



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND
FORESTRY

Reference: Impact on agriculture of pest animals

FRIDAY, 22 JULY 2005

BROOME

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY
Friday, 22 July 2005

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

Members in attendance: Mr Adams, Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Lindsay, Mr Schultz, Mr Secker and Mr Windsor

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The impact on agriculture of pest animals particularly:

To identify nationally significant pest animal issues and consider how existing Australian and State government processes can be better linked for more coordinated management of these issues across State boundaries.

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

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

Consider the adequacy of State Government expenditure on pest animal control in the context of other conservation and natural resource management priorities, with particular reference to National Parks.

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

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

WITNESSES

DE LONG, Mr Petau (Pete), Member, Kimberley Zone Control Authority 1

**EVERETT, Mr Michael Graham, Biosecurity Officer, Western Australian Department of
Agriculture..... 1**

**WATKINS, Mr Richard John, District Manager, Pilbara, Western Australian Department of
Agriculture..... 1**

Committee met at 9.28 am

EVERETT, Mr Michael Graham, Biosecurity Officer, Western Australian Department of Agriculture

WATKINS, Mr Richard John, District Manager, Pilbara, Western Australian Department of Agriculture

DE LONG, Mr Petau (Pete), Member, Kimberley Zone Control Authority

CHAIR (Mr Schultz)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals. The committee's visit to Western Australia is the final stage of the public evidence gathering phase of the inquiry. This hearing today is the final public hearing that will be conducted in relation to this inquiry. The committee will soon begin drafting its report, which we expect to be tabled before the end of the year. I welcome representatives of the Western Australian Department of Agriculture. Do you have any comments to make about the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Watkins—As well as being a district manager for the Pilbara area, I am also a project manager for animal and plant pests in the Pilbara and Kimberley area.

Mr Everett—I am a biosecurity officer based in the west Kimberley, in Derby. I deal mainly with feral animals and weed impacts on agriculture.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I 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 you have an opening presentation to make. Would you like to begin that now, then we will follow with questions.

A PowerPoint presentation was then given—

Mr Watkins—Thanks very much. I hope everybody can see the screen relatively well. I will be giving most of the presentation and asking Mick to help out on a few operational issues. The presentation for you is about feral donkeys and their control in the Kimberley. I will give you a bit of background on the situation of donkeys within the Kimberley: how it has come about, donkey control within the area, and what we have achieved to date. This is mainly an information session that we are providing.

I will provide a brief history. Feral donkeys were introduced into Australia in 1886. They were used throughout the whole of Australia, for transport mainly. In the early twenties, when mechanisation occurred, they were found to be surplus and were mainly released into the wild. People generally had emotional attachments to their donkeys—they did not want to kill them; they wanted to release them—and they released them into the wild.

Donkeys do not have any natural predators. Within the Kimberley we have ideal conditions for their survival. Donkeys have a quite significant biology which enables them to survive very well within the area. I will talk a little bit more about that later. Here are a few old, fuzzy pictures of old road trains with a few donkeys on them. They were certainly used up along the coast, all the way up through the Pilbara and the Kimberley. That is mainly where they were situated in Western Australia.

I will talk a little bit more about donkeys and why they are such a problem. Donkeys have a capacity to utilise water in a similar way to camels. According to the research that has been done they can lose 30 per cent of their body weight and still operate quite well. They can reduce their evaporative water loss to around 60 per cent before they become dehydrated. These are very significant amounts. Repeated heat distress does not really affect their appetites, either. This allows donkeys to travel out from water areas quite significant distances to graze. So if we look at donkeys compared to cattle we find that donkeys can actually go outside the cattle grazing areas. If you imagine a watering point in one area, cattle can go out four to six kilometres or even further and donkeys can go out a greater distance. That is why, when you look at donkeys in the area, you rarely see a donkey in poor condition.

The gestation period for donkeys is 365 days—one year—and jennies generally conceive in the first year. Research shows that the reproduction rate for normal seasons is around 22 per cent. Home ranges are pretty vague but are generally thought to be around 30 square kilometres. Their impact within the Kimberley has not been documented scientifically very well at all because they are mainly a grazing animal. You cannot really pull out scientific facts to say 'Donkeys do this much damage on the ground,' because it has not been established. They are in the same environment as cattle so it is very hard to say what the actual impact has been. There are a few rules of thumb that are used—one is that generally, two donkeys eat as much as one cow, due to their body weight.

Our zone control authority, representatives from which will be talking later, has certainly been a large factor in the feral donkey program. The zone control authority is a semigovernment body that is part of the Agriculture Protection Board. It is made up of pastoralists and shire councillors. They represent the grassroots people within the area. Back in the earlier days in the seventies, it came to a situation where the feral donkeys were causing such large problems within the area that they asked what they could do to control them. They were ground shooting them at the time, which they were finding was ineffective. Sometimes they were actually being inhumane because, due to the vast distances and the inaccessible country, it was very hard to control them on the ground. The Kimberley is the size of Victoria, basically, and pastoral stations are very large within the area. So that was certainly an issue for them.

Originally, control was through ground shooting and mustering. In 1978 we started with aerial control using helicopters in the first trial. That was found to be very effective. It meant that shooters could, from the air, control animals over vast areas of land, and they could do that quite efficiently, effectively and humanely. Because it was so successful at that stage, they started a control program within the Kimberley. It was originally funded through what is called a declared plant and animal control fund. That is a government fund through the Agriculture Protection Board. They rate the pastoralists. The money that is raised within the area is matched dollar for dollar by the government. This forms part of the funds for feral donkey control.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Is that done by private contractors in the private sector or by government employees?

Mr Watkins—It was originally done by government employees. Then they trialled the use of the private sector. It was seen to be inappropriate—that is probably the best word—to use the private sector. There was concern about the image that was being presented by the private enterprise.

CHAIR—Why?

Mr Watkins—I think there was a lot of inhumane activity going on. People were trying to reduce the amount of ammunition used in order to save costs, to a large degree. Since that time it has been done by government people. It has also been seen that government people do not have the potential conflict of interest in carrying out the program. They are getting a full-time salary. When the program finishes, they will still be ongoing. They will still get paid and there will still be a job for them.

Feral donkey control started in about 1978. It went over various stages. It is still ongoing. This first phase got populations down to about 10 per cent of the original number. I will show you a few figures of the numbers shot in a little while. It got to a stage where the impact was minimised.

CHAIR—I noticed in all of the reports from the department, as far as the control process is concerned, that there is reference to the use of fixed-wing aircraft because of the cost of the helicopter. Do you have any figures of how much it was costing you per head to eliminate donkeys?

Mr Watkins—Yes, we do have some figures. At the moment, using our current technique, it is around \$70.

CHAIR—About \$70 per animal?

Mr Watkins—Yes. That varies a little bit depending on the populations. In the early days it probably was considerably less than that, I would suggest.

CHAIR—Because of the numbers?

Mr Watkins—Because of the numbers and the type of program we were doing then. This slide shows the helicopter and animals below. The most limiting factor in that program up until that time was finding the animals. Once you got down to a certain population, because of the vast areas you mainly looked at the high risk areas or the river systems, where you would find them. The most limiting factor of the program was finding them so we looked at other techniques. Our staff wanted to trial a Judas technique program so they went through the Zone Control Authority and got approval to trial the technique to further reduce the impact of feral donkeys within the area. I am going to get Mick to talk about the Judas technique and how it is all done.

Mr Everett—I guess we went over to the Judas technique because the last big control shoot we did was in 1997. Prior to that you could fly around and there were donkeys everywhere; you just shot on sight. We were culling up around 100 per hour. There were just big mobs everywhere. The last shoot we did was in 1997 and we were down to around 20 per hour because that was all we could find. They were becoming hard to find yet they were still there. So we figured there were two options at that time. We could either leave them and let them build up again so there were big numbers and we could visually locate them again or look at the Judas technique, which was trialled successfully in the Northern Territory during the tuberculosis eradication campaign with cattle. That worked very well.

Donkeys are similar to cattle; they are social animals and they do not like being left alone. So we had a pretty good idea of where the hot spots—the numbers—were with donkeys so we concentrated on strategic locations where we knew there were still significant populations. We would go in and find a donkey. Generally, females are preferred; males tend to be bachelors and do not mob with the herd. The other disadvantage of males is that they sometimes hear us before we hear the signal on them and they leave the mob. They just bolt. Now we clean them up. We have found that when you see those males bolt you should just go for them straight away and clean them all up. It sounds terrible but the others cannot hide; we know where they are. They can run off and we can come back to them with the herd. So it is a very successful method.

Mr Watkins—Do you want to explain how the Judas technique works?

Mr Everett—As you can see on this picture here there is a radio transmitter collar fitted to the donkey. Every donkey has a totally different frequency so we are not interfering. They are tranquillised from the air at strategic locations. The one you can see is quite happy. She is just coming round again. There is no pain there and she seems quite content. She is just about to get up and run off, I think.

Again, they do not like being lonely. The donkey finds a new herd and we track it, maybe three or four weeks later, and cull everything that is with it, leaving the Judas animal to roam. So the donkey is doing all the work for us. We just come in again, maybe four weeks to six weeks later. The donkey will have found another herd so the procedure is to—

CHAIR—Is the Judas normally a jenny or is it a stallion?

Mr Everett—Jennies are preferred because they will stay with the herd. The males or the jacks like to be out by themselves. You find them a lot of the time out by themselves. We have a few jacks. We have trialled jacks versus jennies but often we wasted our time. We tracked the jack and there it was, all by itself, whereas the females always stay with the herd. They will not leave the herd even when being chased. They will not speed off.

Mr ADAMS—What is your transmission radius?

Mr Everett—Usually, with this technology we are limited to about 20 nautical miles. So we are looking at between 35 kilometres and 40 kilometres, which is good because donkeys do not roam outside that range. If it was camels we might have a different problem because they roam outside. So something like satellite collars would need to be used for camels, although they are expensive. You could look at where they were the night before, before you went out. But at this

stage there is no benefit in using satellite collars on donkeys. Every time we find the donkeys we GPS them at their last location and we update a database for another tracking run. We know exactly where the donkey was and generally it is within 10 nautical miles of the last known fix.

Mr ADAMS—Is this program being well documented? It is a very interesting program and you are certainly achieving very good results.

Mr Watkins—It is certainly not that well documented at this stage. There is some documentation.

Mr ADAMS—Is that to do with resources?

Mr Watkins—I think it is mainly to do with the people involved in the program being operational. So our focus is on getting out on the ground and getting the job done. Scientists have had limited involvement so there has not been a multitude of papers written about it. Also, we do not promote the program.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You just do your job and get the results.

Mr Watkins—We have seen what has happened in America so we just keep our heads down and go ahead and do the work.

CHAIR—We are sorry that we are interrupting. You might just finish your presentation and then we will ask you questions because that raises some very interesting questions.

Mr Everett—Do you have any more questions on the Judas technique? That is basically how it works; it is quite a simple technique but very, very effective.

Mr SECKER—When you get to the stage where you cannot find any more, which means that you have got rid of them in that area or that property, do you then push the Judas down to the next property? You are doing that, aren't you—you are, sort of, going along the properties?

Mr Everett—We are, yes. You will see it in some of the photos later on. A good test obviously is when the donkeys cannot find anything—you are continually going out and finding that a donkey is running by itself. In another slide here you can see three Judas donkeys running together. That is all they can do: find each other. That is a good sign. We have found though that leaving them free to run—sometimes you get attached to the collared ones—does not work because they are quite content to run in a mob of three Judas donkeys. You generally have to make the hard decision that two have to go. And then you find, during the following run, sure enough, the donkey has moved off. So the donkeys were not completely eradicated at all; the donkey was just quite happy to stay with the other two. But once you remove two, the other donkey will find more. After a while you get to the stage where there is none and the donkey cannot find anything.

Mr SECKER—So then do you get rid of them and rescue the collar?

Mr Everett—Sometimes we will. Some we leave out there as what we call 'monitoring donkeys'. They just roam around. The expense of putting the collar on is the hardest bit of the

whole program. It is quite time consuming and risky so if there is an area there we just leave them until the collar is just about to expire. The collars have a four-year life so we just let the donkey roam for that time and maybe track it twice a year or annually rather than on a four-weekly basis, to see if it has moved off.

Mr SECKER—How many would you have with Judas collars at any one time?

Mr Everett—I should refer to my notes here.

Mr Watkins—We have 450 at present. We have had 1,280 in the field but they have been reduced as areas have been cleaned up. We still have about 488 active out there. There are a few more than that; I actually put another 10 on last week.

CHAIR—That covers an area how large?

Mr Everett—We are pretty much looking at the whole Kimberley region now. I have a poster at the back but unfortunately it is a little bit out of date. That was for 2000 and now the whole Kimberley is covered. I think the Kimberley covers about 300,000 square kilometres. It is actually bigger than Victoria.

CHAIR—It is a big area. Does that slide show the sites of the collared Judases?

Mr Watkins—What we are looking at in the triangular portion is the Kimberley. The black lines are pastoral leases and the dots are radiotelemetry collars.

CHAIR—Goodness!

Mr LINDSAY—In relation to the Northern Territory, is there an issue for you that there is no control on the other side of the border?

Mr Watkins—There certainly is. It is an issue for us. You can see on the slide that the border goes down here so basically the collars along this border are ongoing. It will just be ongoing forever and a day while there are problems in the Northern Territory.

Mr LINDSAY—Has there been any attempt by the Western Australian government to liaise with the government of the Northern Territory in relation to that issue?

Mr Watkins—They have been liaising. We have gone across to certain areas and trained them in this same technique, especially in the national park area. They currently are talking about doing a program using collars in the VRD area, which is over this way. That is really their decision, at the end of the day.

CHAIR—Are they currently talking about it, or have they been talking about it for some time?

Mr Watkins—A bit of each. I think they have put a submission to NHT and NLP for part of that program.

CHAIR—So generally speaking, in answer to Mr Lindsay's question, you are saying that there is reasonable cooperation between the state bodies about the problem, and in looking for advice and assistance?

Mr Watkins—There is reasonable cooperation; however, we often still have that problem coming across the border. Down here on this area here, they shot on three properties. I think it was in December, not last year but the year before. They took off 20,000 animals reportedly on three stations. That is a huge number.

Mr ADAMS—Is that big in Kimberley terms?

Mr Watkins—It certainly is for three stations, which may be running, say, 15,000 head of cattle. You are looking at a huge number of additional mouths on that property that impact on its viability.

Mr SECKER—Do you have any problems getting access to CALM land?

Mr Watkins—No, we do not. We do have other problems with CALM providing funds for controlling on their land. That is our major problem.

Mr SECKER—So you still go onto their lands and shoot?

Mr Watkins—Yes. We cannot really leave any holes as we go around. Within the Kimberley, there are a few physical features. There are the Leopold Ranges and then you have the Chamberlain River. What I am showing you on the map is a physical boundary within the area. Below the Leopold Ranges are generally seen—I have to be careful here!—as the more productive parts of the Kimberley for the pastoralists. This was the first area that was undertaken within the program. This was seen as a high priority area; so that was the first part that was undertaken. Above this area the actual cost benefits were considerably less due to the reduced number of animals and cattle production within this area, and also due to the fact that it is a lot more difficult terrain to do donkey control on. However, our Zone Control Authority considered it was essential that we do the whole area to make it fair for all people who have been investing money into the program.

CHAIR—So you went to the feeder source to eliminate the feeder source.

Mr Watkins—That is right. We have only recently got the last collars on the pastoral leases in the north Kimberley. We have virtually done all the pastoral properties within the Kimberley. That does not mean they are all free, of course, but that means we are in the last phase of the control program within the area. I would suggest that, by 2010, the majority of the donkeys on pastoral lease properties should be at very low numbers. We actually go to the extent of calling areas 'locally eradicated' when we get to a stage where we cannot find any more donkeys in the area. The pastoralists cannot find them, the mustering pilots cannot find them, and we cannot find them. We have not seen anything on our collars for basically half a year, I suppose, depending on what time of the season it is. We try to leave those monitoring animals as long as we can, as long as the battery life lasts.

CHAIR—So your objective is to eradicate, not manage them.

Mr Watkins—We would like to manage them through eradication.

CHAIR—I asked the question because there seems to be a focus with regard to all feral animals throughout the country on management rather than on eradication. People have conveniently forgotten that they are introduced species that are foreign to our ecology. I do not know what it is and perhaps the questions will arise—whether it is a perception that the community does not like what we are doing or it is cheaper to manage them through government than it is to eradicate them through government.

Mr ADAMS—What is the damage that donkeys are doing to the environment generally? Do they shift weeds or anything more than cattle do, or something like that?

Mr Watkins—No, not that I am aware of.

Mr ADAMS—What about their gut content? Is their biology similar to a cow?

Mr Watkins—Similar, yes. I do not think there are any major things that we can pin it on, other than being of a competitive nature. They do damage to fencing in large numbers. They can certainly hinder livestock getting to water.

Mr ADAMS—They would dominate cattle, would they?

Mr Watkins—They can do. They can certainly impact on horses on stations as well.

Mr ADAMS—In which way?

Mr Watkins—Just through their aggressive nature.

Mr ADAMS—Can I come to the opportunity of using the Judas process to look at camels and manage camel populations. Mick, you said that it may be a bit more difficult with the radius because camels travel much further, but you could do it with a satellite in certain circumstances. Could you elaborate or give any advice on that?

Mr Everett—I will explain it a little bit, if you like. With the technology we have here, we have found that the collars we are using have a range of about 20 nautical miles. Camels do move huge distances. They even had the trouble with buffalo when they were using this technique on buffalo in the Territory. Buffalo can move up to 50 miles. They were going up and they could not locate them; they were out of range, basically. What they did at times, before a run, was to use a fixed-wing aircraft; they can get a lot higher. With a helicopter we can get up to a 20- or 30- mile range. We have to get up to about 5,000 feet in a helicopter to try and pick up the signals. We will get a 20- or 30-mile range but we cannot get much higher than that in a helicopter. A fixed-wing, of course, can get up there. Fixed-wings are cheap—I think someone mentioned fixed-wings earlier. The main reason we use them is not for shooting out of but for spotting. Helicopters are hugely expensive—the most expensive part of the whole program. Fixed-wings are literally half the price.

Get them to do all the, I suppose, donkey work. They can grid the country; they are relatively cheap; they can locate the donkeys. Once they have located them you can call the helicopter up

and, on a GPS, say, 'Look, we've got a mob here.' Then we can go over there. We also used to use them for keeping an eye on them by circling, because they do tend to split off every which way. Believe it or not, donkeys are extremely hard to see from the air. You can see kangaroos, sheep and cattle, but donkeys are hard to see even with these collars. We could be right over the top of them—we know they are underneath us because the collar is telling us—and we can look but they are incredibly hard to see.

Again, when they do split, to make it effective, we get in there and they will split off into two mobs—that is okay. What we will do is—they are not smart enough yet—let the collar run, we will go and clean up the other lot and we will come back to the collar. We have had instances where they start splitting up into three groups, so I think we have really improved the gene pool! They are evasive. They are getting quite smart. Again, fixed-wings are good there, rather than wasting a roam flight. We only have 10 and have lost 10 somewhere, so we are not going to pick them up, obviously, for a month or six weeks, until the collar moves in on them. A fixed-wing can just keep circling and keep an eye on that lot, and then just recircle the group.

Mr ADAMS—So if you did some camels you could use a fixed-wing to go out and locate mobs of camels and then take out the choppers.

Mr Everett—That would be the cheap option: use a fixed-wing to go out further. The satellite collars, I think, are over \$3,000 per collar. We are not using a GPS transmitter; it is purely a radio transmitter. They are about \$250 each.

Mr ADAMS—Do you know much about camels?

Mr Everett—I have not had a lot to do with them.

Mr ADAMS—Could you attach this collar or a similar collar in a similar way?

Mr Everett—There should be no problem. They might be made a little bit larger to accommodate the size. It would work very well. That would be a cheaper option with camels. Again, rather than satellites, use these collars we use now, or similar, have a fixed-wing go up first and locate ones that are outside the range. They would pick them up and could then divert the helicopter over to where they found them, which could be 40 or 50 miles away.

Mr ADAMS—What have you seen of the damage that camels are doing, especially further out into the desert area? Have you had much experience with that?

Mr Everett—I have not. I have worked in the Kimberley the whole time I have been with the Department of Agriculture. We do not actually have a camel problem up here. We have had the odd isolated ones that are starting to come up now. Pete might tell you later on. He is at Dampier Downs, which is bordering that country. There are big numbers starting to move up. Richard might like to talk on camels. Have you had a bit to do with camels?

Mr ADAMS—We have mainly been getting evidence about the damage that the camels' increased populations are doing, especially in the desert areas. They are certainly putting pressure on that lower pastoral area, but we are also concerned about the environmental damage that they are possibly causing out there to the area's biodiversity.

Mr Watkins—I guess I have not had a lot of first-hand experience with them. However, I liaise quite closely with the pastoralists in the Pilbara. I am certainly aware that they have been causing a lot of impact, especially over the last few years, with numbers being very significant and impacting on Balfour Downs, Don Hoar's country, and also right through to Warrawagine. They have certainly been damaging fences coming in to a large degree and water holes to a degree. Having read papers on camels, I understand their grazing habits are quite different to those of cattle. They are lot more herbivorous, so they graze on different things and they graze up higher.

Mr ADAMS—On trees.

Mr Watkins—In the past it has been seen that it would not necessarily impact environmentally, but from what I hear nowadays I think there might be a bit of a change in opinion. Any large number of animals has certainly got to be impacting on it, for sure.

Mr SECKER—Do the camels run in herds as much as, say, donkeys do?

Mr Watkins—Yes.

Mr LINDSAY—Richard, you may not be able to answer this, but do you think that the success you have had with the donkey program could be repeated in a camel program?

Mr Watkins—Yes, I certainly do.

Mr LINDSAY—Fantastic.

Mr Watkins—We are even trialling it on starlings in the south-west this year as well. We have found new infestations of starlings by using this technique as well.

Mr ADAMS—You must use a slightly different collar!

Mr Watkins—Yes—just a smidgin smaller!

CHAIR—Do you have adequate resources available? Are they still available to you to continue your Judas program or is that a problem? If so, where is it a problem?

Mr Watkins—With regards to the Kimberley, we get what I consider sufficient funds from the declared plant and animal control program to run an adequate program. I believe there are adequate funds within that area. That is certainly costing the pastoralists quite a lot of money at the moment. However, we believe this program is not going to be ongoing, at least not to the same degree it is at the moment. By 2010, most of this major work that we are doing now should be reduced considerably and the cost should come right down as well. In saying that, there are other areas of the state, such as the Pilbara, where we have the same program. However, we certainly have a different situation there. There are fewer pastoralists, the ratings and the capital value of the properties are not the same and there is certainly not adequate money in the Pilbara to do an effective program. So we are struggling on down there at the moment.

Mr SECKER—Is the number of donkeys down there very high as well?

Mr Watkins—In various spots they can be in significant numbers, but they do not breed as quickly there as they seem to up here, so they do not seem to have the same level of impact. Those are my thoughts, anyway.

Mr WINDSOR—I would like to confirm some of the figures on the slide you are showing us. Is that 81,000 animals over that period of nine years?

Mr Watkins—It is over about 10 or 11 years.

Mr WINDSOR—At an average cost of \$70 a head, that is about \$5.6 million.

Mr Watkins—I think about \$5.8 million has been spent. That is not only control; that is also regulatory as well—inspection and being out there. That pays for staff time to a degree.

Mr WINDSOR—Is it fair to say that that is 40,000 cattle that are not being run, or am I oversimplifying that?

Mr Watkins—No.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Has the productivity of the stations gone up as a result of your eradication program?

Mr Watkins—We have certainly had pastoralists who have said that the condition of their country has improved significantly since donkeys have been removed from the property.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—How big a problem are horses?

Mr Watkins—Horses can be an equal problem. While we do feral donkey control, we also undertake control of feral camels, feral pigs and whatever may be an issue on that property. We do not isolate just the feral donkeys. So all that money includes control of camels—

CHAIR—And feral pigs and horses and other—

Mr Watkins—Yes, all species.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—How many a year do you take out?

CHAIR—Do you have any figures on those animals that you have eradicated through that program?

Mr Watkins—We do have some, but they are not quite as good as these figures. They are not kept as meticulously.

CHAIR—Could you give us an indication? It is very important in terms of the cost to the community. The point that Mr Windsor just made is that the cost of culling the donkeys is overinflated, when in fact the control of camels, feral pigs and wild dogs is incorporated in the use of that money.

Mr Watkins—Off the cuff, I would say that there may be another 5,000 animals, but that would probably not significantly distort the figures.

CHAIR—That is the answer that I wanted.

Mr WINDSOR—Would you know what the gross margin of a steer or cattle unit is out here?

Mr Watkins—Pete can probably answer that best.

Mr De Long—I live at Dampier Downs station. I have one neighbour between Broome, Derby and my place. I am on the edge of the desert, with 20-inch rainfall. The place is a medium-sized place with low-carrying capacity. It has one owner-operator and one cranky son. I bought it in 1968 and added to it in 1976. I am on my third set of neighbours. I am either stubborn or doing something right. I agree with quite a few of the things that Richard said, but I also disagree with some of them, because I have to make a living on that. We pay an APB rate into this program and sometimes economic considerations go by the way, in order to get rid of the problem. The donkey problem has been successful—fine. Ask your question, please.

Mr WINDSOR—What is the gross margin of the cow or steer unit—or however you define what you are running?

Mr De Long—I sold some cattle onto the boat to Indonesia, because there is no other place to go. The steers were 34 months old. They averaged 386 kilos. The cattle buyer came back and said: ‘Please, I need some for this next boat. I will give you a higher price and I will not charge you commission.’

Mr ADAMS—How much is it a kilo?

Mr De Long—The last group averaged 386 kilos and I got \$1.35 then. They are offering me \$1.70 now. We hear that everybody gets more, but we do not here.

CHAIR—So it is about \$500 a head?

Mr De Long—Yes.

CHAIR—All right, Mr De Long: can we leave you there? We will go through this presentation and then will continue with you giving your presentation.

Mr Watkins—The arrow on this slide is on Pete’s property. We are over here in Broome. This slide gives an indication of the number of feral donkeys controlled by year. From 1978, in the early phases, there were up to 50,000 donkeys controlled per year. You will see that, as the years progressed towards the early 1990s, that declined quite significantly—to low numbers. Since then, we have been shooting between 5,000 animals and 10,000 animals per year.

This next graph shows the radiotelemetry progress, which commenced in 1994-95. It expanded in various incremental stages to cover a little over 80 properties. It covered 90 properties this financial year. The dark purple lines show what are called locally eradicated properties. That started around 1998, and they have now increased to more than 43 properties.

CHAIR—So you have eradicated donkeys from about 50 per cent of your targeted properties?

Mr Watkins—That is correct. At the moment, most of the properties below the Leopold Ranges are pretty well clear. The northern area is mainly where we are doing control work now. Within five years, we would like to think that that area will be like the area below the Leopold Ranges. This slide here shows the areas involved. It is a year out of date. The purple area at the top is the area that is free. We are doing an area of about 220,000 square kilometres—or a little bit more now. At the moment, we have one-third to half of that clear.

For the time we have been doing the control, we have recorded the number of donkeys that have been shot through the year. This table here shows by property what sorts of numbers were shot. We started in 1978. This shows a portion of the properties. You will see that some of the numbers are quite large. On Mount Hart one year they shot over 5,000 animals. Four years later they shot 7,000 on the same property. At Mount House/Glenroy they shot 4,000 in one year and 6,000 two years later. On the Ord River Regeneration Reserve they shot 8,000 animals. There were huge numbers of animals on these properties.

Mr WINDSOR—Richard, they would only be the ones that are controlled through the program, wouldn't they?

Mr Watkins—Yes.

Mr WINDSOR—There would be a lot of ground shooting around waterholes and whatever as well wouldn't there?

Mr Watkins—Yes, and they have not been included in these figures.

Mr WINDSOR—Do you have a rough idea of—

CHAIR—The numbers they would have picked up on those ground shootings?

Mr Watkins—I could only guess, really, but I would have said another 20 per cent.

CHAIR—Very interesting.

Mr Watkins—They were actually shooting animals on the ground while they were mustering as well. So there would have been just huge numbers. As the years go on, you can see that the numbers go down significantly. They were shooting thousands and then you start getting down to lower numbers—in the one hundreds.

CHAIR—So not only have the numbers decreased but the time factor has decreased too. Would I be right in saying that?

Mr Watkins—That is correct, yes. During the radiotelemetry program we have kept a table of the results on each property on each particular run that has gone on. Within that, we are recording the number of hours, what the costs have been within each one, the number of donkeys culled off the collars themselves, the numbers of donkeys culled opportunistically and the total number of donkeys.

This spreadsheet is for a property called El Questro. We started that in April 1999. These are the numbers being controlled. You can see that for the first three years, generally, they are very significant numbers. As time goes on they have certainly reduced. The ones you start shooting opportunistically start going down to zero, and the ones on the collars are still picking up donkeys. Then you get to the stage where you are shooting the collars as well. On this particular property they shot 1,400 donkeys. The total cost over that time was about \$60,000. This varies a lot between some of the stations. We have spent \$100,000 on some of them and we have spent less on some.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Over that period, what would that station have paid in levies to the government, roughly?

CHAIR—Would it average 2½ thousand dollars a year?

Mr Watkins—Maybe \$10,000?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—So you expect they will be spending \$6 for \$1 as part of the helping?

CHAIR—You cannot use that as a ballpark figure; it is only for that station.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Just for this station, yes.

Mr Watkins—And some stations do not have any donkeys at all, you see, and they are paying for this person as well.

Mr WINDSOR—I guess the question Martin is asking is: what is the cost recovery? How much is government putting in and how much is the land-holder putting in?

Mr Watkins—Dollar for dollar.

Mr ADAMS—So this program is getting no income other than the money from the levy and the matching dollar from the government?

Mr Watkins—We do get some money from other landowners occasionally. We get a little bit from the Defence reserve every now and then and some from CALM from time to time as well.

CHAIR—But basically it is that cost, and anything else you get is a bonus—and the ongoing cost is the cost to the department for your wages?

Mr Watkins—Yes.

CHAIR—For the wages of the people involved?

Mr Watkins—Yes. Initially those figures were not recorded—they were part of the government process. However nowadays, in the full cost recovery manner we have operated in since 2002, it is our time as well as the cost recovery—in the actual control work on the ground.

Mr WINDSOR—Richard, on the surface this seems like a very successful program. What are the critics saying? What are the negatives that you are getting? Are you able to give us some comment there?

Mr Watkins—Yes. Some of the negatives relate to the fact that we do have properties that run tourist enterprises. They would like to retain a few donkeys around the area for the tourism benefits they bring. They were quite opposed, in some circumstances, to the program going ahead. It has taken a fair bit of pressure from pastoralists and from us to try to turn those people around so that they become part of the program. I guess that is one negative. There are also scientists who say that eradication cannot be achieved. We agree with that, so we always just call this local eradication in small areas. They criticised the program to a degree, and we certainly watch our wording for that reason. There are the animal welfare components of the program. We keep our heads down on the fact that we are culling animals. We do not really want that to be fully public knowledge, to a large degree. We just prefer to go out there and see the job done and keep our heads down.

Mr WINDSOR—What is the preferred method of dispatch? What rifles are you using?

Mr Watkins—We use SLRs—military rifles. Especially in the earlier days, when the numbers were very high, using the other firearms was not feasible from the point of view of cocking and handling. The military rifles are self-loading, so it is a much smoother operation. It is much more humane using them.

CHAIR—The killing impact is greater?

Mr Watkins—It is not so much the killing impact; it is the fact that you can carry out the operation quicker. If you do not hit the right spot with the first bullet then you have another one there and you can hit the trigger again. However if you are using a bolt action rifle you would have to take your point of aim off, cock the rifle and then try and shoot it. If you are in a moving helicopter you lose the opportunity to do that.

CHAIR—We will just have a few more questions, unless you want to add something that you think is pertinent, and then we will shut this part of the inquiry down and go on to Mr De Long. But if there is anything that you feel you would like to make an input to, keeping in mind that you do not often get an opportunity to talk to a committee like this one on an issue such as this, we would appreciate you doing that.

Mr Everett—No, there is no more to add as far as the negative aspects go. Most of the feedback I have got has been very positive. I think it has been one of the most successful programs we have run. People are actually seeing results. Most of the feedback is very positive, particularly within the industry—outside it, it may be a bit hard for a lot of people to understand.

Mr LINDSAY—You introduced yourself as a biosecurity officer.

Mr Everett—You are not going to ask me what that means.

Mr LINDSAY—No. What I am going to ask you is: what are the perceived biosecurity threats to Australia—and you might have to answer that in relation to this region—from pest animals?

That does not only cover donkeys, it includes camels, dogs and pigs and the like. Are you detecting any emerging biosecurity threats in pest animals in the northern part of Australia?

Mr Everett—We are. In general, what most people are concerned about is the feral pig. Pigs are known to be vectors of and reservoirs for diseases—particularly if something like foot and mouth gets into the country. As Richard was saying, even though we do cull a few pigs opportunistically we do not go looking for them on this program. Basically if they are in our line of flight and we fly over some pigs we will go and nail them while we are in the area. In other areas big pig numbers are not where the donkeys are, so at this stage maybe they are not getting dealt with as they should. Hopefully, once this winds down a bit, there will be a lot more money available and possibly the next target species will be the pigs. I think there will have to be a fair bit of effort put in too.

Mr SECKER—Would you put pigs at a higher priority than camels?

Mr Everett—Pastoralists generally do not. From an agricultural point of view, donkeys do far more damage by overgrazing. Pigs certainly do a lot more environmental damage to the water courses. I think that from an agricultural perspective people are bit more concerned about pigs now, with pigs being vectors for disease—human diseases too, such as Japanese encephalitis and, obviously, foot and mouth. Pigs are one concern that people are starting to realise needs to be controlled.

Mr LINDSAY—You guys gave evidence earlier that certain committees might be interested in relating to CALM contributing to the costs of your department. You are both from Western Australian government departments. We have heard people in other areas of Western Australia complaining about CALM not managing their properties, but you sounded a bit more positive about it. Do you have good relations with CALM? Do they work cooperatively with you in relation to pest animal eradication on their property?

Mr Watkins—CALM are very keen to be in control of introduced species on their lands. However, when it comes to putting their hands in their pocket, it seems that is where our problems begin. So, although they would like to get on top of these issues, they never seem to have the funds to direct to this program—I do not know why.

Mr SECKER—Has anybody looked at the feasibility of harvesting the donkeys?

Mr Watkins—Donkeys were harvested in the early and mid-eighties, certainly for pet meat. Significant operations had been carried out throughout the Kimberley while they were in big numbers. This is probably another negative point: we were criticised by the pet meat providers for undertaking this program, because it basically took away their livelihood.

Mr Everett—To quickly add to that point: I suppose the other group has been recreational shooters. A lot of them used to go out and shoot a few donkeys. It is good for us to hear them saying they cannot find them; it is great to hear that. They are concentrating on pigs, which is good, because that is the other recreational activity.

CHAIR—The reality is the only commercial enterprise that you get out of donkeys would be pet food, and the return does not warrant the continuance of it.

Mr Everett—That is right; there is no money in it. Some go out for horses, particularly when there are big horse numbers. They do not even bother taking the donkeys because there is as much work in butchering a donkey as there is a horse and yet there is nowhere near the amount of meat off it, so a lot of them do not bother. There was an abattoir set up in Derby purely for that—donkeys. That is when donkeys were abundant, but it just was not economic.

Mr ADAMS—Are you telling us it failed?

Mr Everett—Yes, it failed. Basically because of transport costs and everything else. Roo meat is a lot cheaper to access through the south-west, which is where the markets are. Transporting donkey meat just was not economical.

CHAIR—If they could successfully—what is the word; I have to be careful here—substitute donkey meat for cow meat, like they did with the horses, they would make a good bit of money. Based on your experience, in what areas of pest control do you believe further research is required? Also, do you think that there is sufficient money coming from all levels of government to address the issue of pest animal control in this region?

Mr Watkins—With regard to the research side of things, one of the factors, which Mick pointed out, is the feral pig situation. That is certainly an increasing trend—the numbers are increasing in the north-west of WA. We do not have an effective control program or tool to use in that area at this stage. That is certainly an area we would like to look at more intensively. Our department is certainly looking at that area to a degree, but we have a fair way to go yet.

CHAIR—How proactive do you think we are as a nation in taking action to address the issue of the potential threat of the cane toad?

Mr ADAMS—Could we collar it?

CHAIR—Would you agree that it is a very, very significant threat to the Australian ecology? Do you think we need to address it a little bit more aggressively than we have?

Mr Watkins—From a Western Australian perspective, cane toads will definitely have a horrendous impact in the Kimberleys from an ecological point of view. There is no doubt about it. I am afraid that what we can actually do about it at the moment from our tools on hand is fairly limited.

CHAIR—But community education is only part of the process, isn't it?

Mr Watkins—For sure.

CHAIR—My view is that governments have to do a lot more and do it very quickly if we want to protect the ecology of the far north.

Mr Watkins—Certainly it would be good to pull a tool off the shelf that we could do something with, but at this stage we do not have a tool that we can actually do that with.

Mr SECKER—You have collars suitable for donkeys and probably camels. Would you have a problem with getting collars to stay on pigs?

Mr Watkins—It is an issue. They have been trialled—

Mr Everett—They are difficult to keep on because of the shape of the animal.

Mr Watkins—Apparently they did some work on that in the Northern Territory, and they had problems there.

Mr Everett—Using a harness means that the cost goes up again. However, pigs generally need harnesses. It has to be able to expand and—

Mr Watkins—Their condition varies so much throughout the year, from the wet season through to the dry. So there were some animal welfare concerns there as well.

Mr ADAMS—Talking about things off the shelf, where the research and the need for research comes into it, has the new bait for the pigs been trialled up here or used at all?

Mr Watkins—The new bait?

Mr ADAMS—They have developed a corn based bait.

Mr Watkins—Mick has been involved with some baiting trails out at one of the stations. It is using grain baits. Baiting over a small area can be done and you can be successful. However, when looking over the extensive areas that we operate in—thousands of kilometres—we really need something like we use in the wild dog trial programs. That is a bait which you can drop from the air and which will be successful.

CHAIR—Mr Adams is referring to a new bait program through the Animal Control Technologies field. That is just coming onto the market now. Apparently very good field trials have indicated that it is exceptionally good as a bait.

Mr Everett—Last year we tried to incorporate the trial over here in some of the pig trials that we were doing and see how it went. We were basically free-feeding them on fermented wheat, and once we got a 100 per cent take it was laced with 1080, which worked very successfully. As a matter of interest, we also trialled the Judas technique on feral pigs some time ago. I did not believe it would work, knowing the habit of pigs, but it was a question of: 'How do you know? Go out, do it and prove it.' But pigs are totally different animals to donkeys. They are not social animals. Once you know where the pigs are, just get in there and hammer them. Collaring or harnessing is a hindrance because when you come to a mob of pigs you do not want to shoot your Judas one, so before you start shooting you try and work out which one is a Judas pig. By the time you have done that, the pigs have gone every which way and you have lost them. So it is not very successful on pigs. It might be good for isolated numbers in national parks, where they can just have one or can roam around and find out where the other pigs might be, but it is not good for big numbers.

Mr ADAMS—But it is a matter of finding the pig numbers in an area as big as the Kimberleys to be able to be successful.

Mr Everett—Yes, and they do not seem to roam that much. There is no need. In the trial that we did on Brooking Springs Station we put one on each of their man-made dams. Everyone had pigs. I think we shot 560 pigs in three days as we went around, and then we came back and could not find any more pigs. These Judas pigs were quite happy to stay where they were on their little spot and attract them again a few months later. They did not bother to move. They were quite happy to stay where they were.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Richard, do you want to make a further comment?

Mr Watkins—Yes. There are some other issues within the north-west. We have a native rat, *Rattus villosissimus*, in the Ord River irrigation area. It can also be an animal pest problem for us. It is a native rat which goes into plague numbers after certain seasonal conditions. We need to have control techniques available and ready on hand for those sorts of situations that occur. It has mainly had an impact on the horticultural area rather than on the pastoral areas, so it is a different scenario. We also have problems with birds being introduced on boats. Within the Pilbara we have had especially significant numbers of sparrows and Indian crows coming in on big boats—ore carriers and salt boats. They come in and start to create colonies within the area as well. They are exotic species coming in. You have heard about the wild dogs, no doubt. I think that is an Australia wide problem as well.

Mr ADAMS—We heard some evidence yesterday that the wild dog and the dingo are pretty well mixed up around here. Are there any pure dingoes left up here, or is there a mixture of other dogs in the colours now?

Mr Watkins—I think this is all subject to personal opinion to a large degree. I personally consider that there would be heaps of dingoes out there.

Mr Everett—Particularly once you get up to the north Kimberley. There are still 100 per cent purebred dingoes up there. The ones in the Fitzroy Valley and highly populated areas are mostly hybrids with community dogs now, but there are still plenty of purebred dingoes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Once again we have been very fortunate as a committee to hear and obtain some very interesting information from people in the field such as you. We appreciate the time you have taken to give the information and the evidence here to this committee today and I thank you very much for that. As I said, it has been very interesting from our point of view and very informative. I am sure that we will use the information that you have given us in the report that we are putting together and will hopefully have together by about October of this year. Thank you very much.

I must also formally welcome Pete De Long, the representative of the Kimberley Zone Control Authority, who joined the table during the discussion. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr De Long—I have been nominated to the ZCA for the Kimberley three times, so I am a long-serving member of the authority and I own a pastoral station.

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

Mr De Long—Yes, I would. When I heard that I would get the chance to speak to the federal government I went for a cruise around my place and looked at what I had done and what I had not done.

Mr ADAMS—This is the federal parliament, not just the government.

Mr De Long—Okay. I beg your pardon, but what is the difference? To me, you are in the big picture—

CHAIR—I will make an explanation of what Mr Adams was getting at. We are not all members of the federal government. We are members of the federal parliament, across the broad spectrum of politics. We have an Independent, members of the Labor Party, members of the Liberal Party and members of the National Party who make up this joint standing committee. We are appointed by the House of Representatives, not by the government, so there is a big difference.

Mr De Long—I would say thank goodness! You have heard about the big picture; I will give you a little picture. If the presentation were on, it would show you where I live and what it looks like. My problems are donkeys, dingoes, foxes, pigs, camels and sometimes tourists.

Mr LINDSAY—What about mining companies?

Mr De Long—We had the oil company for a long time, and since they got the offshore things not much has shown up at all. At least they were available enough that if you had a problem you could go see them and they were pretty good. The donkeys have been pretty successful and talked about quite a bit, but the donkeys were at a cost. You asked, ‘Did you recoup anything out of it?’ And \$70 a head is a fair cost to shoot a donkey, but to get rid of all of them meant putting in a lot of money. I have to operate with what I make, and that eliminated the donkeys but there was no cash return; it all went out. We pay half of the APB rates. When I was first paying APB rates I paid \$97 a year. I think that was the first time the dollars came through. I have not looked at it exactly, but I am up into the thousands: \$4,500 comes to mind. That is not too far off.

The donkeys have been sold at a cost. When they shoot the donkeys—I suggested this a number of times at the APB meetings, and it has not been cost wise, has not been available or the helicopter was too light—they could drop some 1080 baits on the donkeys to eliminate the free food for the dingoes. The dingo population is up. It could have been done economically if the baits were available, if the helicopter were big enough and if the man who was shooting had time. It all comes back to cost, but that is one of the problems with donkey shooting: it has, in my opinion, increased the pups’ ability to survive. We have had some good seasons, too, so removal of the donkeys has provided a lot of food.

On the dingo question—are they pure or are they not pure—I would make the observation that if we eliminated every wild dog in Australia and you needed some pure dingoes, you could go to Indonesia and get them next week. If you go into the villages you see that the dogs look just like dingoes. Maybe that is not true, but I do not think we will ever eliminate all of the dingoes. I shot one killing a calf 100 yards from my place since I received the notice to attend that meeting. I could hear the calf moan in the night, so I went out there with a spotlight and rifle and noticed the dingo chewing on it. The dingo was half white, so it looked kind of like a collie dog. The calf that it was chewing on died two days later. I went out, got it up and treated its wounds, but it had just had too much. Also, we hit a dingo this year driving out of Derby. It swerved from one car going by, and I hit it. There are enough dingoes around to run over and to shoot.

Foxes are not so much of a problem, but they are building up and the dingoes are building up. Obviously they are my biggest problem. The donkeys contributed a food supply for a bit. If you cull the camels and you do not control the dingoes, you are going to have a real carryover and they will spill in. I handle the foxes on a one-to-one basis by getting 1080 from Mick, baiting eggs and burying them along the road. I do not see the foxes, but the traps disappear. The bandicoots have increased since I have been at the place. The turkeys have increased since I have locked the gates.

Mr SECKER—What damage do the foxes do up here?

Mr De Long—We have foxes and they are building up.

Mr SECKER—What damage do they do up here?

Mr De Long—I bought my daughters some Khaki Campbell ducks so they would know what they were, and they came out and there were bodies inside the cage but the heads were gone—foxes. Foxes are a bit of a problem.

But the dingoes are the problem with the cows. They chew them up. They do not kill them outright, but the cows do not survive. I have cattle with ears and tails eaten off. It has not been too bad lately, because we have stayed with the 1080 twice a year. It terrorises me that it will be eliminated and nothing will replace it, because it has put a bit of control in and it has helped the ecology and the wildlife. It has also helped our calf crops.

CHAIR—Where did the foxes originate? The foxes were originally isolated to the southern end of Australia. How have they been introduced into the northern end of Australia?

Mr De Long—As I said, I bought Dampier in '67 or '68. In the first year there I shot a fox. I picked him up and the fleas ran up my arm, so I dropped him. I see the odd fox all the time. I had a man live with me for 20 years named Aubrey Armstrong; he was a dogger. He said, 'They say foxes aren't up here,' but he dogged on the Fitzroy and Liveringa sheep stations and he said, 'The foxes are here.' That was from the late sixties. So as far as I know they have been here all the time.

Mr Watkins—They seem to stop at the desert boundary. They do not seem to go any further north. We are not familiar with them being in the north or central Kimberley. But where Pete lives they have certainly been reported on an annual basis to be there.

Mr ADAMS—In huge numbers?

Mr De Long—No. But I have seen foxes on the road coming in from Broome this year.

Mr ADAMS—The bandicoot is a native bandicoot, is it?

Mr De Long—The bandicoots are a success story. I am really quite pleased with them. We have a class C wildlife reserve below us on the range. I have told people—Norm McKenzie and Dr Burbridge—and they have said they do not believe the foxes are a problem. I say that they are. I caught a bandicoot with no tail. If you see a bandicoot running down the road you will notice he flops his tail one way and he goes the other so that the fox or whatever is after him goes for the tail. I caught a bandicoot with a stub for a tail, so he had used his tail to survive.

Mr ADAMS—But are they a native animal of the Kimberley?

Mr De Long—The rabbit-eared bandicoot is, yes. The fox is not. Nobody has mentioned cats. We have heard there is a bait for pigs and we hope that will come pretty quick. We have heard that there is a bait for cats. Feral cats destroy more native fauna in my area than anything else. If you shoot one and open it up, you will find lizards and the works. They really go overboard. We had a half-dingo pup bred from our dog. It was a delightful thing and it was a killer. At three o'clock in the afternoon on a hot day it would nudge you and go out hunting. It killed chestnut banded rail in my yard. It killed all of the blue-tongues. It killed everything. It died; it should have done sooner. We will never get rid of the dingoes. We will never get rid of the foxes.

On the pigs, next on my list, I have tried a little bit. I have built a pig trap. It has an electric eye and a five-foot reversible gate. It is set open and in it is a shot animal or a dead cow, because that is what pigs live on in our country. They go in, break the electric beam and the door closes. When they come out they go out into a trap. I spent a couple of thousand dollars on it this year and it did not work. The pig ran into the door and bent it. The pig was still in there but nothing else came in. I will try again, but that would be a place where I would suggest some federal money could do something with the pigs.

One of the fellows in the Fitzroy Valley has found another answer. He has invited the Darwin sportsman club to come through his place and shoot pigs. I hear that has been very successful. I do not know how many cows they shot too. That is one way of getting rid of build-up numbers. After getting this thing, I drove through the place. I saw four pigs and I shot two of them. The other two were too fast. They were pretty big porkers. I do not know whether or not you could shoot them from a helicopter successfully, because they really move. There are not many camels on our place, but a suggestion came to my mind today—if you put collars on these camels, they should be put on the bulls rather than the cows, because the bulls are the ones that come into season. I had one fall in love with my Toyota last year. That was very interesting.

We have some people, I call them the desert duellers, who come into the desert when it is miserable in Perth and Canberra. There is an astrophysicist from Switzerland and a number of other people. A botanist was there this year picking up plants. He found 90 on Dampier Downs for the herbarium. They do an awful lot of good and they also get away from the cold. They had a desert discovery tour sponsored by David Hewitt last year. I thought two people were going to show up, and 76 showed up. They found 10 new species of ants. One fellow is going back this

year to see if he can find sandgropers, the little blind moles, and we have a man who writes for a four-wheel drive publication named Neil Cox.

I asked them yesterday about camels. They have gone all through the Sandy Desert, the Great Sandy Desert and the Little Sandy Desert this year, and they say the camel numbers are up and you see tracks everywhere. They have seen bunches of 10 to 100. Neil Cox is supporting a man who is walking every desert in Australia for some sort of record. He is walking the Little Sandy Desert this year and he will walk the Great Sandy Desert if he survives. I think he has done seven of the nine deserts. He has a problem—he fell off a glacier or something in Antarctica and he is limping. They say that they see camels in the desert. I have not seen them, but I believe them. Kangaroo and emu numbers are up a bit. To finish, that was all the bad news. I have some good news: we have no rabbits, no goats and no cane toads yet.

Mr WINDSOR—You mentioned earlier that in terms of cash flow, it was cash out to control the donkeys. On your property, have you seen an increase in your carrying capacity for your livestock?

Mr De Long—No, but some of that is due to other problems. I have a low calving percentage and a low survivability of weaners. If you look at the slide, you will have an idea. It is beautiful when it rains and when it does not rain it is deadly. What I have seen with the donkeys, and this is true, is that since they shot them out, the wild bushfires have increased and they have done more damage. With the people, whatever ethnic persuasion they are, travelling around, we get fires. So we have to burn, and the cattle come to the burnt country, which helps—we can control the cattle a little bit that way. We also control by trapping and some fences. They have been unsatisfactory. The bushfires are a real problem and, since eliminating the donkeys and the number of cattle in the Kimberley, we have been getting more fires, and we have more people too.

Mr ADAMS—So there is more fuel out there.

Mr De Long—More fuel, yes.

CHAIR—And more cigarette butts.

Mr ADAMS—But you burn some areas in a mosaic sort of operation?

Mr De Long—Yes, we do.

Mr ADAMS—I take it wildfires start from lightning strikes?

Mr De Long—Not in August. That is the one we fear because the south-easterly is blowing. If you see smoke in August you are in trouble.

CHAIR—So it is caused by exhaust pipes, cigarette butts et cetera?

Mr De Long—Among other things, yes. But you see tyre tracks. It only takes one of the 500 people who come through and it goes. We are trying to control it. The things that interest me are the bushfire board, the APB and the soil conservation districts. The rest of it someone else will

have to solve. Stopping the dams on the Kimberley or the Fitzroy or whatever is for somebody else.

Mr SECKER—Are you restricted from running more cattle? If there is more feed around, surely you could run more cattle.

Mr De Long—That is what I said. Yes, I can run more cattle in a concentrated area. I have some other problems with calving rates and survivability. Some of it I have not figured out yet.

Mr ADAMS—If there are fewer donkeys then there is more grass.

Mr De Long—That is right.

Mr ADAMS—Whatever is there, more cattle can eat it.

Mr De Long—I am certainly glad that the donkeys are gone from my place. Mick found three last time. Those are fairly expensive donkeys but it is worth finishing the job.

CHAIR—Mr De Long, can I just ask you two questions with regard to prevention? What changes, if any, would you as a practising land-holder like to see made to quarantine and surveillance systems to improve the prevention of new pest species entering the state of Western Australia? In other words, how effective is the Western Australian quarantine border checkpoint at, say, Kununurra, in reducing the risks of pests entering from interstate? Do you think they are doing it effectively enough or do they need assistance or to be expanded, or whatever?

Mr De Long—One of the problems—and it is financial—for this board is that they have an entrance from the Northern Territory below Halls Creek. They go down there randomly because they do not have enough money to man a permanent checkpoint there. Money is a problem but so is the direction. You can throw an awful lot of money at a bad project or a project that nobody is willing to complete—such as the project on the noogoora burr on the Fitzroy.

CHAIR—What is that?

Mr De Long—It is a thorn. It is still quarantined but it is not solvable now. A lot of money was thrown at it for a time and there was control of it and then it stopped. That is what frightens me—that you would stop the control of the donkeys when it is almost finished. Even if it costs \$70 a head now, finish it, please. We are paying half of it and we believe in it. The people who paid the rates in the north Kimberley waited 10 years for us to finish the job in the south. They deserve to finish it there, too. That is successful, at a cost. You could eliminate the camels at a cost. The camels do not worry me as much as the dingoes—and the dingoes have been with us all the time.

CHAIR—Do you think it would be fair to say that because of the isolation of this part of Australia and the distance between here and the bureaucrats who make the decisions in the south, there is probably an out of sight, out of mind mentality which creates the problems that you have just described by their not seeing the urgency of supplying sufficient funds and manpower to do the job that needs to be done up here?

Mr De Long—Yes. We have just lost one state representative to the south, so we have less of a say than we had before. When I first came here the officer in charge for the government in the Kimberley moved from Derby to Perth. If you do not see the problem, you do not work on it.

Mr WINDSOR—I am interested in your comments about the cat. Where would you rate the cat, in terms of ecological damage, compared with some of the other pests that affect the hip pocket?

Mr De Long—For me personally, dingoes are my biggest problem because the donkeys were eliminated, but the donkeys have helped to create the problem by increasing the survivability of the dingoes. Not very much has been done with pigs. If you had half a day, I could show you the damage they do on the river frontages. Then there are cats. I mention dogs because they work my cows, and pigs because they work the country, and cats because they kill everything and survive anywhere. I worked for the oil company, grading a track three years ago—they went south, below us, and drilled—and I knocked cats out of an ant hill that was 50 kilometres from water, so they survive.

Mr WINDSOR—Were they big cats?

Mr De Long—Some of them were big and one was even furry. So they survive.

Mr WINDSOR—With a big head.

Mr De Long—I have seen some big cats but not as big as I have heard about on the radio.

CHAIR—Following up on the question from Mr Windsor, would it be true to say that the cat is total in its destruction, that cats take not only mammals but also birds whereas other animals do not take the variety of native fauna that they take. Would that be a true observation?

Mr De Long—Yes, I accept that.

CHAIR—Mr De Long, thank you very much for making your time available as a person out there who is struggling to survive, like all of you people on the land are. We appreciate your coming here to give your views on an issue that we have found very educational, right across Australia, particularly relating to the general thrust of finding out what pest animals do and what their impact on agriculture is. We cannot get that information. In our various ways, from our various electorates in various states, we can learn about and be aware of the problem at a state level, but, for us to get a full overview of how bad the pest animal problem is across Australia, we have to come and meet with people like you. So we thank you, as we have thanked other people who have given evidence so far, in the final stages of this inquiry. You can rest assured that the evidence you have given here today will be used as part of our report. Hopefully our recommendations will be picked up by government—our role is to put out a report and make recommendations—because members of this committee are aware that if government does not listen to the problems related to pest animals, and that includes local pest animals as well as introduced species, then the ecology of this country is going to face some very devastating times. So, on behalf of the committee, I thank you for your contribution today.

Mr De Long—Thank you very much for letting me bend your ear.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 11.05 am