we say it is crown land and we are managing it when we may really not have the resources that we need to look at it in the manner that we should.

Mr Wyre—There are a couple of issues there. One is that in our conservation reserve system there is a different management philosophy as to unallocated crown land.

ACTING CHAIR—That is parks?

M r Wyre—Yes, national parks, nature reserves and the like. We have also purchased, through government resources, significant pastoral leases which we will be converting into conservation reserves in the future. Our management strategy there is to eradicate, or at least reduce the abundance of, all introduced predators—foxes, cats and wild dogs. We have actually got a major

program going on at a place called Lorna Glen, which is the last pastoral lease before you get into unallocated crown land. That is a couple of hundred thousand hectares. What we are trying to do is get a system going for the native mammals that used to be there—we have removed more than a dozen from the area—whereby we can reintroduce them into the area and they will survive. At the moment if you introduce animals that are fairly naive as to predation, because they have come from an island where there are no cats, for instance, they do not run away from the feral cat that comes and eats them, so we are trying to eradicate that. One of the consequences of our restructuring program is that the dingo—or what is left of the dingo—is almost eradicated from that landscape as well. But we do not want to have a situation whereby the true dingo is eradicated from the mainland, so obviously you have to have areas that are buffered from baiting so that some dingoes can survive. The other thing is that obviously dingo numbers do have a role to play as to kangaroo populations. It is not so much that, if you do X, Y will result. It is that, if you do X, you will move Y and something else will happen. You have got a quite complicated system.

Mr SECKER—It is admirable that you are actually doing something instead of just shutting many national parks up and hoping for the best.

Mr Wyre—Since 1995 we have been spending about $2 million a year on fox control and reintroduction programs in our south-west areas and other places.

Mr SECKER—How much of the $1.9 million that you are spending on dogs is on-ground money? Would your bureaucracy take up a fair bit of that?

Mr C Richardson—No. Eighty per cent of that is people in the field, aeroplane baiting and doggers—those sorts of people and activities.

Mr SECKER—It is not a lot, is it? Based on the number of hectares that the government has in unallocated crown land, that is about $1.50 per square kilometre, so it is not a lot of money.

Mr C Richardson—It is not a lot of money but, to an extent, the pastoralists have a capacity to get more money out of the government to deal with this issue. They can say, 'If you put a dollar on the table, we'll match it.'

Mr SECKER—Has striking a special dog levy like they have in South Australia been thought of?

Mr Delane—In effect, we have a special dog levy through the pastoral rate, because the pastoralists' priority in most areas is to expend those funds on dogs. There are weed, donkey and camel issues as well.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—How does that pastoral rate operate?

Mr Delane—The pastoral rate is struck on recommendation from the zone control authorities to the Agriculture Protection Board, is approved by the minister and then raised by state revenue and matched by government.

ACTING CHAIR—How is it raised? Is it just by sending an account?

Mr Delane—Yes.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—There is then consultation about the priority for expenditure in the given area?

Mr Delane—There is consultation on the setting of the rate. We are dealing with some relatively old legislation here, so it has some clumsy elements to it. In fact, we have legislative changes in the parliament at the moment which will make it more flexible. It will enable individual zones to set a different rate and for that to be matched. We work that through. That is raised. There is consultation on the level of the rate. The recommendations go through the zones, the APB and then to the minister. In effect, we are allocating those resources on a zonal basis. The meeting that Chris Richardson referred to at Kalgoorlie was about saying: 'Of all the resources that the government can afford to apply in this area, they are on the table with the zone control authority. You need to work out what the priority is for those and what the roles of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Conservation and Land Management are on delivering all those.' Of course, CALM also has a responsibility around the table as a land manager.

Mr SECKER—What will the typical pastoral lessee be paid?

Mr C Richardson—I think this coming year it will be about $850,000 for the pastoral industry.

Mr SECKER—That is not much. Are you talking a typical rate of $1,500?

Mr C Richardson—I will put it another way. We have a weed in Western Australia that the broadacre agriculture deals with called skeleton weed, industry put the money in for the program and the department delivers the program on their behalf. They are putting in between $3 million and $5 million a year.

ACTING CHAIR—I move onto your submission, which we have numbered No. 98. Would somebody like to make a statement before we start on that one?

Mr Delane—I will make an introductory statement. The wild dogs are large, obvious animals, yet, even there, we are dealing with quite a dynamic situation. The ownership of the land has changed, the management of the land is changing, the use to which that land is put is changing, government priorities for resource allocation are changing, community expectations are changing so, in a sense, whilst the biology is still not perfectly understood, it is not the most complex part of it. When you come to less obvious pests, like insects, weeds and diseases, for example, we have all of the same biological dynamics, which are often complex, but you are dealing with pests and diseases which are low profile—often zero profile. Whilst they might not have the same acute impact as something like wild dogs and will certainly not have the same visual symptoms as a wild dog problem, it could be much more important both acutely and chronically for agriculture and increasingly for the environment and community amenity.

ACTING CHAIR—How do we do the education on that then? What is the answer?

Mr Delane—We have put a lot of effort in Western Australia into community and industry engagement. We believe very strongly in what the Nairn review of quarantine concluded in 1996, which is that quarantine, as Nairn referred to it but we now refer to it as biosecurity, is a shared responsibility. Whether that is wild dogs, feral donkeys, dieback disease in forests, European wasps, European house borers or some other problem, everyone has to play their role.

We put a lot of effort into general awareness in industry and in the community through local government, through community groups, through industry organisations. We have established a very effective pest and disease information service. We encourage people to report. We carry out diagnosis and try to use a range of awareness measures to get that dynamic working so that there is a reasonable chance that someone notices something different and reports it and there is at least then some prospect that we might be able to respond if it is serious.

Mr SECKER—Can we move on to the question of the insects and vertebrates. What is the extent of the problem of plague locusts, for example, here in Western Australia?

Mr Davis—I think it is about once every 10 years over the last 30 or 40 years that we have had a serious situation with plague locusts. In Western Australia they obviously require very specific weather conditions to build up to that situation, probably more to do with summer rainfall and providing a vegetation at the right time, so that you get an actual continuum of generations that go from the spring and summer of one year through to the summer/autumn of the next year, and then surviving on through. When that comes, about every 10 years, we get an influx into the agricultural areas.

Mr SECKER—What strategies are you using, like spraying the hatchings, that sort of thing?

Mr Davis—A lot of surveillance goes on, where we use our officers in country areas to do monitoring in autumn. Then, based on that, if we do get a pre-indication that there is going to be a serious infestation in autumn, with the chemicals we get the administration part ironed out and then in springtime, when the locusts start to hatch and emerge in agricultural areas, there is a monitoring program which looks at where the densities are and then a last concentrated effort. Most of them before have been basically government funded exercises.

Mr SECKER—Are they only a problem in the agricultural areas versus the same pastoral areas?

Mr Davis—In Western Australia it is basically an agricultural area problem.

Mr SECKER—Do they tend to come north to south?

Mr Davis—East to west, probably, or north-east to south-west.

ACTING CHAIR—We have received evidence of trials that are going on in Tasmania around our ports—airports and water ports—with traps to make sure we check on anything that is coming in from overseas. We are pretty vulnerable in our timber industry and other areas, where we probably have not done much in the past. Are you aware of those trials that are going on?

Mr Davis—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you think it is a positive thing that we as a country get some of these in place?

Mr Davis—Yes. It is targeted surveillance of areas. If you look at how an exotic pest gets into Australia, it will almost certainly come in through a port and a major city. Certainly that sort of targeted surveillance, firstly at the port and then at the quarantine facilities and broadening out from there, is a strategy that I think does bear development. Although when you look at that you see it is generally through the regulated trade. A lot of the incursions that have occurred in Australia may come through unregulated trade as well and, therefore, are not concentrated on those spots. So you would not want to only concentrate on the ports and the quarantine facilities; you do need a community surveillance aspect to it as well. So you need to invest in those areas.

Mr SECKER—But you think it is worth while investing in that as part of the—

Mr Davis—I think it has a lot of potential. I think there needs to be ongoing analysis. The red imported fire ant was first found in the port areas in Brisbane, and there have been findings in New Zealand in airports and ports. So that is obviously an area for surveillance.

Mr Delane—It is about having the appropriate strategy. There has been feral bee monitoring around airports for many years. We monitor for sparrows. We removed some sparrows from near Fremantle port just in the last few weeks. We do those sorts of things.

Mr SECKER—Do you still shoot them at the border?

Mr Delane—We do shoot starlings, yes. We have a major program on that and have just increased the resources in that area. We have exotic fruit fly monitoring traps—I think we have 2,000 pheromone traps—that we monitor around the state. Asian gipsy moth traps have been monitored for quite a number of years. We monitor for interstate movement of coddling moth. So there are opportunities for all of those. But, of course, then there are issues like dry wood termites where you actually need people monitoring what is going on in their houses because you are very unlikely to pick it up through a trapping mechanism.

ACTING CHAIR—AQIS has its regulations and its role at a national level. States and territories have responsibilities as well. Have we got that right? Do we need to maybe work a bit to get the responsibility of all agencies a little bit better than what we have got? I think AQIS lets smoked salmon into Australia but we have people at the borders in Tasmania to make sure it does not get into that state. Maybe that is not the right way to go about it.

Mr Delane—We have, by far, Australia's largest domestic quarantine services. We have people at checkpoints who meet airplanes et cetera. Until the end of 2003, we actually carried out AQIS services here in Western Australia but we have handed that service back. Even then, there were issues about maintaining a very close relationship. Appropriate sharing of information has always been an issue. If we do not know what is coming through the border there might be a large switch into, for example, some softwood timber products, which Peter Davis has spent a lot of time working on; therefore, there is an increased risk of drywood termites at other borders. The state authority then needs to know that there is a shift in the risk environment so that you can have a different awareness program or a different targeted surveillance program. AQIS is very unlikely to do that. AQIS has a very effective program through Steve Irwin but not an

embedded community awareness program that is likely to lead to reporting. If they do report, they are more likely to report to the Department of Agriculture. Having access to information that would enable us to target our surveillance strategies and assess risks is still a significant weakness in that continuum.

ACTING CHAIR—What solutions would you offer?

Mr Delane—There is some work being done on a day-to-day basis. I sit on the Quarantine and Exports Advisory Council. We are doing some work through that body at the moment looking at ways to improve the assessment of the effectiveness and what the risk presentation is so that we can support better partnerships with the state authorities.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—When will you complete that work? Those outcomes are pretty important to the recommendations of this inquiry. We are looking at solutions to the problems to try to help you, so it would be important to get hold of that because we can actually give it a push along by recommending it as part of this inquiry.

Mr Delane—We can give some examples but I think there is probably not a lot of data, and that is necessary to reach a reasonable conclusion that there should be high-level information sharing between AQIS and the state authority. We are in the same business. AQIS responsibility stops either at or soon after the inspection point. State authorities then pick that up. If it is a serious incursion, which then invokes an industry cost-sharing mechanism, of either plants or animals or if it is an environmental issue which then invokes government cost sharing of course it comes back. The Australian government and the states will share the costs by some means anyway. But, unfortunately, particularly with the invertebrate pests, they are usually well established by the time they are detected in the environment. In fact, you cannot effectively respond.

ACTING CHAIR—With the ant issue—and I know with the New Zealand issues as well—isn't this where the community can play a bigger role? Maybe we need more education. Everyone from schoolchildren right through to community groups can act in a way that they have not in the past.

Mr Delane—There is significant difference in the approach taken by Australia and New Zealand. New Zealand decided many years ago that they had a leaky border, and they have always remained a leaky border. Australia has taken a somewhat different approach and puts itself forward as having a very effective quarantine service where, in effect, nothing gets through. That can never be the case. If you put yourself forward in that way then you lull the community into a false sense of security and a false sense that they do not have a role to play and that everything is okay. There is ample evidence that that is not the case; unless we double the size of the quarantine service again, there will always be things, whether they are cryptic termites or other things, which will evade inspection or other measures at the border. We need that second or third tier all the way to an individual person in their house, on their farm at their business to play that important role.

Mr Davis—On that, a very significant difference is the cost recovery process by AQIS. There are adverts, for instance, involving Steve Irwin saying, 'Report your pests.' But if you report them to AQIS, and you have a boat with termites on it or something, the costs of that treatment

are actually sheeted home to the person reporting the pest. I think that acts as a real disincentive, and that has certainly been passed on to us by the community.

ACTING CHAIR—That is one of those issues that can be looked at. You are talking about not weakening AQIS at all but adding this other dimension of community awareness of the process?

Mr Delane—Yes.

Mr SECKER—Do you have European wasps here yet?

Mr Davis—We do not have them established, but we have had European wasps in Western Australia that we have had to eradicate. We have run an annual eradication program for the last 20 years in Western Australia. We have actually had nests to eradicate. The critics might say that they were established and we are just dealing with them but, if you analyse where these nests occur you will see that they do not occur in the same place. Basically, with something like the European wasp, you are looking at single queens that are fertilised, are released from nests, and then hibernate during winter in cracks and crevices, which could be in packing cases, trucks or anything. Then they are transported over the border. They probably have a less than one per cent chance of establishment, so we probably get several thousand fertilised wasp queens from the Eastern States every year, which means 15 to 30 nests a year that we have to deal with. This year we found nests in Albany associated with a building project near the wharf area. We found them on rail lines imported from South Australia. So, no, we do not have the wasp, but we run an annual program to prevent its establishment.

ACTING CHAIR—That reinforces the issue that we are better to try to eradicate pests when we first discover them than to try to deal with them later. Our most successful way, as a country, is to deal with something as we find it, try to eradicate it and put every resource we can onto it. Is that your conclusion?

Mr Davis—It certainly is. I think, cost-effectively, that is the way to go. We have progressed. We found the first nests in 1977. We have had 28 years of keeping the wasps at bay. Technology moves on at the same time; now there is bait that was developed in New Zealand. If we happen to lose the battle, which we nearly did last year, we have now got a new technology to use that we did not have 28 years ago.

Mr SECKER—You have done better than South Australia.

ACTING CHAIR—How do you think we are going in research in this area? We have a CRC structure now.

Mr Delane—We do. I think the European wasp program was a very good demonstration that you can get good community engagement. We have a very high level of awareness in the community now, and local government works very effectively with us. As Peter says, sometimes all you can do is buy time until there is a breakthrough of some technology which enables you to mitigate the impact once something is established. We are involved in all four biosecurity related CRCs. We are a major partner in the Australian biosecurity CRC, the animal-human health one. We are the biggest partner in the new plant biosecurity CRC. This is, in effect, the third CRC on

invasive animals. We are a partner in that. I think CALM has been and is a partner in the new one; and we have been a partner in the weed management CRC for a long time. They are very effective mechanisms, although they are not necessarily bringing consolidation of capacity.

There is great competition for research funds, so there is not enough sustained capacity at the end of each CRC funding program. In long-term core capacity areas like biosecurity that becomes an issue. We should be building capacity rather than having ephemeral activity. That is the case in what might be called research areas, but they are probably core science areas like taxonomy and the like where, in the past, CSIRO has been very strong, universities have been strong and state departments have been strong. I do not know that you could argue that there is any organisation that exists in Australia that is strong in that area, so we are increasingly relying on diagnostic capacity all over the world. There are some very good mechanisms, which have helped in that area, in national pest databases that Plant Health Australia has facilitated, for example, and we are a key player in that process. But there is a weakening in the core underpinning science capacity, particularly in some areas of diagnostic and taxonomy.

Mr SECKER—Is WA still phylloxera free?

Mr Davis—Yes.

Mr SECKER—Do you have plans to stop it coming in?

Mr Davis—Yes.

Mr SECKER—Millipedes?

Mr Davis—We have plenty of millipedes.

Mr SECKER—For 30 years I have heard about sterile insect technique. It was going to be the saviour of the sheep industry, getting rid of the green Lucilla blowfly. Are we ever going to have some success with this?

Mr Delane—Bob knows much better than me, but we have been very successful using that technology. We have a very important contract with the South Australians at the moment, so we have a sterile in-site facility and we provide them with sterile med flies when they need them, and when they do not need them we are able to—

Mr SECKER—This is with fruit fly?

Mr Delane—Yes.

Mr Davis—Mediterranean fruit fly.

Mr Delane—We have been able to use those in some research and some suppression activity when the South Australians do not need them. It is a very important technique, but it is not a cheap technique, because you have to establish the core infrastructure and then you have to sustain an idling capacity.

Mr SECKER—What is the problem with feral bees, as you call them?

Mr Davis—There are several issues. Obviously, they are an exotic species in a natural ecosystem. Often, there are co-evolved species of native bees which are biospecific to various plants. With something like feral bees, some plants use a closed funnel for the pollination of the plants; the native bee goes in and out. Feral bees will actually cut a window through the side to get at the nectar, so you do not get the pollination. There are effects that way. They nest in hollows of trees and therefore birds cannot occupy them for nesting. There are many weeds that are obviously European in origin that are much more prolific, because the feral bees can pollinate them and therefore the seed set is much higher.

Mr SECKER—So you would be against the import of the American leafcutter bee for the lucerne industry, seeing that—

Mr Davis—Yes, we would see that there could be some real problems with that.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you have the bumblebee in Western Australia?

Mr Davis—We do not, and that is one of the recommendations that we probably should be looking at in Tasmania from a research point of view at this stage, prior to it getting to the mainland, which I am sure it will.

ACTING CHAIR—The tomato growers like it.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—From a research point of view and in terms of logical solutions, there have been some criticisms from the private sector about delays in the registration of pest control products et cetera. Do you have any comment on that?

Mr Davis—The issue of delay was actually brought up in our submission—obviously, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority is the national authority on that—and we brought to light the fact that it was two years into a three-year eradication program before we received appropriate registration and permits to use an insect growth regulator in the type locality where the red imported fire ants come from in South America. Luckily, during that period there was a great drought in Queensland and there was not a lot of wetland to deal with. But we saw it in the scientific reviews of that program. On two occasions we brought this to their attention because of the delay.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—What then is the key to streamlining the approval processes?

Mr Davis—I am not sure of the internal workings. I know there are set times. For example, the medical and environmental effects of a chemical may have a six-month to 12-month review time within the Department of Environment. I think there are problems if you are bringing a chemical straight in and you want it registered from point one. There are delays because obviously it needs to be studied thoroughly.

ACTING CHAIR—Do we need one national coordinating body for vertebrate pests and another one for invertebrate pests, or do we do it in one body?

Mr Delane—The reality is that we need to continue to get better coordination of the existing bodies. All governments have responsibilities in the area. All governments have a number of departments and organisations that are involved in it. The national biosecurity strategy and framework which is being worked on at the moment does hold some significant promise. Some of us have been involved in various attempts to get uniform national legislation in all manner of things over the years. No-one has come up with a simple organisational solution. They tend to be relationship solutions rather than structural solutions.

Mr Davis—I think for invertebrates the primary industries pathway is good, but for non-agricultural pests there is a real gap. There is really no administrative framework for cost sharing in that approach.

ACTING CHAIR—There is the issue you mentioned about, 'I've got a boat and if I tell someone then I've got a problem.' It is an issue where a near miss needs to be reported but somebody need not lose their licence. We definitely need to look at that.

Mr Delane—Most of the pressure on our biosecurity services is in the environmental/community area. We have technical capacity. CALM has technical capacity in some areas but we are spending an increasing amount of our time and resources on European wasps, European house borers, salvinia, water hyacinths, and all manner of non-agricultural or borderline agricultural activities. That is fine because we have the capacity to deal with it, but there are always funding issues and more generally in getting community, government and industry engagement on those.

ACTING CHAIR—How many Western Australians know about those four that you mentioned?

Mr Delane—A relatively small number—where they are affected. That is probably what we would expect of the community: a general level of awareness and if they see something odd they should make a phone call. But, in general, they will only know about things that affect them. There is a very high level of awareness of the European wasp. There has been a very high profile campaign. People know the potential consequences but there is also a couple of native paper wasps that everyone has seen so they usually report those. That does not present a problem because it does mean that they are thinking and they have a reference point.

Mr Wyre—While we are all for national coordination, and there is certainly no problem there, one of the things that is unique about Western Australia is that we do have this border security system. We do have the Nullarbor. There is a very small window of opportunity for things to come by road or rail transport into the state. So one of the things we have been concerned about, and one of the things that we fight for, relates to getting a national consensus on what pests you focus the Australian taxpayers' dollar on. We do not see that because something is widespread in the eastern part of Australia it is necessarily a fait accompli that it will take over Western Australia as well. That has been borne out with the starling program over many years. We are in the throes of a cane toad program at the moment. It can be very difficult trying to balance that, but we are one-third of Australia, so protecting one-third of Australia is still an important thing for all Australians.

Mr Delane—A very important issue is that the focus is on the western region of Australia as opposed to turning it into a state issue about Western Australia.

ACTING CHAIR—What about the highway through the middle? If that ever came about, would that be another avenue?

Mr Delane—That is a risk avenue. We did have some resource in that, but a very low value use of that resource. At the moment we rely on public awareness and we have disposal bins and those sorts of things. But, yes, if the desert highway really did get a high level of traffic, we would have to think about how we would deal with that.

ACTING CHAIR—Once again, thank you very much for your evidence.

[2. 17 pm]

DE LANDGRAFFT, Mr Trevor, President, Western Australian Farmers Federation

LEAKE, Mr David, Vice President and Agriculture Protection Portfolio Holder, Western Australian Farmers Federation

McMILLAN, Mr Andrew John, Director of Policy, Western Australian Farmers Federation

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome representatives from the Western Australian Farmers Federation. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise 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 all witnesses that the giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. I invite you to make a brief opening statement and then we will have some questions for you.

Mr McMillan—I will give a brief statement to start with to give the committee a bit of an update of where things have gone in the past 12 months. The initial submission that we put in focused on two main areas: a lack of funding, of government agencies largely; and a good neighbour policy that we are in the process of developing with CALM. To start with the good neighbour policy, unfortunately, it has not developed as we would have hoped by now. We are not sure of the exact reason. We are told government priorities have overtaken the good neighbour policy, but we are a little bit suspicious—the culture change that we referred to in the submission has proven pretty hard to achieve, and that is part of the reason why it has not progressed. We are lobbying the Minister for the Environment quite heavily to ensure that this is put in place.

ACTING CHAIR—Could you just remind us of that culture change?

Mr McMillan—It is the power of a uniform, to paraphrase it. There are good and bad reports that we get all the time from our members in relation to the relationship they have with CALM officers out in the field. With the previous group you talked about the education system taking a very strong environmental focus, and we are talking about a very sensitive environmental issue here. That has transformed into a lot of policy implementation out in the field. I think that paraphrases it reasonably well. As far as the funding side of things go—

ACTING CHAIR—It is still a little broad.

Mr McMillan—We had a couple of examples of frivolous prosecutions undertaken in Albany last year, where we firmly believe that the CALM officers did not follow the principle of public interest, which is clearly stated in their prosecutions policy. There was quite a large farmer demonstration at the time of these prosecutions, and the magistrate threw them out, indicating that it was a waste of his and the court's time. Subsequent to that, we had a lot of members ringing us up saying they had had it up to the eye teeth with the approach of CALM out in the

bush and, if there were bushfires on CALM land in the next two summers, they would be prepared to stand at the boundary and protect their own property but the government's property could literally burn. Obviously that struck home quite heavily with the hierarchy in CALM.

ACTING CHAIR—It is very sad.

Mr McMillan—The good neighbour policy was proposed to resolve this and many other issues that we have with the agency. To go back to where I started, it is a major disappointment for us that that has not progressed. We have not had much progress with the funding either, unfortunately. Rob Delane from the APB circulated a paper for public discussion last year, which was called 'a proposed regional model' and promoted regional funding via a levy mechanism and regional control of funds raised through that mechanism to be focused on regional priorities. As an organisation, we supported the proposed regional model, even though we did take a lot of flak from some segments of our membership. We thought that was the way of the future because obviously the government was not in a position to manage its own lands adequately and there was a need for a partnership approach.

The agency did not promote the regional model particularly well. As you would be aware, if you are not promoting something well, public sentiment takes over, and the industry by and large rejected it. That went quiet. We are now in the position where we understand a piece of legislation, which is now called the Biosecurity and Agricultural Management Bill, has been given priority in the process over here. I downloaded the 111-odd page draft last night. I have not had a chance to go through it yet, but I understand there will be a provision in it which is basically the proposed regional model reinvented in a legislative format. This is what we indicated to the agricultural community would happen—if they did not adopt the model in the first place and assume control of it, they were likely to have something thrust on them through the legislative mechanism that they may not necessarily like. That is a snapshot of where we have been in the past 12 months. There is unfortunately not a lot of progress to report.

Mr SECKER—I know you promoted the idea of the wild dog bounty trial around Laverton. Has that finished yet? Do you have any outcomes that show how successful it was?

Mr Leake—I think it was part of the wild dog review strategy. Obviously the bounty option was part of that strategy. I am not sure how many scalps they ended up collecting, but it was just one of a dozen different options. Obviously baiting and trapping—regular trapping by doggers—and getting a school up have been other parts of that strategy put up last year. As a representative of the agricultural regions, I have bowed out to a large degree on how they manage their dog issues in the pastoral areas. They are radically different to the agricultural areas, where we are just dealing with an influx of dogs out of the pastoral or unallocated crown lands. That has become the current issue along all the fringes, and obviously that has been our primary focus at WA Farmers Federation.

We have just reinvented the barrier fence committee as part of a state strategy to counter some of the emu plagues that come down on a regular basis and the ongoing dog incursions that are happening in various aspects. In respect of dogs in the agricultural areas, essentially some degree of upgrading of the fence, an extension of the fence into some of those areas, is seen as an obvious option. Obviously the cost has to be very closely scrutinised. I think currently a cost-

benefit analysis being done by the department to see what the benefits are of extending that fence and upgrading the current sections.

Mr SECKER—Who paid the bounty?

Mr Leake—I think the minister put that up as a response to a critical situation that Laverton had. I think that was more than just dingoes. There were wild dogs, cross-breed dogs and all sorts coming out of the Aboriginal camps. That is ongoing, I know, through Kalgoorlie. There are guys there with stations with naff-all sheep on them. I am not sure how they are making a quid, to be quite honest. It is a big issue in pastoral areas and I really have not bought into it to that degree. As you heard previously, they have run the zone committees—the ZCAs—and they raised their own funds, which are matched by the government. They run their own coordinated dogging programs and baiting programs. It is a whole new language to me.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, we heard that evidence.

Mr Leake—Yes. I have bowed out of that because that really is foreign to me. We see the dogs in the paddocks and we see the damage, but we still cannot access them. We cannot bait whole properties. Historically they have run buffer zones of 10 to 20 kilometres through the high dog population areas on the unallocated crown land directly adjacent. But the current fence obviously is emu standard and does not stop dogs for a moment. I cannot help you much on the culling.

Mr De Landgrafft—Just on the basis, though, of putting forward a bounty, really it was a reaction to a critical situation. It was trying to perhaps take us back to the old days when they actually did those sorts of things and adding some incentive into the system for people to actually go out there. What it is really is a reaction to is the lack of training and preparation by the agencies in having doggers available to undertake the task. They are hoping that perhaps, if they put a bounty out, it might attract some enterprising people to go out there and make a living. It is quite clear that that is not going to happen and it does not appear to ever be going to work. Nothing is going to replace continual training in and funding of these dogging experts to go out and do that.

Mr SECKER—What was the bounty worth?

Mr Leake—It was $20 to $40—not a lot.

Mr SECKER—No, it would not be worth your while.

Mr Leake—I know there have been doggers employed in our agricultural areas. They might shoot 50 in a year and they live on $2,000. Yet controlling 50 dogs and that continual leakage takes a lot of money. CALM actually took that up as a new part of their brief 12 months ago. They were given control or management of some of the unallocated crown land. Prior to that, they had not involved themselves in the management of wild dogs at all. There is certainly a longstanding issue with regard to them managing pests on all of their reserves in the whole state. But there was a real issue in this whole central wheat belt area. As part of their new responsibility they had to take over management of the ag department, which had a dogger there before. If they pick up 50 dogs in the year, it costs them $90-odd thousand to do so.

Mr SECKER—I would not mind your comments on this. It is hard enough to get farmers to go away for a two- or three-day course anyway, but why would you need two or three days at a cost of $1,500 to teach someone to wear a pair of rubber gloves and use a syringe?

Mr Leake—This is for the baiting?

Mr SECKER—Yes, the baiting licence. It amazes me that you need three days to teach people to wear rubber gloves, to use a syringe, and how to put their baits out.

Mr Leake—It is all part of the duty of care. If the government are going to sign off, they have to have some form of protocols to say they have done their best to educate people in the correct use of the baits. I have not been involved in any of those bait racks, as they call them. They are very strict in the use of 1080 at all, let alone letting people do their own baits.

Mr SECKER—In South Australia they have prepared baits or you can bring your own meat and a department of ag person will come along and inject the pieces of meat. He is a trained person. That probably would not be as easy to do out in the more sparse areas so that is when you would want to trial it yourself. The danger out there is a lot less than in the closer areas. It just seems right over the top to have a three-day course.

Mr Leake—You might have already heard this: they have explored the use of sausage meat, which has been trialled recently. There are still ongoing trials. If they can produce that bait locally here and transport it cheaper than the costs of preparing their own it is an obvious part of the wild dog strategy.

Mr De Landgrafft—There are two sides—it is agricultural and pastoral. Quite clearly, there is a need for the pastoralists to have the ability to prepare their own baits. It becomes another blocker in the system if they cannot get on and do the job. They have access to the fresh meat and they are able to do enough baits for what they need at the time. Otherwise, you tend to have more baits than you need or perhaps not enough—one or the other. In the agricultural regions the farmers have quite accepted the idea that the departmental person with the training would turn up and inject their baits. That seemed a fair system.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You refer to the culture of the green outlook of the staff. What do they say is the solution to the problem?

Mr De Landgrafft—At the level at which we were negotiating the good neighbour policy, which was pretty much at the top and we had the executive director of CALM there, they were quite happy once we got past the initial suspicions of each other's agendas and talked about simply being good neighbours. CALM came to realise that the best thing they could do is get on very well with farmers because we are the people who do their job most of the time. They never see that country out there. It is farmers who are looking after their lands and taking great care. They are certainly not out there to do damage to it. Getting over that was a bit of an issue but after the first couple of meetings we found that we were striking some common ground.

It seems to us that getting over that mound, as we did with them, would have to occur all the way down the line. A lot of the employees in Conservation and Land Management—CALM, as we call it here—take their role very seriously and really see themselves as protectors of what is

left of the remnant bush out there, and anybody else who wants to go in is potentially threatening. That is the culture that we are trying to unravel. We needed to put together some basic guidelines about each other's responsibilities as neighbours and what do we do under certain circumstances when there is an issue for us interface. The most common interface is in time of fire, and a lot of lightning strikes occur.

Mr Leake—And they rely on the local farmers.

Mr De Landgrafft—Technically, if we roared out there with our firefighting unit and knocked over a few saplings to put the fire out we would be in breach and they would prosecute. That is what was demonstrated in these frivolous cases that were mounted. The farmers saw that and thought, 'Crikey, this is no go.'

ACTING CHAIR—Was there any change in the view after the case the magistrate threw out?

Mr McMillan—Certainly at the top of the level there was, as Trevor was saying, because we were dealing with the people right at the top of the organisation and had the full support of the minister.

ACTING CHAIR—How do we take that down then?

Mr McMillan—It is very difficult for us. To add to what Trevor and David said, it is deeper than even the way they are talking; it goes all the way back into the education system and the lack of appreciation of kids coming through today of where their tucker comes from. I am sure all of us can remember when we were at school we studied agriculture by default in the way we were taught, particularly if you came from the country. The city-country divide is getting wider all the time. Even in the last draft of the good neighbour policy that we got, the first item is the objectives of CALM. They are still getting their objectives up in headlights. That is the first thing their staff see when they get this policy. Bear in mind that most CALM staff have qualifications in environmental issues as opposed to agriculture. They are already firmly entrenched on one side of the fence.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—How can it be an objective of CALM to protect wild dogs?

Mr McMillan—I know exactly what you mean but unfortunately they do not. Wildlife is wildlife is wildlife and it all should be protected, according to the gospel of CALM.

ACTING CHAIR—There is an issue here, isn't there?

Mr McMillan—Yes. The other issue is that communication with the community is not taught in the book at university. That is something that have got to be able to do by experience. These field staff are not being given that experience; they are being bound up by bureaucratic red tape a lot of the time and they are not being given the exposure.

ACTING CHAIR—There are issues there that we have to deal with. They run into animal welfare issues and everything else, which farming has got to start to face. Knocking over native animals and the public's perception of that is all part of what we are confronting. That is certainly an attitudinal issue. What we wear is another matter. There is not only the food that we

eat and where that comes from but also what people have on their backs and what kids wear. They do not know about what they wear; they do not know where it comes from. These are all issues which have not been solved by your organisation or put out there. Can we find solutions to those issues?

Mr De Landgrafft—This is all coming upon us now. It is something that we have noticed in broadstream agriculture, if I can go off the trail a little bit. In Western Australia recently we had a one vote, one value conundrum and after that rural people felt a little bit jaded about how they were being treated by a citycentric government. One of the things that we brought forward to government when we went back into talks with them was that we really needed to have a scheme whereby government put forward good programs that publicised what actually happens out in rural areas and talked about the value of agriculture, where the food comes from and the modern industry out there that is worthy of investment. There is inclined to be a very old vision of agriculture. It has been often mooted that it is a sunset industry, that nothing much happens out there, that are there are no opportunities out there and that the people out there have little idea of modern thinking.

ACTING CHAIR—That is often perpetrated by the people that work in agriculture and are a part of agriculture!

Mr De Landgrafft—Of course. Whatever the reasons why that has developed, it needs to be overcome, so we have put to government that they need to put some resourcing into that. They do it in other areas. Water is of course a big issue right across the nation. The water department here are running a series of ads telling the whole public how good they are at thinking about the future and about the resources that are out there and how good they are at monitoring them et cetera. So we asked the government to roll out this type of program in respect of agriculture, giving general appreciation of what we do. We in agriculture have moved with the times. We are far more conservation minded today than was probably ever the case before. We consider farmers to be the best conservationists in the world because to survive they have to live with their environment. That is the kind of image that, by one way or another, we have to get back out across there. The government have earmarked $350,000 for a program to be rolled out later this year. We are trying to be part of that. We as an organisation see that we have got a PR problem, and of course funding advertising and changing political engineering is an expensive process that we somehow have to get involved in. That is a long answer to tell you where we think we should go.

Mr Leake—Getting back to the good neighbour policy, while you talk about education, engagement and opportunity, there has got to be a line of communication between the land owners, whether they be CALM or farmers, that has not been there in the past. There was a line of conflict because there was not the understanding of CALM's agenda and there was not a lot of knowledge as to how they prioritised some of the ideas, given the different standards. Part of the good neighbour policy was to have three tiers of information that was to come in a single page form or pamphlet form and then you could go on the net and perhaps get all the details. I can see advantage in—and having a better fit with the whole community by—engaging in some communication rather than having something else.

ACTING CHAIR—Do we need to look at the ways in which we farm? Is there a need to regulate some of that?

Mr Leake—I do not think the impact of farming on conservation areas is huge. If there are weed species that have obviously got in there, and if it is an endemic species people will manage it on their own farmland. The problem is that a lot of these weed species build up in the reserves and are not managed. If they have not got a huge impact they quite often do not go any further than the first 50 or 100 metres. If they do not move out, there is no issue. They do become a fire risk. If some of the declared species though—there have been a couple of outbreaks in the last 12 months—get out of hand in some of these reserves, which they have down at Manjimup, they just get put into the too-hard basket. They fall into the same case as the animal pests: there are just too many animals and too many reserves. They just throw up their hands.

ACTING CHAIR—We have to accept this as a reality.

Mr Leake—We have had to. Our main negotiating point now, as far as this good neighbour policy is concerned, is that any funding mechanisms that might be set up in the future are going to be based on the government meeting higher contractual arrangements about managing pest species on their lands. It is happening to a degree. I know that CALM has made submissions for a separate fund to start making more than a token effort, put it that way.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there an accepted view of what are pests on their lands as opposed to what your perception of pests are?

Mr Leake—They are the standard rule pests.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there a conflict?

Mr De Landgrafft—There is some conflict.

Mr Leake—Whether they be foxes, rabbits, kangaroos or pigs, it is the normal line-up. This is just within the agricultural areas.

ACTING CHAIR—But some people would not accept that kangaroos were pests, would they?

Mr De Landgrafft—Kangaroos or dogs; I think we all accept feral animals.

ACTING CHAIR—Rabbits.

Mr SECKER—Rabbits, foxes; we all accept that.

ACTING CHAIR—They are imported; they are not native.

Mr De Landgrafft—That is right. But when it comes to kangaroos and when it comes to—

ACTING CHAIR—Native animals.

Mr De Landgrafft—Yes, native animals.

ACTING CHAIR—They are perceived differently in a regulatory sense but also by the community.

Mr Leake—Wedge-tailed eagles are another one. They are a native animal. They have not got an issue with you managing your kangaroo numbers on your property but the problem is you have got these huge areas that are feeding in large numbers. Emus especially build up in large numbers and migrate. Eagles in some of the areas have been supposedly doing more damage than they have historically. To get a licence to control any of those is a real hard ask.

Mr De Landgrafft—There has been some success in the south-west with a CALM policy which I think is quite good—that is, a permanent, or almost permanent, open season on some species. That works quite well. For instance, farmers can destroy grey kangaroos if they are in such numbers that they wish to destroy them. They can destroy them on their land but they must be left there, so they cannot be actually used. There are some limited open seasons occurring with other species, such as some of the corellas and cockatoos, and also with some of the duck species. You always find that they tend to be very conservative about those kinds of open seasons. They are very sure that in general the numbers are not under threat. Where we have problems is that you have hot spots where somebody is suffering very significantly, say, from corellas and the authorities will not offer an open season on them. So the methods of destroying them become so laborious that no-one can do it.

ACTING CHAIR—Is this because of the department's concern that the public perception of this will have a political reaction or whatever? Is this the driving reason for this?

Mr De Landgrafft—It could easily be. But of course it also gets back to that culture of: we are the protector. I think that the public do often understand. Everyone knows that there is kangaroo shooting.

ACTING CHAIR—I think the majority of Australians accept that.

Mr De Landgrafft—They do. If there was an open season on corellas in certain areas, I do not think the public would have that concern. But I think it is more the protector status that is a problem.

Mr Leake—You will always get some of the public that will also be concerned. We had a letter recently from someone who was very concerned about the extinction of dingoes. There is nowhere in the dog review strategy that says they want to exterminate every dog. It is just not going to happen.

ACTING CHAIR—Of course not, but there are perceptions that we are mixing up what is a pest with what is on the extinction list or the endangered list. There is a need to divide these things and to look at them separately so that we can take out issues such as emotiveness, but it seems that they are lumped together in the media and everywhere else. We have not done that very well in Australia. In game management we have been trying to eradicate many things for a long time, but we do not seem to be going about it very scientifically. Hopefully, we can make some recommendations down that road.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—We have mainly dealt with your interfacing with state government departments. What is the best thing we can do for you nationally?

Mr De Landgrafft—In theory, acceptance of the model that we have tried to start has been successful, but it has not actually been rolled out. We do not have a shiny, glossy booklet in front of us talking about the policy. We think that is one of the significant ways to go. If there were a federal push that good neighbour policies became part of the charter one way or another, that would be pretty good. Everyone would start to understand their responsibilities and the viewpoints of others. Some districts might even sign up to pacts with CALM on threatened species et cetera. One thing we found is that CALM will not tell you where endangered species are, and we understand that from one aspect. However, suppose you were living adjacent to a reserve where there was an endangered species and, because of a fire, had to go there to get your stock out; if you had that knowledge just generally, you could avoid that area. It is about getting over the mistrust of the common people and the bush-bashing mentality or the perception that we just want to destroy the bush.

Mr SECKER—In your submission you talk about 'damage permits'. I have never heard that term before.

Mr De Landgrafft—If you, as an agriculturalist, can demonstrate that you are suffering damage of an agricultural crop or production system, you can apply for a damage permit for certain species. The kangaroo is one. Whilst we have a general open season for the greys, we cannot harvest or use them. You may want someone to come in and use those kangaroos or you may not feel like shooting them yourself—farmers do not like shooting roos, but they know the damage they can cause—so, after being issued with a permit, you can get a professional in. A damage permit gives you tags, one for each carcass, so that you can demonstrate where they are from and how many have been collected et cetera.

Mr SECKER—So they could be used—

Mr De Landgrafft—They could be used commercially and most farmers favour that. The other one applies to wedge-tail eagles. For instance, if wedge-tail eagles became a very significant problem at lambing time, you could also apply for a damage permit. That is a tricky one. They are a magnificent bird and nobody really wants to call them a dirty criminal. I do not know of anybody who has gone and asked for such a permit, but apparently they are available.

Mr Leake—They usually give a set of recommendations about how to control individual birds. If you have 20 or 30 of them, it is a bit laughable sometimes.

ACTING CHAIR—It is a big catchment target.

Mr SECKER—Unfortunately, people would just shoot them and not tell anyone.

Mr De Landgrafft—That is exactly what happens. If you go in for a damage permit, they will probably tell you, first of all, that it is not happening. Then they will tell you, 'Well, if you prepare some carcasses and put them in an adjacent paddock, they will go and feed there,' and a lot of other strategy. It can work at times. Most farmers put up with a fair bit of damage, but it may be—and it has been—significant.

Mr SECKER—So, because it is a hassle to go through, they act and hope for forgiveness afterwards if they are found out.

Mr De Landgrafft—That is right. One of the solutions probably is to streamline that process more so that farmers will be more likely to apply for a permit in the first place. CALM would then have half a chance to monitor what is going on.

ACTING CHAIR—With the present process, it does not. If these birds cause economic damage, you shoot them and dispose of their carcasses and we have no record of that. Under a permit system, we could record it and then be able to keep a management plan of what was occurring and, where there is a problem, take out the birds. The present situation does not serve good science—

Mr De Landgrafft—Or good neighbourly relations.

ACTING CHAIR—or good management.

Mr De Landgrafft—Yes. The other side is that you might apply for a damage permit if, where you have a new plantation of trees, the corellas are knocking the growing point out of them. Their likely solution is that you use a single-shot type rifle to take so many birds a day. Quite clearly, you will not get there. They end up giving you meaningless solutions to the problems.

ACTING CHAIR—It is not facing the actual problem that somebody is economically having to deal with.

Mr De Landgrafft—Yes. When you are looking for a damage permit with kangaroos and the person you apply to has taken the attitude that they are not your kangaroos and they are making it very difficult for you, you end up doing it under an open permit and waste the resource.

ACTING CHAIR—There are a couple of questions I need to get on the record. We have received a lot of submissions about dealing with pest animals. Do you support some sort of a national approach to pest management? In the past, each state has done it through agriculture departments, or whatever. I mean not taking it over nationally but having some overarching way of dealing with pests in Australia.

Mr McMillan—I guess we are pretty wary of any national approach. Being as isolated as we are over here, we do not readily accept a one-hat-fits-all approach.

ACTING CHAIR—Maybe when you get over your paranoia!

Mr McMillan—Absolutely—I am only new to this state, but I am learning very quickly! Certainly in relation to kangaroo cull numbers, I have just been through the exercise with our people in the last 12 months. We have CALM make a recommendation here which has to go over east for approval, so in a way it is happening at that level. I think, as Trevor said before, a far more practical model would be some sort of direction along the lines of the good neighbour policy. Certainly one of the issues I was going to raise before we finished was interagency cooperation. Even though they will deny it, CALM and the APB here have competing agendas.

There are resources being duplicated, particularly in the administrative function, that would be better spent through a joint approach to pest management, achieving some on-ground results. So if there is some way of that being controlled from a federal point of view, that would be good. With the NRM groups, something that we were very keen on in the proposed regional model was the fact that regional communities actually made the decisions on the issues in their area. If something could be extended along the same lines as the NRM groups, it would be terrific.

Mr SECKER—You could join those two groups together and then you could go for the really serious amalgamation of WFF and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association!

ACTING CHAIR—We have had evidence that we have never been in a position where you could get improved baits, for pigs, dogs or whatever, on a commercial basis because there is not enough money in it for someone to get a scientist to research it and do it up. If you look at these things as a problem to manage, you can do it on a national basis. I think there is overseas evidence that this is probably a way to go. It is not taking over from anyone. It is not doing that. It is just to have an overarching way of looking at this and bringing together resources and probably brains to work on a particular issue and to manage that. That is what we are probably looking at as a recommendation from this committee.

Mr Leake—From a research perspective, we have got that more or less in hand now. There is national research, and when it comes down to the actual species we are so contained and so devoid from the other states—

Mr SECKER—It is almost an island.

Mr Leake—that we do not gain. There is a national wild dog committee, which met recently in Queensland. It does not contribute much to our cause at all. You can go and share some knowledge, but there is not much to be gained out of it. We have our own issues. Like I said, we have got our agricultural issues versus pastoral issues, and we have to try and manage that. I do not think we can try and bunch them together and get some synergies, but I think if we can focus—

Mr McMillan—Perhaps to give some substance to the paranoia, we have not seen the outcomes of the 1080 review that has just been concluded, but I believe they are not particularly Western Australia friendly. We went in to bat for the continued use of 1080 over here because there is a natural resistance to 1080 poison in native wildlife over here, but I would imagine the pressure being brought to bear in the Eastern States, where it is knocking off native wildlife, would have a big impact on the outcome of that review. So that is one example where a national approach to the use of 1080 would not suit Western Australia.

ACTING CHAIR—It is used to knock over native animals which are pest animals. Do you support the career path for doggers? I just want to make sure that we get that on the record.

Mr McMillan—Absolutely.

Mr De Landgrafft—Very much so.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you think that the R&D corporations should be involved at the research level? Should we be getting them a bit more involved in the process of pest animals?

Mr De Landgrafft—Yes. They are all going to pass the buck as to whose jurisdiction it is. You would probably call that market failure, and when you have market failure that is an area for government to really look at. You might be able to look at proportionate funding. I know Australian Wool Innovation was looking at some issues—it has slipped my mind precisely what they were. I thought it was to do with dogs.

Mr Leake—Yes, they have funded some of the research areas, anyway, when it came to some of these new baits and even some trigger mechanisms which actually inject. They are not allowed into Australia. They work like a mine, apparently: when the dog bites into it, it will actually shoot the bait down its throat. They are using them in the States.

ACTING CHAIR—It is a bit like a detonator in a spud that they used to use in New Zealand for pigs.

Mr Leake—That is about it, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—I do not think that they are acceptable anymore in the community sense.

Mr Leake—If you are going to be making recommendations—and that is your idea for the outcome at the end of the day—it comes down to a couple of key areas from our perspective. Fencing in the agricultural areas will solve a lot of the emu and dog problems on a long-term basis and—

ACTING CHAIR—Doggers?

Mr Leake—Yes, doggers could mop up. You would not have to be buying the same degree of dogging to mop up in future; you could just write that off against the cost of maintaining the fence. It becomes a nonissue then. That is obviously going to be a real focus. It has been a thorn in the nest for a long time.

ACTING CHAIR—The other issue is educational, in that we need a community based approach to try to look at how we are going to go forward. We have to take the community with us. Your constituency does. If you do not get the community onside or share with the community, you are going to go backwards.

Mr Leake—Yes, it is communication all the way. This good neighbour policy—eight months ago was it, Andy—

Mr McMillan—Twelve months ago.

Mr Leake—Twelve months ago we more or less wrapped up the final draft, and nobody has seen a copy of it. It has been stalled.

ACTING CHAIR—That is very sad.

Mr De Landgrafft—It would lead to other areas like pig control, which we have not got on to at all. CALM deny that pigs are their responsibility. The pigs will keep coming in, and the farmer can only do what he can. A program was started down near Lake Muir, where we had the cooperation of CALM and the farmers. They put on a program where they continually trapped the pigs until they exhausted the numbers in areas. That is the kind of cooperation you are going to have to continue to have.

ACTING CHAIR—It is cooperation that you need to build. Good luck with that. We certainly appreciate your evidence. Thank you very much.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 2.58 pm