



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND  
FORESTRY

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

FRIDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2005

COOMA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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

**Friday, 9 September 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 Wilson and Mr Windsor

**Members in attendance:** Mr Forrest, Mr Schultz 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**

<b>ALCOCK, Mr John, Stud Breeder, and Member, Monaro Merino Association Inc. ....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>CLIFFORD, Mr Brian, Chairman, Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CONSTANCE, Mr Ernie, Private capacity .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>GOLBY, Mrs Sylvia Mary, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>GREEN, Mr William, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>GREEN, Mrs Ellen Mary, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>HEDGER, Mr Harley John, Member, Monaro Merino Association Inc. ....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>HILLYER, Mr Graham John, Ranger (Multi-skilled), Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INGRAM, Mr Stephen Gregory, Deputy Chairman, Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>KENNEDY, Mrs Marion, Chairperson, Adaminaby Yaouk Wild Dog Committee .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>KING, Mr John N., Stud Breeder, and President, Monaro Merino Association Inc.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>LITCHFIELD, Mr Robert Michael, Area Representative, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>LITCHFIELD, Mrs Susan, Former Secretary, Monaro Merino Association Inc.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>LITCHFIELD, Mrs Susan, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>MAGUIRE, Mr Robert Edward, Representative, Rocky Plain-Snowy Plain Cooperative Wild Dog Working Group; and Member, Advisory Panel, Wild Dog Management, Kosciuszko Region .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>SEARS, Mr Timothy, Managing Ranger, Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SPENCER, Mr Peter James, Private capacity .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>TALBOT, Mrs Coral Margaret, Private capacity .....</b>	<b>47</b>



**Committee met at 9.58 am****HILLYER, Mr Graham John, Ranger (Multi-skilled), Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board****INGRAM, Mr Stephen Gregory, Deputy Chairman, Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board****CLIFFORD, Mr Brian, Chairman, Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board****SEEARS, Mr Timothy, Managing Ranger, Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board**

**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 has received over 100 submissions and has held public hearings and inspections in Canberra, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia. Today's hearing will be the last one for the inquiry and the committee is now moving to finalise its deliberations and prepare a report for tabling in the House later this year.

I welcome the representatives of the Cooma Rural Lands Protection Board and the Bombala Rural Lands Protection Board. 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. Do any of you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submissions or make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Seears**—There is just one thing that I would like to add to the Cooma board's submission. With regard to the impact of science on our pest animals eradication program, it has been especially relevant in this area over the last seven years in the prevention of aerial baiting within crown land because of research that was carried out on the impact of quolls. Over the last three years, there has been research carried out in the southern area of the state, here in the Ingebyra area, in the Byadbo part of Kosciuszko National Park and also in the northern part. Basically, that science has now shown that aerial baiting does not have an impact on quolls. The official results of that research have not been released as yet; I understand the release should be next week or the week after. I have been involved in it, so I know that that has been the result. It is an indication of what poor science does to what was proving to be an effective program. Before putting in place things that affect current programs, there should be better research carried out.

**Mr Clifford**—It might be of benefit if I summarise after the submissions by Tim and Graham.

**Mr Hillyer**—A further thing that I would like to bring up—and I mentioned this in the submission—is that over the last 12 months we have had a lot of comments about the problems of native animals, especially cockatoos and wood ducks. They are starting to have a big impact on agricultural crops, especially in our area. Also, there is the issue of the white cockatoo. We are getting an increased number of pine plantations in the area and the cockatoos are causing big problems, especially in the park areas, with pine tree wildings. They are an emerging problem there.

The wood ducks are causing a lot of problems with newly sown pasture and crops. Where you might have had to sow an extra acre or two, you now have to put in a lot more to support them. They are having a very big impact and they are certainly increasing in large numbers. I would just like to add that we are trying, through government, to have more drought support—for instance, the drought-proofing of properties. Particularly in the more marginal areas it is making it difficult to grow crops. Harvesting is especially difficult, as the cockatoos are eating a lot of the grain crops. There are not a large amount of crops in the area and people who are trying to do the right thing are being penalised. I realise that we have to have these animals, but they have increased in number.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that contribution. I am aware of the issue of wood ducks. Since the state government banned the duck shooting season, the wood ducks have had a lovely environment in which to reproduce at an enormous rate. I was not aware that they were reproducing and increasing in numbers to the point where they were creating that sort of problem, so I thank you for that information. Do you think the white cockatoo issue is a migratory thing, or is it that they are breeding in numbers here? We have heard of problems related to white cockatoos in other jurisdictions.

**Mr Hillyer**—They have certainly bred up in these areas, and it could be partly because of the cropping. I think they are a bit migratory, but once they get established in these areas they just stay there.

**CHAIR**—What sort of number are you talking about?

**Mr Hillyer**—I have counted flocks of 500 or 600. I have tried to count them; there could be more in those mobs. They are causing a big problem with grain crops in the area—people are trying to support themselves and they are being penalised.

**CHAIR**—Your comments have pre-empted a question I was going to ask. Has the issue of pest animal problems increased over the last three years and, if so, to what extent has it increased and what do you attribute the change to? I am talking about all pest animals, including wild dogs.

**Mr Hillyer**—They are probably not a declared pest animal but of concern is the feral deer. They are causing a big problem in a lot of areas down here, especially to the eastern and southern sides of our board area.

**Mr Clifford**—Another animal, which is not a declared pest, is the wombat. It is really starting to cause major problems. Looking at land care issues, they do tremendous damage to creek beds et cetera, so you have a major problem with erosion. When I was a kid there used to be a large number of wombats. They would get mange and get wiped out, back to a normal sort of population, but that does not seem to be happening anymore. It is pretty general right though this board area and probably Bombala. There is an enormous explosion of wombats right through. Something needs to be done to address that issue.

**CHAIR**—Keeping in mind the impact the fires in 2003 had, have native animals and exotic pest species been forced out of the park because of lack of food sources and has that exacerbated the problem you are experiencing? Is that a fair observation to make?



**Mr Seears**—Initially the impact was that there were animals moving out. There is another issue: a lot of that area of park was open and should have been good grazing country but there were not a lot of grazing animals there. Basically the native grass had got so rank that there were a lot more of these native species on the adjoining private country than in the park. The fires and the burning off have renewed pasture growth in a lot of that country over the last 12 months and some of these animals are going back. The problem this creates is that animals like the wild dog that are living in the park can now breed up in bigger numbers because they have more prey there to live on than they had before.

Our figures certainly show that the number of dogs trapped has increased considerably over the last three years. Numbers of stock being impacted by them have not increased but part of that is due to the fact that a lot of the country adjoining the parks is not being grazed—the stock are no longer running where they used to in years gone by. It is good to see the impact on stock numbers because of wild dog predation reduced but it is not the full picture. We need to look at all things. It would also be good to see these areas restocked and then see how effective the programs are. There are a lot of reports about how effective our programs are. They seem to be working using basically trapping and baiting but if we can move back to aerial baiting some of the costs of carrying out these programs will probably be reduced. With proper access we can probably control those animals to a greater extent.

With regard to other pest animals, the rabbit population has also increased over the last three years. Initially after calicivirus a lot of work was done and the population was certainly reduced. It has been down at good low levels for quite a time but over the last three years landholders have certainly had a lot more things on their plate to worry about than the rabbit population. They have been trying to survive feeding stock and keeping the bank manager away from the door in a lot of cases. That is one thing that was looking like holding itself, but they have increased, especially this last winter. The season we have had has been just enough to basically get rabbits. Rabbits like it dry and there has been enough feed for them to breed well.

**CHAIR**—I want to ask you about the comment you made with regard to aerial baiting. This morning we received a copy of the *Albury Border Mail*, of yesterday's date, in which Mr Della Bosca, the state minister, in an interview made some comments:

For instance in May and June this year, the Government co-ordinated an aerial baiting program involving 11 Rural Lands Protection Boards, including Armidale, Tamworth, Northern New England, Gloucester, Grafton, Kempsey, Mudgee, Hunter, Maitland, Cooma and Braidwood.

Do you want to make a comment on that?

**Mr Seears**—All that aerial baiting or most of it, as far as I know, was actually carried out on private land. I know that, within the Cooma board area—I can speak on it specifically—all that baiting was carried out on private land. There was no baiting at all on crown land. As we know, for aerial baiting to be effective to control dogs, you have to control them before they get onto private land. It is too late to shut the gate after they are already out. If we get aerial baiting back within the park and it is done strategically, using the best knowledge and whatever is available, it can certainly be effective with regard to assisting us in the control.

**CHAIR**—I will quote one more paragraph from the same article—and I presume that the reporter who ran the story was quoting the minister. The reporter went on to say:

Mr Della Bosca said aerial baits were dropped in national parks, state forests and on private land, with priority areas identified by wild dog control associations.

Would you like to comment on that, given the comment that you just made?

**Mr Seears**—I can only speak for the Cooma board, and I know that with respect to the Cooma and Braidwood boards it is all on private land. I know that, in the northern part of the state, some of it is on crown land. I am unsure what the tenure of it is. I think some of it is on national park and state forest land. But, as far as this end of it is concerned, because research was done back in the nineties, aerial baiting has not been permitted on crown land. There was a small program done in the Adaminaby area last year that was on national park land, but that was done late. It was done in October. There was some benefit from it, but it was too small a program within the whole scheme of things to be effective. I thought there was supposed to have been baiting done in that area again this year, in cooperation with the private land, but it did not happen. They are waiting for the outcome of the whole research before they do any further baiting down here on crown land.

**Mr WINDSOR**—In the northern parts of the state I think there has been some work done in some of the national parks as well. I was interested to hear what you had to say about the quoll research. Can you elaborate on that a bit more? Is there any more that you can tell us?

**Mr Seears**—The full paper is not out on results. I can only speak on what I know from down here and from my involvement. They collared 16 quolls down here in an area that we then aerial baited with 1080 at 10 baits to the kilometre. They went back into that area six weeks, I think it was, after the baiting and they retrapped most of the collared animals, plus additional animals. Only one quoll that was collared died and, on tests, it was not from 1080. Of the animals captured, six of them had actually eaten baits—the dose was rhodamine B as well—but it had not killed them. The short-term result was that they did not have any impact on the quoll population, as the baiting did not actually kill any quolls that were in that area. The benefit that came out of it was that in their initial trapping they trapped three feral cats and, of those three feral cats, two of them were poisoned with the baits when it was done, so there was a positive spin-off there. There were no other animals monitored to see the impact of the baiting.

**Mr WINDSOR**—You people have contact with National Parks. Has the quoll been the major reason for not allowing aerial baiting?

**Mr Seears**—It is not the major reason—it is the only reason they have given for not aerial baiting. The other thing is that they have done a lot more research into where the quoll populations are and there are a lot more quoll populations than was initially thought. I know from the National Parks staff and from our own staff, who are out in the field all the time carrying out the baiting programs and trapping programs, that the evidence of quolls is there through the areas, and those areas have been aerial baited extensively up until the time when it was stopped. So the anecdotal evidence was always there that aerial baiting was of benefit to the quolls but scientifically it had not been proven as such.

**CHAIR**—Going back to the bushfire, is there any indication or do you have any evidence that the bushfire—which was a very, very intense fire, as you know—has impacted on the population of the tiger quoll and whether anybody has made any comment on that?

**Mr Seears**—The interesting part about that was the area where the research was carried out—down below Ingebyra at Wallace Craigie—was one of the hottest sections of the fire that I saw. It was all white box and there were only sticks sticking out of the ground. That was all that was left; there was nothing else. Pre the fires, when we had done the trapping the year before in 2002, there were 21 or 22 quolls captured. In 2003, post the fires, there were 15 captured in total. So the actual impact of the fire on the quoll population surprised everyone in that it did not impact on them. I do not know where they went.

**Mr Hillyer**—They came back.

**Mr Seears**—They are not in that area all the time; they just travel through. Where they were we do not know.

**Mr Hillyer**—We could probably get you some data on that through the research people who have been doing the work.

**CHAIR**—That would be useful.

**Mr WINDSOR**—You mentioned in your submission the need for a national approach. For the record, could you indicate how you would see that working and, in particular, the involvement of the rural lands protection boards?

**Mr Hillyer**—A problem we foresee is that in a lot of states there are so many different acts, legislation and that sort of thing that work against each other. We feel that if there could be a more common approach it would help with a lot of the programs. Being close to the border we can see where there are a lot of differences in the legislation on both sides. It seems a little bit crazy that just because there is a border line you can have so many different restrictions.

Also, if we had a coordinated approach all over Australia with good data—and this comes through that we have got to have a good national reporting system—then this should show where the funding is needed. It would allow better planning. Another thing that we have to really look at is the exotic disease side of things. I suppose it has always been something that could happen, but we have got to think that if it does happen what are we going to do with the pest animals? If we had a more common approach with every state we could coordinate it a lot better and also our programs would be a lot more effective.

We have got to try and work together. You see it in other agricultural industries with state legislation and really it has got to happen there too. We have got to try and get in and work together. It should not be one state trying to outdo the other. A case—talking about fires—I know of in Victoria is that when they put on more trappers after the fires it was to the detriment of other programs like feral pigs. That came from their people down there. I think to work on these types of pest problems we have to have a common approach from all states and we have to have common funding too. That seems to be a thing—they will get funding for dogs and we will not

get as much. They might get funding for some other animal and we do not get it for pigs. I think it has to be common for everywhere.

**CHAIR**—You will be pleased to know that your counterparts in other states are saying exactly the same thing, so you are not on your own in recognising that shortcoming.

**Mr Clifford**—I would like to add to what Graham said. I think it is so important, and until we do get this type of cooperation from states we are always going to be having major problems. Just in our Cooma board we have put together seven management plans, fully funded, with pest animal controllers on the ground, which is working pretty well in most areas—in a couple of areas it is falling down. But you need to get the cooperation right through, otherwise what we do here could be impacted on by other areas that are not doing it, and so you will never get ahead. If you can all go together you may make some good headway over the whole area. Unless there is a cooperative approach from Victoria through to Queensland on pest animal control—and I am talking especially about wild dogs—I just do not see that we are ever going to make headway. You could have as many inquiries like this as you like, with everybody having the best of intentions, but unless you can get that cooperation I think it is a waste of time. There has got to be ongoing funding. What worries me is: at the end of 2007, when Debus's money runs out for the south-east, where is the funding going to come from? It is a major, major problem and one that really has to be looked at. If we cannot get those two things I think we are going to go backwards very quickly.

**Mr FORREST**—One of the reasons I have been keen for our hearing to come down to Cooma is that you are close to the border, and I was hoping you could give us some good examples. What we are wrestling with now for the report is how you set something in place to deal with that. Victoria does not have an equivalent to rural protections boards; they have what are more like catchment management authorities, with similar but also much wider issues to consider. Do you want to be kings for the day and put some evidence on the record for us to consider how we could make a national coordinated plan work? We will have to drive it somehow with funding, because it is pretty much all state jurisdiction.

**Mr Clifford**—What the Cooma board has already initiated is only in the early stages at the moment, but we are just well aware that Cooma stand-alone is not the way to go. This is the way we have had to go, and we have made progress, but it is not sustainable. We have recognised this and we are trying to go regional at this moment. We have sent letters around to six other boards and all the other agencies to try to tackle the pest animal problem regionally. That is the first step, but for the next step you need—

**Mr FORREST**—By regionally, do you mean a whole ranges approach, including in Victoria?

**Mr Clifford**—Cross-border, yes.

**Mr Hillyer**—A number of years ago we instigated what we call an interstate pest animal working group, because we adjoin the Victorians. We have had meetings usually every six months and that is where we coordinate our programs. This is where the anomalies come in, with different legislation and funding and that sort of thing. But if we could get a more common approach with them and perhaps do it on a group basis—

**Mr FORREST**—Can you give us some good examples of where you have tried something and it worked and you got a good outcome?

**Mr Hillyer**—We have tried it with dogs. We have had a good relationship on that and planned our programs for both sides of the border so they coordinate at about the same time.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Who are ‘they’?

**Mr Hillyer**—We usually have from Victoria the Department of Primary Industries and Parks Victoria; and from New South Wales, National Parks, Forests and the rural lands boards. And they are all on-the-ground working people.

**CHAIR**—Did you have any problems with land-holders in both jurisdictions with your approach to that or were they cooperative?

**Mr Hillyer**—They are very cooperative. They are all for it, on both sides of the border.

**Mr FORREST**—But what did you have to do to ensure that cooperation occurred? You might get a good result on this boundary, but up on the Queensland border there are different structures.

**Mr Hillyer**—It is about getting to know who your people are and how they work, then hopefully you will get that cooperation. By meeting with people regularly, you get a better understanding of the way they work and what their objectives are.

**CHAIR**—Did you have any experiences with or cooperation or input from the New South Wales Pest Animal Council on that issue?

**Mr Hillyer**—No.

**CHAIR**—None at all?

**Mr Hillyer**—It was set up as a local group.

**CHAIR**—Did you have any responses from any of the state governments on either side of the border to the exercise that you undertook?

**Mr Hillyer**—Not really, no. It probably should be expanded on so that it is recognised better by the state governments.

**CHAIR**—What was the outcome? Can you give us a practical illustration of the outcome of your exercise—how many dogs you got or whatever?

**Mr Hillyer**—I would have to look at the records on that. It is certainly working.

**CHAIR**—Could you give us some indication, very quickly if you could, as to why you thought it was a successful exercise and what the outcome was in terms of the number of dogs destroyed?

**Mr Hillyer**—I could give you the sheep numbers and furnish you with what was happening after that cooperative program.

**CHAIR**—In effect, you have done something similar, except that you have done it with fewer government departments than, say, the Wee Jasper and Brindabella exercise when the Yass Rural Lands Protection Board undertook to control foxes and wild dogs. Have you done something similar?

**Mr Hillyer**—I suppose it is a bit similar, only it is an unofficial type of program. Also, that side of the border has input into our plans and we are going to have input into theirs as well. We have expanded it to include pigs. Another thing that we did was to hold a very interesting pig-training exercise. A lot of the Victorians have not had experience with pigs and they are becoming an emerging problem down there in some of the high country. We had a training program on that and it went down very well.

**CHAIR**—You might talk to your Victorian counterparts just on that point and suggest to them that you and they might consider putting a submission in to the rural skills training inquiry that this committee is undertaking at the moment because those sorts of issues have been raised. When I say ‘those sorts of issues’ I mean the loss of experienced doggers et cetera because of the cost-cutting measures through state governments and so on. That would be very helpful for the committee. I think it is important to put that point to you.

**Mr WINDSOR**—The point Mr Forrest was making is a very important one. We are trying to develop successful small models that can extend into a national model and we are all wrestling with that.

**Mr Ingram**—There are other organisations along the border which actually work along the same lines, particularly in health and education, but it is not generally widely known. It is coordinated at a local level. I think a lot of the time it depends on who is on the other side of the border and who realises that you have the same problems.

**Mr FORREST**—There is a different element to the Victoria-New South Wales cooperation here because you are not separated by a river. That is one of the reasons that I wanted to come here and get better ideas. There is no natural barrier, if you like. The river is some assistance. There is no point in you having world’s best practice feral animal control on your side of the state border if nothing is happening in Victoria. You may as well not do it. What you are telling us is that you have some good outcomes but it has been driven by people at the grassroots. You have not had a national body driving it. That is the key for us—if somehow we can find a way to recommend better ways for all the other state borders around the country and we can find a way to facilitate the grassroots motivation. We do not want to set up a national bureaucratic thing. There is enough bureaucracy in the system already. We are trying to avoid that. I am particularly looking for good examples where grassroots cooperation works well.

**Mr Hillyer**—Possibly, if it is demonstrated that it is working, but only as a low key type of thing with practitioners on the ground who get support from people higher up and also from the government for funding to be able to pursue these programs. Perhaps we should be trying to pursue it and go a lot further with it, especially on the funding side.

**CHAIR**—Who funds your pest animal controls?

**Mr Hillyer**—Most of it is through ratepayer funding. We do get some outside funding for some programs through NHT and those sorts of programs, and Envirofund.

**CHAIR**—Where does the outside funding come from? Does it come from state governments?

**Mr Hillyer**—It mainly comes from the federal government.

**CHAIR**—Under what scheme? Can you tell us that?

**Mr Hillyer**—There has been some Envirofund and NHT funding.

**Mr FORREST**—Can the New South Wales rural lands protection boards raise their own rates?

**Mr Hillyer**—Yes.

**Mr FORREST**—That is not quite what we have in Victoria.

**Mr Seears**—With regard to the cross-border issues, as you are aware, the Cooma board adjoins the ACT, which has completely different legislation again from anywhere relating to—

**CHAIR**—There are different people there too!

**Mr Seears**—Yes, but we have liaised very well with Environment ACT, who run Namadgi, which has a big impact on us. The cooperation there has been very good and, once again, it was driven from the ground up. We have management plans that they are signatories to, despite the fact that they have no obligation at all to be signatories to them. They do not have any legislation that says that. They have different rules. They are not supposed to carry out any control of pest animals any more than one kilometre in from their borders, which we all know is completely useless. I do not think that legislation has been changed but at least the practitioners on the ground understand the needs and, basically, control is carried out on similar lines to what is done in New South Wales.

**CHAIR**—That is an interesting point. You are saying that, despite legislation which is 'useless' in the process of controlling feral animals, the people on the ground in the departments are working at arms-length from that, doing things that the legislation restricts them from doing, but are getting positive outcomes because of it. That sends a very strong message to the community that there is legislation in this country that is absolutely ridiculous in its application and, in fact, if it was not for the flexibility of the people on the ground the feral animal problem would be even greater as a result of the legislation.

**Mr Hillyer**—That is exactly right.

**Mr Seears**—When you have a one-kilometre section and you do not have any access because it is all heavy bush, you basically have to carry out your work where you can get access, which is on the fire trail and not necessarily within that one-kilometre section.

**Mr FORREST**—I am sorry to be stuck in a rut on this, but I am just looking for more evidence that we could recommend things that work. I refer particularly to your Bombala submission because you have the longest boundary with Victorian and, obviously, I am a Victorian. On the operations that you have described with regard to Victoria, you have already indicated that there was not one body you dealt with; you had to deal with three or four. There is not a centralised body in Victoria that is similar to the New South Wales model on protection laws, is there?

**Mr Seears**—No.

**Mr FORREST**—Should there be, or is there a way that the Victorian catchment management authority approach could work? These are established statutory entities that have the capacity to raise revenue of their own. We do not want to create a new one.

**Mr Seears**—We do not know how external funding will be implemented in New South Wales. It looks like it might be on a catchment management basis as well.

**CHAIR**—I think the question and the answer are centred around the obviously strong response we have had from all of the areas in Australia that we have covered—that there needs to be a national approach. There needs to be input from all of those departments and people who are currently undertaking it at various levels, whether they be local government organisations, rural lands protection boards or government agencies, and they need to be included in a national body that coordinates all of these things and puts together a database. Would you agree with that?

**Mr Clifford**—Exactly.

**Mr Hillyer**—Possibly, instead of going for state funding, somehow we might be able to do it as a cooperative thing by the two or three with federal funding—

**CHAIR**—Yes, in a situation where a national body would be set up on not only pest animals but pest weeds—a combined organisation that has the capacity to fund programs that are uniform across the country for different pest animal species and different pest weeds—and be funded by both the federal government and the state governments and, if needs be, by a contribution from local government, because they are at the bottom end of the scale and they are at the coalface of what the feral animals and introduced weed species are doing to their communities. Do you think that would be a reasonable thing?

**Mr Clifford**—I think that would be great if it could be achieved. I think that is what is required, because we are all doing our own little thing and it is very frustrating. Bombala do their thing, we do our thing and all other boards do their thing but, as you say, if it could be brought in nationally, that would be tremendous. But what sort of committee would you have?



You would need representatives from practical type people. You would not want it to be bureaucratically top-heavy, or you would get nowhere.

**CHAIR**—We are conscious of that concern and worry, and I can assure you that we do have some thoughts on a national body and we are concerned that it does not get overloaded with the bureaucratic issues. I will just ask a couple more questions of you. I am conscious that we have a limited time here today, and there are some people who did not write to us but rang us in the last week or so and asked if they could be fitted in to make a contribution, so we will probably cut some of this short. That is one of the reasons I am pushing some of the questions at you. There are a couple of things that I need to ask you, because it is very important that we get this sort of information. What resources do you put into training and extension services for pest animal control? That is the first question. The second question is: do we need a nationally accredited training scheme for pest animal controllers?

**Mr Sears**—With regard to the second one, I think it is crucial to have training programs for people who deal with pest animal control. It is an issue that we have been dealing with here, not just the Canberra and Bombala boards but other boards in the south-east region, especially courses that relate to wild dog control. Others have been set up in other states. I know there is one in Western Australia that we saw something on. Basically, it was not comprehensive enough. If someone came to me with what they had done in that course, it would not mean anything to me, if I were looking at being the employer. You need something that has a lot more hands-on work and that is going to end up with national accreditation. A lot of the training and stuff we can do has not been nationally accredited. I think it needs to be pushed that way.

You have to be careful with regard to training in pest animal control to ensure that you can get the right people to carry out the training. It needs to be done by people who have had plenty of experience on the ground and who can relate that. An example from the Cooma board is that one of our pest animal controllers—or dog trappers, as they were called—has for the last couple of years been going up to the Armidale-Glen Innes area and doing exactly that: running training courses for people up there. It is crucial that the skills are not lost. We are lucky in this corner that we do have a good supply of people who have the skills, in comparison to other parts of the state. As far as the initial training that board staff get is concerned, it is basically only supplied by DPI, then it is up to you to learn on the ground from other experienced people that you are working with.

**CHAIR**—What methods of pest animal control need improvement through research and development?

**Mr Sears**—One of the things that I see with rabbit control is that RCD was shown to be effective. Research was carried out in this area three years ago with regard to a different supply mechanism for getting it out there so it would be more practical. It is currently the only supply mechanism to catch and inoculate rabbits. Research was done on putting it onto carrots. I do not know where that has ended up. In the scenario we have now, where rabbits are becoming more of an issue, it is something to look at. When you have land and you cannot de-stock through bad seasons, at least it would be a control—you could get it out there and it would not impact on anything else, only on the rabbit. I think things like that need to be pushed; they sit for far too long. The new poison bait research that is going on to replace 1080 with regard to canids is

going to be very helpful in terms of our program and the number of areas we are going to be able to access, especially in crown lands, if it is shown to be only effective on canids.

**CHAIR**—I thank each and every one of you for making your time available today and, more importantly, for giving this committee a further insight into the problems related to feral animal species in this region. As John alluded to earlier, we are very pleased to be here because we have attempted to come here on two other occasions and other pressing matters have prevented us from doing so. The secretariat, in particular, was very mindful that we needed to be reminded that we had not been here, hence our visit today. This is the last public hearing on this inquiry, and I thank you for the considerable and very informative input into it. You can rest assured that this committee, despite what people might say, is working very cooperatively in a bipartisan way. We all have the same objectives and the same mindset on this issue, and we will attempt to put some very constructive recommendations to the government in our report. We can only do that with your cooperation, your knowledge and your assistance. Thank you very much.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.41 am to 10.51 am**

**ALCOCK, Mr John, Stud Breeder, and Member, Monaro Merino Association Inc.**

**HEDGER, Mr Harley John, Member, Monaro Merino Association Inc.**

**KING, Mr John N., Stud Breeder, and President, Monaro Merino Association Inc.**

**LITCHFIELD, Mrs Susan, Former Secretary, Monaro Merino Association Inc.**

**CHAIR**—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament and consequently 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. Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr King**—Thank you. I would care to make a statement and thank you for the opportunity to appear. This submission was written probably more than 12 months ago and we acknowledge that there are a number of things that have changed since that time.

**Mr FORREST**—Hopefully for the better.

**Mr King**—Yes, certainly some of them have changed for the better—we would acknowledge that. We will each put a case for a particular section that we are familiar with. I am in the fortunate position of not adjoining a national park, but I am president of the organisation so I will try to do an overall coverage. The thing that we really need to bring out is that the wild dog problem in particular is an indication that the balance of nature is so far out of whack that it is not funny. We are seeing people here today who are representing themselves and organisations and so on as far as the livestock industry is concerned, and the impacts that that has on the community, but the wildlife that these wild dogs live on does not have anyone to represent it. The very people who are making it difficult to control these wild dogs, the extreme green movement, feel that they are looking after these animals and looking after the environment. In fact the reverse is absolutely the case. These wild dogs are living on wildlife both in national parks and in our surrounding private land. They come and eat our animals—on a fairly regularly basis, unfortunately—but definitely their staple diet is the wildlife.

If a few quolls—and I use the word ‘if’ advisedly—are killed by, we’ll say, an aerial baiting program this would probably save the lives of countless thousands of wallabies and echidnas and things like this in the very area where the dogs are living. There would then be a spin-off obviously for us as sheep owners. My colleagues will demonstrate to you rather graphically the impact that wild dogs and pigs have had in their particular areas, and they will also put some costs with that demonstration that I think will really surprise you. I do not want to take up a great deal of their time or yours; I think that they are more than capable of putting our case.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Mr King. Would anybody else like to make a statement?

**Mr Alcock**—I come from the Nimmitabel area. We have had dog problems for all of my life and that was the case over the lives of all of our ancestors as well. But we were at least able to address those problems some years ago by way of baiting in strategic areas and were able to live with them. When aerial baiting came in, we were able to bait in areas where dogs came out of the breeding areas, and we were able to keep the dog populations in areas where they did not pose any threat to us. About 12 months after the aerial baiting ceased, the dogs then came out. We were losing about 800 sheep a year, so we were virtually forced to go out of sheep. But then the National Parks and Wildlife Service asked whether we would be interested in putting up a fence. At that point we—the four of us, as land-holders—put up an electric fence, and that was about 22 years ago. That has worked. We have had some kills since—the dogs have come around or through the fence—but it has worked very well. As I said, we have had a few kills, but they were not significant. People at the end of the fences have still had problems where the fences have speared dogs around, particularly in the Bemboka area where dogs have gone from the end of the fence into different areas.

I believe the National Parks and Wildlife Service have probably been negligent in their duty of care by allowing the dogs, in areas where we did have pretty pure colonies of dingoes, to get out of those areas and into areas where there are hobby farmers, and most of the hobby farmers have a big dog. They have allowed the dogs to get into those private property areas where the dingoes have mated with the domestic dogs, and they have lost their colonies of pure dingoes.

**CHAIR**—You are dealing with hybrids now—some large hybrids?

**Mr Alcock**—Absolutely. The dogs that were in our area, while the aerial baiting was going on, were the real McCoy, but they have now accessed the coastal areas and bred with these dogs, and they are now just anything and there are heaps of them. They breed twice a year instead of once a year, so you can imagine the result. They are a bit like the bunny; you can never win.

The other thing that is very noticeable, once the dogs build up in big numbers, is that the wildlife suffers. You will never see a wallaby or much wildlife about once the dogs are present. I think that is another area in which the Parks and Wildlife Service have been very negligent, in allowing so much wildlife to be destroyed to preserve the dog. We really need to preserve our valuable native wildlife. Baiting programs also control foxes—and, to some degree, even cats—and they have an impact on our native wildlife, so you can kill two birds with one stone.

The other thing I would like to touch on is the pig problem. There will probably be a lot more of my colleagues who will talk about dogs. We have tremendous pig problems now that we did not have 10 or 15 years ago and we really do need to address this problem. The only way that can be done is with coordinated pig programs. They are a problem that I cannot just blame the parks for; they are out on private land as well and in forestry, and obviously I have got a lot of plantation. Where there are big areas of land there is a problem. I feel that we need big, coordinated programs to control the pigs, probably by way of trapping. One of the major problems you have when you are trying to track pigs is the pig doggers. Where there are pigs feeding they will come in and dog them and disperse them. That has been a major problem in our area. The other problem with the doggers has been that they come in and catch the pigs and cut the ears off the sows and then you find that nobody else can catch the wretched things. That is another major problem.

**Mr FORREST**—What are you saying there?

**Mr Alcock**—The pig doggers will come in and catch a sow and so that no other dogger can catch that sow they will cut the ears off her and then she will rear her litter. It keeps the pig population quite healthy.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Does that happen a lot?

**Mr Alcock**—Absolutely. It happens very regularly.

**Mr WINDSOR**—So the dogs catch them by the ears?

**Mr Alcock**—Yes, they lug them. That has been a major problem in our area. I hate licensing things, but if ever there were something that should be licensed I think it is pig hunters. They should be licensed to catch pigs because there are a certain element who are a problem.

**Mr FORREST**—What sort of damage are they doing as far as environmental concerns go?

**Mr Alcock**—There is environmental damage and they are certainly a dashed nuisance to us because they tear the paddocks up. But the major threat I see to our industry is one of exotic disease. Should we get swine fever or foot-and-mouth disease, we are in big trouble with these feral populations.

**CHAIR**—Can I just make the comment that my view, if I can put it in a personal capacity, is that it should not take a concern by anybody in this country for us to be concerned about foot-and-mouth and any of those introduced diseases in an environment where we are talking about an introduced exotic species that has no place in our environment and that we should be getting rid of anyway. I make that point for what it is worth. I suppose the point I am making is that you should not have to argue that point with people in our position or with governments of any political persuasion. The issue is that there are introduced exotic species—and that is why this inquiry is under way—that are creating massive problems of an agricultural and environmental nature in our community. You should not have to go out there to argue the risk of disease when, in fact, the risk is there anyway to the very thing that we are trying to protect, and that is our flora and fauna—and we get a lot of pressure from the environmental groups to protect that area.

**Mr Alcock**—Yes. So these disease aspects are some of our major concerns. The other thing that pigs carry and is a threat to our cattle industry, and our domestic pig industry too, is leptospirosis. They can carry both strains: hardjo and pomona. They are another one of the problems.

**Mr FORREST**—Can I just intervene. We know pretty much what the problems are. We have been hearing evidence all over Australia. We are looking for solutions; we are looking for recommendations that we can put into our report and use to drive change. Can you focus on that and get the maximum benefit from the opportunity we have for an exchange. We are pretty satisfied that we have covered every issue—every feral animal across Australia. What we do not see is progress. Mr King mentioned in his introductory remarks that there have been some improvements since you made your submission. That is what I would like you to focus on.

**CHAIR**—Can we ask a question along those lines: what sort of national approach would you like to see in place for pest animal control?

**Mr Alcock**—With the pig issue and this matter of the dogs, we really have to have coordinated programs on a regional basis. One of the major problems that rural lands protection boards have is getting unanimous support. There are some areas where there are absentee land-holders. We need to have fairly major coordinated programs. It will work provided you can keep the dogs out. Once you get pigs onto feed the last thing you want is someone to come in with their pig dogs and disperse the mobs. Instead of having 10 in a mob you have three mobs with three in. It really has to be a coordinated program.

**CHAIR**—You would support any approach that we might make as a committee to a minister of the Crown for a national approach to the pest animal problem? Having said that, do you believe there is a need to have a national database in place to monitor populations of pest animals such as wild dogs and feral pigs so we know where we need to target? Do we need to target on a national cooperative basis? Is that the way we should be going?

**Mr Alcock**—Absolutely.

**Mr King**—If there is not a national database of, particularly, pig populations and we are unlucky enough to get a foot and mouth outbreak the whole thing is dead in the water before it starts.

**Mr Alcock**—I would like to mention a coordinated program that has worked very well. It is not with pigs but with foxes. It has been done with the Dalgety, Numbla Vale and Bungarby Landcare groups. It has been going now for three years. They have got an amazing result from a coordinated program with probably 90 per cent of the land-holders in that area participating. The job it has done on the foxes is absolutely phenomenal. We are now seeing quite a few echidnas coming back, and also a lot of little ground nesting birds that we have not seen. Despite the drought they are coming back because we have been able to get rid of the foxes. It has also lifted our lambing quite considerably. Foxes are a great cost.

**Mr FORREST**—Is that a cross-border approach? Those two towns are near the state border.

**Mr Alcock**—No, it was not. It has been locally driven in conjunction with the rural lands protection board. It has been a huge success. With regard to pigs, there are not very many of us but we have been working on a coordinated basis on our side. It certainly is having an impact on the pig populations. But as I said, you really need to keep your gates locked to keep the dogs out to have the full effect. I am not suggesting that dogs should be ruled out totally; they probably have a place because there will be the odd boar that you will not catch that may have to be shot or caught with dogs. I am just saying that there is an element within the pig hunters that is not all that good.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Mr Alcock, you spoke about the success with the electric fence. Can you elaborate on that: the structure of the fence and the cost?

**Mr Alcock**—That was put up over 20 years ago. It all happened from a meeting here when the Dingo Destruction Board was going. I gave a report on the stock losses in the Kybeyan area and

the head ranger at Tumut at the time stood up and said, 'We can't afford these sorts of losses. Something has to be done. If we supply materials will you put the fence up?' I said that we would do anything to get rid of the problem. That is where it started from.

We got the materials supplied and it was approximately \$40,000 at the time, which the parks would have put in for materials and energisers. We put in approximately the same amount by way of clearing the line and having the fence erected. We started with a six-wire fence, but we had only started off a little way and I said, 'This is not going to work,' and I got the ranger that was involved to come over and he agreed that it was not going to work because my dogs were just shooting through it without getting touched. So we agreed to go with a seven-wire fence, and that worked to some degree until we had too many shorts in the fence and that was being caused through killing echidnas. Neither of us, land-holders or parks, wanted to see the echidnas killed, because they are a valuable part of our balance of nature. We then changed the configuration, lifted the bottom wire up because it was too low and they were going over the bottom wire and getting their prongs stuck on the hot wire—the second wire—and getting electrocuted. So we lifted the bottom wire up and shifted the configuration to an eight-wire fence, which it still is today. It has been highly effective.

**Mr WINDSOR**—So the echidna can get underneath and the dog will not go through.

**Mr Alcock**—Yes.

**Mr WINDSOR**—In terms of the other issue, you talked about the success you had with the foxes through Landcare. One of the difficulties we have got with the national approach is that every state is different. As we said earlier, there are rural lands protection boards here but not in Victoria, and so on. Could you envisage the national government coming into this argument through the Landcare groups, so that it would not be just a farmer driven operation? To pick up on some of the comments that Mr King made—and I think the secretariat should highlight those comments—it is really about saving wildlife and sheep, cattle and other animals. The Landcare effect is a secondary benefit. The point you were making was that if we do not do something, we are going to do a lot of damage to our natural flora and fauna. Could you see that model being developed and the Commonwealth putting money into that system? Or should it be through the rural lands protection boards? Which model could you—

**CHAIR**—Mr Hedger and Mrs Litchfield might want to make a comment. Please feel free to do so.

**Mrs Litchfield**—We live some distance north of this fence that has been so successful, but I would challenge New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife to allow the fence to be put where it is. At the time, there was clearing done on ridges and so on, and I think they have tightened their outlook for that type of clearing. I think the fence is the ideal solution. I went to Sydney and spoke to the Colong Foundation about wild dogs and about the 'Dingo: friend or foe?' seminar. They passed a motion to say that all national parks should be fenced, which would be absolutely wonderful. I feel that it would be utopia if they were fenced in, because that would solve a lot of the problems.

**CHAIR**—They must have kept it in-house, because there is no public reaction to it.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Exactly. But I was there and I witnessed the motion. So it went through, I can tell you, and you will find it in minutes of the Colong Foundation. The problem is that where we have dog problems is on the headwaters of rivers, and you cannot practically fence it—unless you go right back into the park on ridges, and I do not think they are going to let us do that now. Sure, if we could run a fence on sound ground and keep the dogs out and the pigs within the park, it would be satisfactory to us.

**CHAIR**—Could I make a comment on something that was raised earlier about aerial baiting as a method. I quoted from an article in yesterday's *Border Mail*, in which Minister Della Bosca said:

... in May and June this year, the Government co-ordinated an aerial baiting program involving 11 Rural Lands Protection Boards—

and two of them were in Cooma and Braidwood. It went on to say:

... aerial baits were dropped in national parks, state forests and on private land, with priority areas identified by wild dog control associations.

Are you aware if there has been any aerial baiting in the national park around the Kosciuszko area?

**Mrs Litchfield**—There has been a very small amount, a token, you would almost say, in my opinion, and it will be followed up with later groups.

**CHAIR**—Does it please you to see that?

**Mrs Litchfield**—Absolutely.

**Mr King**—Absolutely, but it is insufficient.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Aerial baiting is the solution, as far as we are concerned. I think National Parks want it.

**CHAIR**—And the use of 1080?

**Mr King**—Absolutely.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Absolutely. National Parks are really looking to use it, but they have been dampened down by the strong will, you would say, of the extreme greens. Since we wrote our submission I must say they are trying to do their best but their hands are tied in a lot of cases.

**CHAIR**—That leads me to another question on that . There was a recent announcement that they got an additional \$1 million in this last financial year to control their pest and weed problems in their national parks. That brings it up to about \$18 million per annum. What are your views on that?

**Mr King**—It is a drop in the bucket.



**Mrs Litchfield**—I think Bob Carr's land grab—I am probably saying the wrong thing—has been so enormous that they have not had the funds for feral animals, and everybody is paying for it now.

**CHAIR**—I am not trying to be political there.

**Mrs Litchfield**—I am not either.

**CHAIR**—The point is that we have had the message from all around Australia, from various individuals and groups, that governments at the state and, indeed, the federal level are not putting in sufficient funds to allow people to control the problem. All you are doing is slowing the process down and then the money runs out, then the process lifts to the point where the populations of the ferals get out of control and then we go into another quick-fix program where we pump in more money. Do you think that is a common theme that you have experienced in your lifetime?

**Mrs Litchfield**—Absolutely.

**Mr King**—Absolutely. May we revisit the landcare idea for a moment?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr King**—Unfortunately, whilst it seems an ideal solution to involve landcare, it seems to work with genuine farmers who achieve most of their income from the land but, increasingly in this area, we have hobby farmers coming in and their management is one of neglect. They look after the area around their house and they do not know about the rest of it. I have 20 hobby farmer neighbours and I managed to get one of them to be involved in a fox-baiting program here last week. I am by law not allowed to lay baits in places where I need to, so that makes me a criminal if I am going to survive. So management by neglect is just not going to allow it to work.

**Mr WINDSOR**—So it is a two-barrel problem that you have got. You have got National Parks on one side, in a sense, and absentee landlords on another side—

**Mr King**—They do not even have to be absentee. They can be living there with different priorities.

**Mr WINDSOR**—And there is no legal recourse to force them to do anything.

**Mr King**—Absolutely.

**Mr Alcock**—On this fox issue, you mentioned a nationally coordinated program and I think it does need to come from a national body because the fox is a national problem—it is even down in Tasmania now.

**CHAIR**—Just before you make your comment, what we are leading to here is that we will probably be making a recommendation to the ministers, the government of the day, the Prime Minister, to set up a national body that is responsible for all feral animals of an exotic and a local nature and all introduced or exotic weed species and for that national body to be supported with

input and money by the states and local government and all the interested community groups. That is what we are aiming to do and it is one of the reasons we need this information from people like you.

**Mr Alcock**—I think that is a wonderful idea and the only way that it can work. With regard to fox-baiting programs, you do not need to have a lot of baits. It is like with aerial baiting: you do not need to aerial bait huge areas, as long as you bait into the right areas. Foxes are quite simple to control if you have got bait stations. If you just have a carcass depot you only have to drop a bait there every night and you will bowl a fox. You will actually control foxes from a fairly large area in that way, and that is an avenue that may need to be looked into where you have got absentee land-holders. But it is no use doing it a fortnight before lambing; it needs to be done throughout the year. Particularly in January and February, when the young foxes are about, you can tidy up a lot of foxes at depots.

**CHAIR**—Just before we ask any further questions, I want to bring it to your attention that we are rapidly running out of time. I am conscious of the fact that there are some people here who did not formally apply prior to this meeting to give evidence, and I want to give them the opportunity. I am conscious also that Mr Hedger has not had an input. He would like to have an input, I would assume, so I invite him to make some comments.

**Mr Hedger**—I have a pretty rough estimate of the losses that I have had in the last 12 months caused by wild dogs.

**CHAIR**—Can I interrupt: could you give a brief overview of that and perhaps tender it as evidence, if that is okay with you?

**Mr Hedger**—Yes. Firstly—

**Mr FORREST**—Where is your place, Mr Hedger?

**Mr Hedger**—The Snowy Plain, Rocky Plain area.

**Mr FORREST**—Thank you.

**Mr Hedger**—I have a very small property of 890 acres, 400 acres of which I cannot use now because of wild dogs—and have not been able to use it for the last 15 years. In the last 12 months I have experienced a loss of approximately \$18½ thousand, and I can give you all the details if you would like them. I lost a stud ram that I valued at \$5,000 because of dogs, and last year I lost 15 1½-year-old wethers which I valued at \$60 a head, which is a very minimum rate. I had 44 lambs which I valued at \$30 a head killed in one night, and six ewes which I valued at \$55 a head. I do not know whether you understand that once sheep experience trauma and are terrorised by wild dogs you get a break in the wool, and that is called tender wool. I had two bales of tender wool from the sheep that the dogs terrorised on Snowy Plain last year. That resulted in a reduction of 280-odd cents a kilo, which is almost \$1,000 over two bales of wool. I put an estimate of \$10,000 over three years on the stud ram that I lost, but I think that is a very minimum rate. In the 12 months, that makes a loss of \$18½ thousand.

**CHAIR**—But you have forgotten about the replacement value of the ram you lost, too.

**Mr Hedger**—That is exactly right. I cannot emphasise enough that we have had a problem with wild dogs for approximately 35 or 40 years. I have been on the place there for 50-odd years, and it is just an ongoing problem. We are not allowed to aerial bait or use bait of any description in areas where our main source of wild dogs are coming from, mainly because of the tiger quoll. Lately it has been forgotten about, and now there is a pure bred colony of dingo there.

**CHAIR**—Do you have any corroboree frog problems?

**Mr Hedger**—They were there until the fires. That is about it. I would also like to make the point that I am getting out of sheep.

**Mrs Litchfield**—It is very traumatic for him.

**CHAIR**—It is okay, Mr Hedger. A lot of people do not understand the situation. One of the things the committee has made mention of is that it is not just the economic loss created by feral animals, which equates to about \$720 million per year to agriculture; it is the emotional and mental problems associated with it. I appreciate your coming here today to give your side of the story.

**Mr Alcock**—Further to Harley's comments, the stock losses are not necessarily increasing. The authorities can say, 'The losses are not all that great,' but they are not so big because of what Harley has just indicated: people are going out of sheep. There are huge areas where this is happening—for example, where Sue is—and people have had to give up running sheep there because the dogs caused too big a loss. If we did not have the electric fence where we are, there would not be any sheep from where we are right into Rock Flat, which is nearly into Cooma.

**CHAIR**—We understand all of that. We have received evidence from people in Western Australia with very large properties who started off with flocks of around 70,000 sheep and are now down to 15,000 sheep because of the dog problem. They tried to supplement their income with goats and started off with 2,000 or 3,000 head of goats on those properties but are now down to about 1,500 head. You point this problem out at these sorts of inquiries, but a lot of people do not understand that there is a flow-on effect. I come from the meat processing industry. The national flock is decreasing because people are going out of sheep. That impacts on meat processing and on the economy of country towns. It has a widespread impact. Its effect has a multiplication factor of three or four times. We understand that, but a lot of people do not understand that. It is very important that we get that information from you so that, in some way or other, we can advertise the downside of the serious impact of feral animals in terms of the massive economic and personal problems that you have to deal with.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Can I make a radical recommendation. We should bounce off the Colong Foundation because they are a very smart lot—a lot smarter than we have been. The dingo—he is only an Asian dog; although a national icon of sorts—I recommend be kept in sanctuaries. There is a big move within the Colong Foundation to keep them alone in sanctuaries. That would relieve the national parks of a huge nightmare. There is a division about this matter. A few sanctuaries are running dingoes and those people are adamant that that is where dingoes should be kept. If they have to be released back into the wild, tight areas should be fenced off in the wilderness, or wherever, and dingoes should be kept there. I know that is an oversimplification, but I am suggesting that from a national point of view.

**CHAIR**—By protecting the breed, you are protecting the gene pool. There is a dingo sanctuary at Bargo in the electorate I represent in New South Wales.

**Mrs Litchfield**—I have spoken to that fellow. It would save a lot of trauma and a lot of money, and it should be pushed in a national approach.

**Mr FORREST**—Could we formally table Mr Hedger's information?

**CHAIR**—Yes; we will include it with the committee's evidence.

**Mr FORREST**—Your submission, which was received 18 months ago, stated:

Adequate funding is available for pest animals but it is not utilized by experienced on ground experts.

For the record, you might want to clarify that.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Since this was written there has been a marked improvement in funding and in the attitude of National Parks. We are well on the way, but they need a lot of help as well as us.

**Mr FORREST**—Do you still stand by the statement, 'adequate funding is available'?

**Mrs Litchfield**—Adequate funding is available for pest animals but is not utilised by experienced on-ground experts. To a degree, we still stand by it. Perhaps we had better change it to 'inadequate'.

**Mr King**—If some of the funding were channelled into a cheaper form of control such as aerial baiting, then the money could go a lot further and be a lot more effective.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Exactly.

**CHAIR**—We have heard that from people all around the country and I keep referring to that. Taxpayers' funds are used inadequately. Taxpayer funds are not targeting the areas of need and that makes it difficult for the people administering the responsible departments.

**Mr Hedger**—There is a very big point of concern on the Snowy Plain area. I have some very good video footage and evidence of little red wallabies that were slaughtered last winter in the snow.

**Mr FORREST**—We have collected quite a lot about that.

**Mr King**—They are almost wiped out in that area at the moment. The impact of dogs on the fauna and flora is unbelievable.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for that. I thank each one of you for taking the time to be here today. We would like to have more hours in the day to listen to people. We as a committee are very focused on this inquiry. In my view, this is probably one of the best standing

committees in the parliament because, across the political spectrum, we are working together with one objective. We are a multipartisan group of people from Independents to National Party members to Labor Party members to Liberals. It is true to say, and I am sure my parliamentary colleagues would agree with me, that from time to time we are subjected to people coming in here becoming very emotional about the issue. We compliment them because they have brought that emotion in here to tell us how it is affecting them as individuals and as groups. Thank you for the open and transparent way you have presented your evidence to us today.

[11.32 am]

**GOLBY, Mrs Sylvia Mary, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council**

**GREEN, Mrs Ellen Mary, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council**

**GREEN, Mr William, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council**

**LITCHFIELD, Mrs Susan, Member, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council**

**LITCHFIELD, Mr Robert Michael, Area Representative, New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council**

**CHAIR**—I welcome representatives of the New South Wales Farmers Association Cooma District Council.

**Mr Green**—I am a new addition.

**CHAIR**—That is good, because you have increased the knowledge factor by about 20 per cent. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Do you wish to make a statement on your submission or make some introductory remarks? You can make a statement on behalf of your group or you can make a statement as an individual.

**Mr Litchfield**—The best way I can summarise is that we are all affected land-holders and sheep farmers, and we are all suffering the same sorts of problems and the same losses. We are all in the same boat.

**Mr FORREST**—I suggest we focus on solutions. We are very familiar with the problems.

**Mr Litchfield**—I table a survey I did here in 2002—a personal one.

**CHAIR**—We will accept it at the end of the hearing.

**Mrs Green**—I have things I would like to table, too, in regard to the disease.

**CHAIR**—Why don't we work on the basis of Mr Litchfield making his contribution, then you and anybody else who wants to can make a statement, keeping in mind that what my parliamentary colleague Mr Forrest just said is pertinent. We know the problem. What we want to hear from you is how you see us solving the problem based on that knowledge.

**Mr Litchfield**—I have had great success in poisoning feral pigs—I think 1080 is the best poison we have available to us at the moment—and then suddenly discovering that the secondary kill of foxes and some cats, believe it or not, was unbelievable. The National Estate are not allowed to poison their pigs using 1080. If they could, how many dogs will they collect under the same system? The other feral animals that concern me are deer and goats. I have a real fear of them spreading exotic diseases. If that happened—foot and mouth and all the rest of it—it would absolutely put us out of business. All governments should up control of their quarantine systems at airports, boat terminals and all the rest of it. We are an island country and we should be able to look after ourselves, but we are relying on you fellows to look after us. That little happening a while ago with the meat that was imported here, which Senator Heffernan brought to the attention of the public, is the sort of thing that cannot be allowed to happen. I have always been a great advocate for the reintroduction of aerial baiting—I think it is the way to go. If you want a solution, that is the way to go. It is the cheapest way and was proven to work years ago. I am not saying that we should abolish our trappers; we have a great group of trappers around Monaro now. We still need our trappers. Maybe when the trappers are not full on with dogs, they can work on the pig side of things. The pigs are the greatest destroyer of the National Estate—and a lot of people do not realise this. On the eastern escarpment side they are ripping up acres of swamp areas.

In Melbourne, Dr Scott Williams has been working on alternative poisons to target dogs and foxes specifically. I spoke to him last week, and the update he gave me was that they are into field trials with a non-target species, which are running quite well. There is a project review next month. I asked whether there were enough funds to make sure the program is completed, and he said yes. Australian Wool Innovation, which we all contribute to, allocated \$3.7 million towards this a few years ago, and it will probably be released for use around 2008. So that is something down the pipeline to look forward to. Whether you use that for aerial baiting or stick to 1080 probably does not matter much, but we have to get back in the air. To the east of us, in east Monaro, when you go over the hill you are only 20 miles from the coast and the terrain is so rough you just do not enter it.

**Mrs Green**—John wants solutions, but the only solution is to go to the air. We need broadscale aerial baiting. It can be determined in particular areas of breeding grounds; it does not have to be indiscriminate but it needs to be broad scale. The south-east dingo destruction board controlled the dogs fairly well. I think there was even an attempt to eradicate them, but it never happened; you will never get rid of all the dogs. I live on the eastern escarpment, and the terrain we are talking about is some of the most rugged country in Australia—in parts of it, the only way to get into it is by helicopter—and dogs live right through that country.

My husband and I lost our flock under the escarpment where we live—there are no sheep left; they are all gone. But now what plagues us there is neospora caninum, which is the abortion disease spread by canids—dogs and foxes. I am also on the rural lands board—I am the Chair of Pest Animals for the South Coast—and of all the herds tested 90 per cent are showing infection rates. There is no cure for this particular type of abortion disease and the cost to the beef industry is astronomical. I have the Cattle Council of Australia's submission here, I have the New South Wales agriculture department's, I have AgFacts and I also have the study on Australia and New Zealand all on neospora, which I would like tabled because the information is very good.

With regard to electric fencing, one of our main problems with it is the very fence which Mr Alcock was talking about speared the dogs back on us, so we are on the opposite end of it and it has been dramatic. There is nothing you can do. The other thing is Parks put in endless amounts of money into maintaining a 30-kilometre fence for some land-holders and then we, on the other side, get nothing. I do not believe there is equity in that. I think that we must go to a different system of trying to make farming in this state or in this country more equitable. I think a national approach is the way we have to go. We have to get some committee or group of people to oversee what is happening in every state because, from my understanding, it is very similar wherever you go: dogs are out of control; foxes are out of control. I have started a fox program on the South Coast—it goes from Sussex Inlet to the Victorian border. We do it biannually and we do it aggressively.

**CHAIR**—Who funds it?

**Mrs Green**—The CMA funds it. We got \$50,000 from the CMA this year for that.

**CHAIR**—The CMA being?

**Mrs Green**—The Catchment Management Authority. They have been very, very supportive of the fox work, but our problem is that the legislation states you must be 500 metres from a dwelling, so when you have your smaller acreages you have this ridiculous situation where you have to miss whole townships because you cannot come within a kilometre of a town. So you have this harbour where foxes are living in the towns—under culverts and under bridges—and we are really only able to target our broadacre farmers. It is not good enough because our wildlife is decimated. Where we come from you would see lyrebirds and wallabies if you went into the bush country. I have not seen a lyrebird in three years and I cannot believe that.

**CHAIR**—Some of the things you are raising are very, very important and one of the questions I failed to ask earlier in the evidence-taking today was: can any of you tell us, as a parliamentary committee, how we can send the message out to the community about the real effects of the things that people like you all around Australia are complaining about with regard to feral animals and introduced weed species? How do we go about educating for that? What is a suggestion from you as to what we should be doing about putting some money into a program, how the program should operate et cetera? Could you give us that too because that is part of our problem. I am happy to take a comment from each one of you.

**Mr Green**—I think it is like anything—sheer publicity. There was an ad on the telly from the RSPCA about koalas, saying that dogs do kill koalas. And this is basically what it is: it is shifting the momentum from one side to the other and saying: ‘We are not protecting these species. We have got places where they can be protected—national parks—but they are not being protected because of these other species.’ I think the dog—we will call it the dog because that is basically what it is according to the DNA that has been collected—should be put under a pest order as a threatening species. The other thing is that I think we have got to look very closely at biological control of both dogs and foxes because genetically those in the bush now are feral.

The other big point with feral animals, especially dogs, is that in the past the basic problem was straight-out bloody dishonesty from National Parks and these other groups. As we have seen in the state inquiry, there is straight-out bloody dishonesty. Part of the evidence given there was



totally incorrect. I think these issues have got to be brought to the table honestly and openly. Another thing that has to be looked at very closely is the contract system that the rural lands boards of New South Wales have got themselves into with National Parks. I think the rural lands board system has been bought off by Parks money. Most ratepayers that I know of within the rural lands board system are subsidising these contracts. But, apart from biological control, the big issue is aerial baiting. There should be publicity to get the message out there, saying: 'Well, we've got the bush, but where have our animals gone?' Sheer publicity.

**Mrs Litchfield**—I agree with that. Alby, we need a huge national education program. The parks have been put up there as an icon for our public of New South Wales. A lot of kids do not get out of a flat nowadays; they have no idea what is going on in the bush. The green movement, the extreme greens, have put up this issue that everything in there is fuzzy-wuzzy and cuddly and we cannot touch it. That has to be dispelled somehow or other. I think if we can get a huge national program going it will save everybody a lot of heartache and a lot of money.

**Mr Litchfield**—What is the solution?

**CHAIR**—If it has been covered, just say that.

**Mr Litchfield**—Yes, I think it has basically all been covered.

**Mrs Golby**—The idea that is put out is that everything is nicely balanced so if we do away with the dogs things will get out of balance. But things are not balanced at all. There is too much protection for the top predators and, as Ellen said, this has affected other things, like the lyrebirds. There are a lot of little things—for example, if you have one hawk that lives in your garden you are not going to have any other birds. I am not saying do away with hawks; I am just making the general point. If you have a lot of dogs, those dogs might come in and kill on a property once or twice a week, maybe once a fortnight, but they are not on a diet in between times. Things are not in balance now, and those dogs need to be hit hard.

**Mrs Green**—Alby, Bill touched on something that really is a problem in New South Wales and that is through the rural lands board system. I have been a part of that; I joined it in frustration about the dog issue. The absolutely dishonesty from National Parks about what actually lives in the bush astounds me. We all live and do our work in the country and in the bush and we have an idea of what is there, but if you try and tell these people it is just closed doors. I do not know how we get the message out there, other than saying we are the caretakers of the land and we know, and we have got to do something about it because we are losing very fast. We are losing ground all the time. I am not sure what we do.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Is it possible—and just forget about the cost for the moment—to fence the feral animals in?

**Mrs Green**—No.

**Mr Litchfield**—No, it is not practical.

**Mr Green**—And you are not getting rid of the problem; you are just trying to fence something in that should not be there.

**Mr WINDSOR**—But you have a situation where, because of the green movement, there is an acceptance that you cannot do something ‘in there’, so you suffer the problem. Internally there is a massive problem created as well, but they seem prepared to accept that and your damage on the exterior. So you would say it is not possible for them to have your problem?

**Mrs Green**—Yes, that is right. The geography of it is such that you could not fence it.

**Mr WINDSOR**—You are probably in the worst topographical area that we have looked at in terms of the physical terrain and trying to come to grips with it.

**Mrs Green**—But the green movement does not know what is in the bush. I spoke to Keith Muir from Colong the other day. We had a very approachable and good conversation. I invited him down to sit in on some of these management plans that we are having. He just said to me, ‘You guys wouldn’t want us there.’ I said: ‘We’re more than willing for you to come and join with us and see what we’re attempting to do. We have nothing to hide.’ And he said, ‘Oh, well, we might think about it.’ But I was very disappointed by his reaction. He just felt that we were farmers and we hated conservation. We are the conservationists!

**Mrs Litchfield**—I got that message through. He actually paid for me to go to Sydney. It was incredible.

**Mrs Green**—I have been working with him myself.

**Mrs Litchfield**—They want to know that they are ignorant. It is a huge gap created through ignorance, and they will listen to you if you can talk to them. There are extreme people there who do not want any farming at all, a bit like Peter—that is another story. The general outlook from the foundation is that we can coexist, but we need to educate them. They have done such a top job on every other person in Australia except farmers that they have convinced everybody that we are evil, and we are really the leading conservationists. That is how it has all evolved, and we need the tables turned, don’t we, Ellen? Is that about right?

**Mrs Green**—Yes.

**Mr Green**—The other thing is that we are the people who are out in the bush more than anyone else. The park ranger might go there once a month, but we live beside them. We are probably out there on a daily to a weekly basis. So we are seeing what goes on in the bush on a daily basis.

**Mrs Litchfield**—They have got this foundation going through subscription. Everybody in the city that has half a heart is trying to join them or do sidekick movements with them or whatever, and they have done an enormous job. We are just peripheral farmers, and the backlash against us has been huge, hasn’t it? We have not coped with it very well, and neither have our national bodies. We are here speaking for the New South Wales farmers. They have tried very hard, but, as you know yourselves, if you are in a minority situation it is pretty hard. You fellows have got the lead. You are up front with the feds and I think you could do a great job.

**Mr WINDSOR**—One of the difficulties that we have, though, is that this is the federal government. A lot of the custodians of the problems are at the state government level, so you get into all that tennis match stuff.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Exactly.

**Mr WINDSOR**—We are just trying to think of ways that the Commonwealth can show the lead, and that is why it has got to be something fairly basic. Theoretically at least, if there is a problem in an area the Commonwealth could directly fund it.

**Mrs Litchfield**—There is a huge amount of money in that heritage fund. That is sitting there being underutilised, in my opinion. There are millions there that you fellows could perhaps divert into a publicity campaign or an education campaign—call it ‘heritage’; call it ‘save the farmers’. Do a big program through it.

**Mr Litchfield**—The other problem about fencing is that the national or state governments are forever purchasing or accepting another piece of country somewhere or other, so where is the boundary going to be? Where is it going to finish up?

**Mr WINDSOR**—It is possible to construct legislation that demands before any of that is done that custodianship of that land is put in place. That is why I asked the question about fencing. There may be other solutions, but what you are saying is that fencing is probably not one of them.

**Mr Litchfield**—I still think it comes right back around to the aerial baiting, really. We have been held to ransom ever since that Dr John McIlroy found that quoll down in Tallaganda. We have been held to ransom over that. That is just to the north of where we are. I think the rural lands protection board spoke about that quoll research, but I might be wrong.

**CHAIR**—We have heard evidence both today and at other times that there is no scientific proof that the emotive issue of aerial baiting hurting tiger quolls or any other native species can be substantiated. Do you as a group or individually believe that non-target native species are affected by aerial baiting? We would like to have that on record.

**Mr Litchfield**—No, they are not affected.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Quite the contrary; they thrive.

**CHAIR**—You are saying that if you have a concentrated program of aerial baiting, the end result of that, after a period of time, is that the numbers of the native species increase.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Absolutely.

**CHAIR**—Because you have killed the predators that are creating the problem for the native species?

**Mr Litchfield**—I believe so. The one predator out there that I think will always be a problem until they do some research is probably the cats. They are more difficult to handle.

**Mr Green**—They have got biological control.

**CHAIR**—Thanks very much for that. We have only had broad references from witnesses about the cat issue, but it is very bad. I understand that in Victoria alone it is estimated that there are something like 20 or 30 million feral cats out there.

**Mr Litchfield**—The dog trappers are forever collecting feral cats in their traps as well.

**Mr Green**—I think the other point we have to be very careful about when we are talking about funding and that sort of thing is to make sure funding is used in a very beneficial way. I think that a lot of the funding in the past has gone into areas where there has been no real on-ground use in getting rid of the problems.

**CHAIR**—So we are buying into this: funding is going into—if I may be a little bit controversial—motor cars and personnel—

**Mrs Green**—And mound baiting.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Mound baiting has been driven by the conservation movement. It is a safe haven that, as I keep saying, costs a hospital bed every time they put one down.

**Mrs Green**—A mound bait left in for a season costs \$1,800. Any national park would have hundreds of these. We are even seeing refusal from foxes on these mound baits. They are more effective with foxes, but with dogs they are just a training ground—they teach them not to take a bait. Wherever we go we are hearing about constant problems with these but, because they are so environmentally friendly, National Parks push them as a control measure. They have fallen over everywhere.

**CHAIR**—Getting back to your point, and picking up the reaction from each of you—I have a view on this and my colleagues would probably have a view on it—do you think that, in addition to taxpayers resources, that is, money, going into these programs that are designed to assist, the general accounting process is not as intense or in-depth as it ought to be as far as responsibly looking after the taxpayers' dollars is concerned? I ask the question because it is obvious from the brief statements that you and other people have made that the outcomes that are being delivered from taxpayer dollars into these projects, which have the best intent in the world, are not as good as they ought to be.

**Mr Green**—Definitely. We have seen the absolute neglect of these contract systems with the ones that are going at the moment where we are. The thing is that we have a management plan going and, from just briefly on the computer, I think the cost to harvest one fox is something like \$15,000. This is the thing—it is about putting money in the right place with the right purpose. To me, you have to go down to the practical application to make sure the money hits the ground and it is expert driven, with dog trappers, fencing and aerial baiting. Basically, dog trappers are the experts, so let them handle the money.

**Mrs Litchfield**—A lot of it has really been management by compromise. It is weak; it does not work.

**Mr Green**—There is no management.

**Mrs Litchfield**—It is a lack of management through compromise.

**Mr Green**—It is chequebook science: ‘Here’s the money, you do what you like and we’ll say the problem is solved.’

**CHAIR**—Just on that point, do you think we should include in our report a small section or chapter which focuses on not only what we have done with regard to the impact that pest animals have on agriculture—that is, \$720 million per annum—but what it is costing the taxpayer? We have had evidence before that it is costing us so much per donkey to eradicate et cetera. So a list could be made and we could say that, in order to constructively address the problem across the nation to protect our flora and fauna, we ought to look very seriously at the way in which we are using the money that is being targeted at that very objective because this is what it is costing, based on the information we have received, to eradicate a single fox, a single donkey, a single ditto.

**Mrs Green**—And mound bait costing. I think it would be very interesting.

**CHAIR**—My point in raising this is that, while it might not seem sensible to some people, it sends a very compelling message to government that your dollar is not going where it ought to be going?

**Mr Green**—Definitely. I think the national park in our area was quoting close on half a million per year for dog control, yet every farmer in the district had dog problems. So \$400,000 has just been thrown in the air without a problem being solved.

**Mrs Green**—In the Belowra Valley I think we counted 109 bait stations in one area. This, again, shows a lack of equity: if you get on with a certain group of people you will get more stations than Joe Bloggs over here who might be complaining. That is very common.

**Mr Litchfield**—Our biggest problem is just above the Belowra Valley.

**Mr FORREST**—I am having a bit of trouble with the geography. I have a bit of a map.

**Mr Litchfield**—East Monaro.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Out from the headwaters of the Tuross. Can you see the Tuross River there?

**Mr Litchfield**—I will tell you the story about these bait stations. They are so adamant about bait stations and nothing else, the local trapper at one stage was threatened that if he appeared in the Belowra Valley he would have his throat slit. That is what they think of trappers down there. That is cooperation for you; that is the way they cooperate.

**CHAIR**—What further research do you see as being important in helping to improve pest animal control? Are pest control officers sufficiently well trained to carry out their task, or do we need a nationally accredited training scheme for pest animal controllers?

**Mr Litchfield**—From what I can see, they are quite well trained right around Monaro. We have been very fortunate because we have had a couple of elderly gentlemen—John Comans is one—

**CHAIR**—Keep in mind that we are talking about a national situation, around the country.

**Mr Litchfield**—I cannot speak for the whole of Australia, but in our area they are all right. About research, maybe collaring or chipping dogs et cetera to see where they go or do not go, I think we should set them up a little bit like these terrorists that blow themselves up: you let the dog go for so many days and then you press a button and blow him apart, because when you have trapped him once and collared him or chipped him he is mighty hard to get a second time.

**CHAIR**—What about a judas dog? In Western Australia they had judas donkeys and judas goats. They put a transmitter on them, let them run with the mobs, then come in and aerial shoot, but they let the judas go and the judas then goes and finds another group. The judas keeps going from group to group. They have had a very effective program in wiping out populations of wild donkeys and goats. Would it work if you had a traceable, transmitter based implement on the dog and, if not, why not?

**Mrs Litchfield**—I think you will find a later group you are hearing from will follow up on this. A huge amount of money has been spent on that and the dogs are worse than ever.

**Mrs Green**—In the terrain of this eastern escarpment country in particular you just cannot get in at them. And there is a nine-hour delay, even on a satellite collar. If a dog hits in one area they do not pick him up until nine hours later, so if he is killing he has already done it. That is with satellite. The other thing I would like to say is that we need money desperately for research into neospora, to develop a vaccine or some method of curing this disease. We do not know what the impact is on our native fauna, but there is a belief that it will cross into them. Maybe that is another reason for the decimation of native fauna in our national parks. We know it affects all undulants.

**CHAIR**—That is a frightening revelation that you have just raised about neospora. To my knowledge, we have not heard any concerns about that; maybe people have been focused on other things. That is a frightening situation, which has the potential to do massive damage.

**Mrs Green**—It is a protozoan virus. Noelene Franklin, who is a scientist, believes that it could cross into the native fauna. She was a research scientist at CSIRO for eight years, so I believe that she would have some idea. As yet, we do not know. The eastern seaboard of Australia, from Queensland to Victoria, is riddled with neospora.

**Mrs Litchfield**—It is a national park the whole way now, isn't it?

**Mrs Green**—Yes.

**Mr Green**—The other thing is that apparently it is very closely related to toxoplasmosis, which actually does affect pregnant women.

**Mrs Green**—Worldwide, it is bigger than brucellosis ever was. It is the major cause of abortion—

**CHAIR**—I am out of the meat-processing industry, so I understand. I am still in the meat processing industry—the only difference is the animals have changed!

**Mr Green**—Going back to research and that sort of thing, I think there has been plenty of bloody research on dogs and there are that many files about, so enough is enough. Let us just have some practical application to sort the problem out.

**Mrs Golby**—As far as training goes, I think a trapper who is already doing a good job is the best person to teach somebody else.

**CHAIR**—Yes, I have made that point and we have heard evidence to that effect from the north of Australia.

**Mrs Golby**—Also, I think aerial baiting needs to be more widespread and to be done without waiting for a problem to come. Adaminaby had a lot of troubles and they still do. They got their aerial baiting. We had a lot of fires. When the 2003 fires were on we were totally surrounded by fires. This put a lull in the dog problem; there are odd ones, but there is a definite lull. It was the same when aerial baiting ceased in 1997: there was about a four-year lull before the dog population just built up and exploded. We had 14 dogs caught on our place in six months.

**CHAIR**—If there is a document you would like to table as evidence, we would be happy to take that.

**Mrs Golby**—Yes, thank you. I would like to see the aerial baiting as an ongoing thing, rather than saying, ‘Let’s see if there’s a problem, and then do it.’ It should be a preventative measure.

**Mr FORREST**—You have been very consistent on that. That was your submission to us 18 months ago. The chairman got excited earlier today when an earlier witness mentioned the New South Wales minister’s announcement of aerial baiting. We have not written our report. The solution you suggested to us was that our inquiry immediately call for the reintroduction of aerial baiting. Has progress been made?

**Mrs Litchfield**—A tiny bit.

**Mr FORREST**—We cannot draw much encouragement from this statement.

**Mrs Litchfield**—Well, they got a plane in the air—it is token.

**Mr Litchfield**—Yes, it was restricted. The number of baits dropped per kilometre was very limited, for a start. And the first lot they did, the foxes round about probably took the whole darn lot.

**CHAIR**—And they are going to come back when?

**Mr Litchfield**—I do not think it has been followed up.

**Mrs Green**—I sit on three management committees and at each one I have asked for the reintroduction of aerial baiting into problem areas. And Parks just dismiss you and say: ‘Absolutely not; you can’t have it. The minister said Adaminaby was a one-off.’ I say, ‘No, the minister said that wherever there is a problem area we can have aerial baiting.’ And they say, ‘No, absolutely not.’

**CHAIR**—Okay. We thank each and every one of you for coming here today. We are very pleased and obviously delighted with the contributions made so far. We were intending to come to Cooma on a couple of occasions but circumstances prevented us doing so. The secretary of the committee reminded me that we needed to come to Cooma and we are here today. Thank you for your contribution; it is very important. We understand your problem and we will try to come up with recommendations in our report that will send a very compelling message to the federal government that we have to do something on a national scale.

We need to eradicate introduced or exotic species in this country, whether they are feral animals or introduced weed species, and we need to manage local indigenous fauna. We appreciate what you are saying. Your contribution will help us make a very constructive report and, more importantly, recommendations to the minister and to the government of the day. Hopefully, it will bring some positive outcomes, although I have to say that reports and recommendations do not always get treated with the urgency they need from government. But perhaps after this is over we as individuals might be able to ask the appropriate questions as to why the recommendations are not being implemented or enforced. Thank you for your time.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.11 pm to 12.46 pm**



**SPENCER, Mr Peter James, Private capacity**

**CHAIR**—Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Spencer**—I am appearing as a concerned citizen and local landowner.

**CHAIR**—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Do you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submission or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

**Mr Spencer**—I have made a submission to the committee. I will not go into that right now because I have no doubt you have oodles of things to read. It is a document of considerable length; I am sorry about that. However, the more research I did on the subject the more I became overwhelmed with the fact that your committee probably is going to have a greater impact—if we can get things effected from its input—on rural Australian communities than any other committee that has sat, and I have appeared before a number. I am really impressed with the fact that the impact of pests on the rural Australian environment has been absolutely devastating.

I spoke to a farmer at a meeting in Canberra on Tuesday when the Chief Minister announced their new parks policy, and the farmer said to me: ‘Peter, I just thought for 30 years that my farm was just getting worse and that it just wasn’t good land.’ In fact, what has been happening is that as our land has been impacted by an overlapping plethora of government policies—parks, pests, different legislative things—we have almost been institutionalised by this and gradually grown to accept this. In families the next generation is virtually walking away because the struggle has become too great; they have gradually got to the stage where it is all too hard and the farms are no good. So I think your committee can contribute, hopefully, a refreshing wind of change if we can get some of these messages across to the general public and parliament as a whole.

Rather than go over my paper, which is substantive enough, I want to say something which is very important. I heard people talking today and their heart is where they are being impacted. It is very important that this message gets to all of us as to how they are directly impacted by pests. I am referring to specifically animal pests, not weeds. What I do not understand is that we have all been saying this for 30 years. We talk about the aerial baiting, the trapper, the baiting station or the fence. We all attend the dog meetings at the rural lands protection board, and Parks come to, and we go over the same hash. The sad thing is, and this is what we must remember and I mention it in my paper—

**CHAIR**—Can I just interrupt you to say that that is one of the reasons this inquiry is under way, because nobody has attacked it at a national level before.

**Mr Spencer**—That is right. I just say here that, with that in mind, as a matter of the utmost importance this committee should take good stock of what it does not hear. It should take very careful note of what is not submitted by those persons who are not present because they have

gone—and I can show you this on this map of the area around the ACT. All the way from Yaouk to Williamsdale, there are only two farms left that farm sheep—all the farms are empty except for those two. The others have up to a five-thousand-acre buffer zone between the boundary of the park and where they are operating their farms. There is nothing left. These farms have been given up; the farmers have walked away, thinking: ‘Our farms are of no value.’ This has to be looked at. I said to the Chief Minister of the ACT yesterday, ‘Just walk around your boundary and look at the devastation.’ I estimate there are 30,000 families impacted by pests through national park mismanagement. It is like the ripple of a stone when you throw it into a pond: the ripples go out.

In 1974 when the first act came in for national parks we removed the social accountability clauses that said they had to be subject to a planning authority, environmental impact studies and the fencing act. By doing that we felt at the time—we as a people, as a nation—that they were national parks and they were going to do wonderful things for all of us. Nobody looked at that. The end result is that now they are not subject to any management principle. So when the ranger looks at his domain he does not have to worry about whether he can feed the animals, about the impact of the flora on the fauna or vice versa and about what is happening if one species is dominating another—and if they are hungry they just jump over the fence and eat the neighbour’s, so he does not even have to deal with whether the stocking numbers are right.

**CHAIR**—I do not want to be rude and interrupt you but the theme that you are following at the moment is a theme that we are well aware of. To assist us, could you give us your idea about how we overcome the problem? What suggestions do you have, from a national point of view, that you think we should be doing in cooperation, or otherwise, with the states and territories and local government people? What could be recommended to the federal government of the day that will help resolve the problem? We cannot go back in history and return people to where they were.

**Mr Spencer**—What I am suggesting must be done is you must understand the impact of the plethora of legislation, for instance. It is not the pest. I will just run through the chain: the dog follows the roo; the roo eats the grass, but he does not eat the regrowth; the dog, following the roo, drives out the sheep; the sheep gone creates thickening; thickening creates regrowth; regrowth you cannot clear from native vegetation and you lose your streams. So what you have got is this rippling effect. As they said to me on Tuesday: ‘Oh, we’ll just make your farm a tourist attraction.’ But the moment you do not fence the park then my farm goes, then in 20 years time the next farm goes: it spreads. You have got to deal with the issue in the park.

My recommendation is that you must turn around the legislation and say this: all parks must be subject to a development authority application and an environmental impact study. They did this at Puckapunyal. Professor Morgan from the zoology department in the University of Melbourne was called in. They put in a fence and then did an estimate of what animals could be carried inside that. They had to cull 90 per cent of what was there to bring the numbers back to what could be run in a healthy way, without disease and without impacting badly on the environment. Our parks are places where there should be a proper balance of native flora and fauna, not impacted by exotics. However, they are the breeding grounds of our problem. If we do not contain them, then don’t even worry about your aerial baiting or your bait stations or your trappers. Fence your parks, then work back to that from your farms and you will eradicate the

problem. If you do not do that, in 30 years time we will be having the same discussion. That is all I have to say. And that is what is in my paper.

**Mr WINDSOR**—In the research you have done over the years, have you seen any other country where this problem has been dealt with?

**Mr Spencer**—In the back of my paper I put a couple of notes about what has happened in New Zealand where, in fencing the parks, they found it had a double-whammy benefit in that they were able to stop foxes and cats getting in.

We heard a comment earlier tonight that it is impractical. On every piece of freehold or lease land in Australia that farms sheep or cattle a way to do a fence has been worked out. We have done a budget on the fence at \$60 a metre, which is \$6 million to fence Namadgi. But they would not have to fence where it adjoins another public land mass like Mount Kosciuszko. It would mean a six-foot high, chain wire fence. The kangaroos would not cross it. The kangaroos are a bigger problem than dogs, as far as loss of productivity, with the grass that they eat from those adjoining parks. In New Zealand when they fenced, they found that it helped in two ways. It puts in a management parameter where people have to work in that framework. You can work back to that point. If I have a fence I can then bait back to that fence and know that that is my problem finished. But at present I have to look at the whole park. I have a 13-kilometre border with it. New Zealand was the only example that I have been able to look at. That helped them with their native animal protection, because a lot of the exotics like possums could not get through.

**CHAIR**—Our problem is that New Zealand would fit into some of our national parks. Who do you think should be responsible for the cost of erecting that sort of fence, which we have had evidence to say that in Tasmania would cost somewhere in the vicinity of \$15,000 per kilometre?

**Mr Spencer**—It is \$60 a metre. When our former New South Wales premier Bob Carr re-established up to 8½ per cent of our state as national parks, the problem was that the farmers picked up the tab for that lack of budgeting. If you are going to create a park, look at the total cost. If you cannot afford it, do not create the park. It is no good coming back to us later and saying: 'It is now your problem, pick up the tab.' That is what is happening. Rural Australia is picking up the tab of bad budgeting for the parks they want to feed fundamental green idealism.

If we are not going to look at the practical need for proper funding, why are we having the park in the first place? That is the sad thing. For example, there have been 83,000 impacts on calves from native animals in the last year. They are what we call the fifth column. They are the first ones that are looking for food. Do you know what the report said? It gave two paragraphs at the end as to where to find a kangaroo hospital to get the kangaroo fixed. There was nothing about the deaths, the loss of property and the harm to human beings caused. We have lost control, and the dogs are just following on after the kangaroos. It is all in there.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your brief contribution. You may be surprised to know that there are members on this committee who have been fighting the very things that you have been talking about, as private individuals and members of parliament, for some time. The difficulty we may have is that as a national government, even though the recommendations might be coming from this committee, we have to convince the state governments—because of the constitutional

problems that we have—that what we are proposing is in the best interests of protecting our native flora and fauna. That means that some of the practices that are endemic in state and territory jurisdictions have to be radically changed, as you quite rightly pointed out. I make those points for what they are worth. I thank you for your contribution and your submission and apologise to you for the brief period of time we have been able to give you today.

**Mr Spencer**—I just want to make one comment before I go. I think you will be able to get a lot more support. I think you will find, when you look at the end of my paper, that it is now having such an impact on our environment that we have probably lost the entire catchment capacity of the Snowy Mountains scheme because of what has happened with dogs. The impact on thickening and revegetation through the loss of snow on leases and the native vegetation and the parks has probably destroyed the biggest catchment area of Australia to the point where the Blowering Dam, Murrumbidgee and Snowy River losses are not due to drought or climate change but are due to what they call interception. The dogs have driven the sheep out, the grazing has gone and now the woody plant that is growing back is taking the water. There is none left. The next 50 years are going to be worse than the last, so it is just the start. As to my research, the University of New England rang me yesterday and said: ‘Peter, your paper is spot on. We are now urgently looking at it. We believe the catchment is lost.’

**Mr WINDSOR**—If you have the time, have a look at the Commonwealth Heritage Act.

**Mr Spencer**—I am familiar with it.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Have a look to see whether there is any legislative manipulation that could be in there in terms of this difficulty that the chair spoke of in dealing with the states. We see it with health; we see it with everything.

**Mr Spencer**—As I said, I think you will find the state is aware of the problem. We have heard about cloud seeding. It is trying to blame it on climate change and drought; in fact, it is contributing. I will give you an example: six streams on our property have gone in 20 years, one every four years, directly below where the regrowth is occurring. On one property we cover, with undulation, 20,000 acres. We are probably the highest farm in Australia. But when I talk to my neighbours, they say the same thing. I am saying that the Australian Alps are the icon of hydro and water catchment for Leeton irrigation. I believe the state knows it but it is not admitting it. I believe you will be able to draw attention to the plethora of change occurring in our environment because we are not managing right from point 1. We must stop adding bandaids with another bait station. This is not the issue. We have a major problem on our hands, and we are wiping out the whole of rural Australia.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that contribution. That issue has not been raised, and it is a very pertinent point. To my knowledge, it has not been raised anywhere in Australia where we have taken evidence.

**Mr Spencer**—I sent an email to your office this morning after I got information yesterday from the Western Australian Water Corporation about the big kauri tree forests. They put a submission up for public hearing yesterday for a massive thinning of those trees to increase water production flow by 20 per cent. They are almost wiped out with water, and they have now

admitted the problem. It is now a scientific fact—UNE rang me about it yesterday—and I believe pests are the start of the problem.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

[1.01 pm]

**KENNEDY, Mrs Marion, Chairperson, Adaminaby Yaouk Wild Dog Committee**

**MAGUIRE, Mr Robert Edward, Representative, Rocky Plain-Snowy Plain Cooperative Wild Dog Working Group; and Member, Advisory Panel, Wild Dog Management, Kosciuszko Region**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Do you have any comments on the capacity in which you appear today?

**Mr Maguire**—I am a land-holder and I am also a member of the Monaro Merino Association and the New South Wales Farmers Association.

**CHAIR**—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament. Does either one of you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submissions or make some introductory remarks?

**Mrs Kennedy**—Yes. First, I would like to thank the committee for letting us have a say on the impact of the feral animals. In the Adaminaby-Yaouk area, as you are well aware, there is intensive damage done to agricultural production by wild dogs and the emotional sight of farmers who have stock killed and maimed year after year. I can assure you it is a sight you never get used to. It is one that you should not have to put up with, but the problem seems to be getting worse. Over the years we have lost 750-odd sheep that have been killed by dogs, and that adds up to quite a substantial loss. The dogs are moving further out of the park to source their food on private land and are having a huge impact on farming communities, with huge stock losses. Over 500 sheep have been killed in the Adaminaby-Yaouk area this year, and over 45 dogs have been trapped. These dogs travel great distances. One dog that was microchipped and that was killing sheep on our property had travelled over 60 kilometres out of the park. It took six weeks to catch this dog. He had been caught twice before and released in the park, and he was very trap shy.

The Yaouk Valley had over 30,000 sheep back in the 1960s and 1970s, now it has 1,000, so naturally the numbers killed are down as farmers turn to cattle. But it will not be long before they start to kill calves too. We have at present two trappers working in the area, but they can do only so much. When the dogs start moving, they cannot stop them all. It is most important that we have aerial baiting to knock down the large number of dogs that build up in the park. The aerial baiting done last year in the Adaminaby-Yaouk area was a success, but it needed follow-up work to be a better success. Over the years it has cost us thousands of dollars through sheep losses, wool losses and lamb losses. Future breeders have been killed and ewes have been killed through not joining up and the dogs chasing them. We have cut our sheep numbers by over half. You can stand only so much loss from your income. It is very depressing going into your paddocks when the dogs are killing. It becomes very emotional. We should be able to make a

living from our properties, and we should not be handicapped because we live next door to national parks. I think that some compensation should be paid for stock losses.

**Mr Maguire**—I had a snow lease when the park was grazed. I had a snow lease and a permissive occupancy of nearly 10,000 acres. There was no overabundance of native animals in the park in the three years that I had the lease—we were kicked off in 1969. There were a few wallabies, a few roos and echidnas and so forth. That was one of the observations I made. When it finished in 1969, there were no dogs whatever in the park; there were no dogs in there from the thirties to the sixties. Sheep that were mismustered—20 or 30 sheep missed in a lease—would be there next spring if the snow did not get them. If the snow did get them there would be a big pile of dead wool, not like when dogs hit them and they are scattered all over the shop. When we went to Snowy Plain seven or eight years ago there was a bit of a dog problem but it has escalated out of all proportions. There used to be 20,000 sheep grazed on Snowy Plain; this year there were 300—not enough for a decent stew—and that is attributed to the dogs. Sixty dogs were trapped on Snowy Plain last year, and the trapper estimated that he knew of another 17 that he could not get. These are gigantic proportions.

The 1080 was used to keep them in check but, of course, 1080 is very selective. The dog is way up on the top of the list of being susceptible—if you do not feed an eagle enough 1080, you will not kill it—so it has to be held in check. When the greenies come and say, ‘You’re going to throw all these baits out and you’re going to kill every damned thing,’ that is not right. The little amount of poison that is used will kill a dog or a fox but it will not kill anything else. So it got selective. The bait stations are a waste of bloody time. All they do is cost you \$600 a day to maintain, and they educate uneducated dogs. At the moment, there is no reason why we cannot aerial bait, because the quoll trials have been finished. You have heard that before. They have finished but they are not letting on. In April 2004 the minister approved 1080 for Adaminaby-Yaouk. It has been done once, and that is a bloody disgrace because once is just no good at all. The first application knocked the dogs, but they are back in greater numbers. Something like 500 sheep have been killed in the area this year, which is far greater than last year.

**CHAIR**—So you are saying that it has basically been a cynical exercise to send a political message that we have reacted to?

**Mr Maguire**—Yes. I blame—when I say ‘blame’, I do not think the RLPB have pushed hard enough to get it going again. Any other area like Snowy Plain was out of the question. I have been talking to the parks. A submission has gone to the minister with whom I started with the Snowy Plain mob to aerial bait Snowy Plain in conjunction with Adaminaby, but we are into September. Heavens above, it should have been done. Then we get back to the human side of it. I will read this letter quickly because it is important. It says:

My name is Ben Reardon from Yass. I was fishing around the Tantangara Dam area fishing the Eucumbene River on 23 January 2004 when two wild dogs approached me from behind. When I first noticed them they were 15 meters behind me. They were creeping up with their front legs lowered when I started throwing rocks. This made them back pedal a little but it wasn’t until after many rocks they disappeared.

Also a fellow work mate has come across a pack of wild dogs whilst fishing on the Eucumbene River. The pack of dogs surrounded him forcing him to try and beat them off with their fishing rod. Unsuccessfully he was forced to wade in the water until the dogs lost interest.

The *Canberra Times* did an article on that—here is a copy, which you can have; it includes a photo of my son, with dogs hanging from a tree. The *Canberra Times* have contacted this man and there is further proof that other people have been harassed. My son was followed by dogs for six k's when he was mustering 30 head of cattle on country we own in Snowy Plain which was burnt out in the 2003 fires. We are going to lose people. Where we are going, I do not know.

**CHAIR**—We are aware of those two particular incidents.

**Mr Maguire**—Do you have a copy of Ben Reardon's letter?

**CHAIR**—Yes, we do. We have also had evidence from Victoria about horsemen in the high country being annoyed and attacked by dogs, so we are aware of that danger. We have taken significant evidence right around Australia on the problem of wild dogs, foxes and all other feral animals. What we need from you are your ideas on how aerial baiting is working—and you have given us some evidence on that already; whether 1080 is effective and the only alternative poison that is worth using for controlling and eradicating feral animals such as foxes, dogs and cats; and whether health concerns such as hydatids and neospora are a major issue in your area. Bob, in your submission you have commented that the local wild dog and fox plan is seriously flawed. We need to know why it is seriously flawed, so that we can build that in with the other information we have and make the appropriate strong recommendations to the government when we put out our report. Incidentally, for the benefit of those people who are here, our report will be tabled after we have gone through the draft, hopefully at the end of October or early in November.

**Mr Maguire**—The plan is flawed because we have not been able to use aerial baiting, and that is why we are in the mess we are in. At the moment, as I have just told you, 1080 is the most effective poison. Bait stations have educated these uneducated dogs. Michael Hedger caught 60 dogs last year that have walked past 20 bait stations. In a little area like Snowy Plain, 60 dogs is outrageous. Of the 300 sheep that went up there this year, 13 were killed in the first week. Harley took 100 and David Fletcher took 200. David Fletcher usually takes 2½ thousand, but he is down to 200—and 13 of those were killed in the first week. This problem has been going on forever. The only solution we have is to forget about the bait stations and make the park look after the country they are supposed to look after—by getting rid of the dogs that are causing so much trouble. At the fire inquiry, I gave you a copy of a book by Max Leitch called *A Recipe for Disaster*, in which he says:

In 1985 it was possible to see anything up to 50 kangaroo carcasses rotting—

at Tantangara—

either in the water or on the banks of streams. The dog packs chase the kangaroos and they take refuge in the water but can't survive for long in the very cold water.

That is one little quotation. Last year, when the first snow came in May at Snowy Plain, all through the Snowy Plain valley there were little mobs of red wallabies. The dogs slaughtered them when the first snow came because wallabies cannot go in snow. Up to 11 were killed in mobs. I saw seven in one mob and 11 in another, and the dogs ate one. The park are talking about conservation. They talk about park policies. What is the park policy? Let the grass up and



burn the guts out of it every 20 years and have everything killed? Heavens above! Just listen to this heap of—

**CHAIR**—Can you give us a reference on that document you are going to read from, Bob?

**Mr Maguire**—You can have this.

**CHAIR**—Great.

**Mr Maguire**—It is page 9, ‘Impact on native animals’. This is what the parks say:

Wild dogs and foxes predate upon native animals (Corbett 1995). While individuals of these native and introduced species are being taken by wild dogs & foxes, the impact upon local populations is unknown.

**CHAIR**—Can you just give us the name of that document for the *Hansard* record?

**Mr Maguire**—Yes. It is the ‘3 year co-operative wild dog/fox plan’ for the Snowy Plain and Rocky Plain. I am one of the landowners and David Fletcher is the other on the committee. I am also on the advisory committee of the park, but they do not take the bloody advice.

**CHAIR**—I am well aware of that, Bob. I was the local state politician, as you know.

**Mr Maguire**—The advisory panel for wild dog management in the Kosciuszko region—and that was a waste of time. In Marion’s country—I was in Adaminaby—one chap, Alan West, ran 5,000 sheep in 1967. In 1970, the first dogs attacked. In 1970-71, he lost a thousand sheep; in 1972, 700 sheep. From 1972 to 1978, Alan cut his sheep numbers in half. In 1978, some cattle got into Kosciuszko park. He was burying his mother while they impounded his cattle. Yes, it is laughable. In 1981, Alan sold 6,000 acres for not much money, to keep going. The people who have bought that land do not want the dogs removed, so we have the problem there that we cannot bait it. It was the dogs that started the problem, and it is the dogs that are going to finish the problem. In 1991, he was completely out of sheep. He has sold all of his country now; he is a broken man. I have had enough—you had better have a go, Marion. I am sorry, but I get stirred up with this.

**CHAIR**—We understand that, Bob. Do not apologise for it.

**Mr Maguire**—I have seen Snowy Plain in the last seven years go from a magnificent thing to a place of death and destruction. You used to be able to drive out on an evening, coming on dark, and see all those little red wallabies feeding about. Now you do not see them; they are gone.

**CHAIR**—Just for your information, Bob, and for Marion’s information, we understand that this is a very emotive issue for people, because the people who are creating the problem and making the excuses do not understand that the people who are affected by it are the most environmentally conscious people in the country. So we understand that; do not apologise for it.

**Mr Maguire**—The other thing I want to bring up is the wombats. Everyone complains about wombats. Commercial travellers, we call them. They have been distributed by the do-gooders, by the WIRES association. They have no respect for anybody’s property. They will take the

wombats, wherever they can, to where they are not, and let them go. They even took them out by boat on the Eucumbene peninsula. It is eight kilometres long, and they put them out on the far tip. It has taken me a fair while to round them up.

**CHAIR**—That is a very important point you raise there, Bob. You are saying that groups in the community such as WIRES are distributing native animals—

**Mr Maguire**—To where they are not.

**CHAIR**—into areas that those native species of animals have never been.

**Mr Maguire**—That is true. That is a fact. Cats: Australia is the only place where they have colonised. Did you realise that? They are not colonised in any other country, to my knowledge. Using stock is the only safe method of managing the park. It is the only way of—

**CHAIR**—Keeping the fuel levels down—

**Mr Maguire**—keeping the fuel levels down, because if you have stock there then you are in charge. You can limit the number that you have got, the time they are in and when they come out. It has been documented that, on the main range, where it burnt, they lost 60 tonnes of topsoil to the hectare. I know that has nothing to do with feral animals but it has got to do with management and that is what we are on about. I do not know how Marion has stuck to her guns and lived with the death and destruction that I have seen; it is unbelievable that anyone should have to put up with it.

**CHAIR**—I think we do understand; I think it is the stoicism of the Australian land-holder. We understand that. Some in the community might not, but we do.

**Ms Kennedy**—I would like to comment on aerial baiting. I have joined national parks, including the Kosciuszko National Park, the Namadgi National Park, which includes the Cotter Catchment, and the Scabby Range Nature Reserve. The dogs just come in to those areas all the time. I think aerial baiting has got to be done. The last lot of baiting did a good job but there are still dogs there. I think that they have just got to keep doing it to follow up on what they have done.

**CHAIR**—Can I ask both of you a question: would you like to see, given the experiences that you have had over the years, an approach to managing pest animals put in place at the national level?

**Mr Maguire**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—In your opinion, what are the main barriers to effective pest control management in your area?

**Mr Maguire**—The main barriers are that, after all is said and done, there is more said and nothing is done. That is the problem. The park will not get rid of these dogs. They know they are there. They have slaughtered everything in the park; you can ride for two days and not see anything except a bird. I am not kidding—do it.

**Mr WINDSOR**—What do the local park people say privately in relation to that comment you have just made?

**Mr Maguire**—Like all people, you get good and bad. There are some terrific people in the park, but there are some real—I can't say the word.

**Mr WINDSOR**—Some not so nice people.

**Mr Maguire**—Yes. They are not so nice. And they have got a hidden agenda. That is what I am frightened of. As soon as you mention stock to the head shonky, that is out. He reckons that grazing did nothing in the fire in Victoria, which is absolutely wrong. All the fires in the park were put out on grazed country. In 1964-65 fires were put out on the grazed country within the park; in 1983 they were put out on country outside the park.

I want to talk about this proposed dingo thing. Here is a map that you can have. All that area coloured pink on the map is where they want to run the dingos. If they want to preserve the dingos, I suggest they use methylated spirits! The dingo is infused with every other sort of dog. The dogs that I have seen caught at Snowy Plain have got legs on them as thick as my wrist and they are big woolly buggers—they are not all the same but there are a lot of them like this—that have a husky strain in them. They are huge—if they stood up on their hind legs they could put their paws on my shoulders. We lost two calves this autumn. Those calves did not die from anything else but the wild dogs; my wife and I saw them, but they did not come out. Do you want that map?

**CHAIR**—Yes, table that as well.

**Mr Maguire**—This is what has gone to the minister. This is a map of Snowy Plain and it has a map here of where the killings have been, including my two calves, and a map of where the stock used to be grazed. That is supposed to be before the minister now. I do not know what is holding him up. You can have those things if you want them. There is also a report here by Dr Leong Lim that I want to table. He did a report on the quolls and the stuff in the park.

**CHAIR**—That would be very helpful, thanks, Bob.

**Mr Maguire**—Righto. You can also have that heap of junk, too! It is called the three-year cooperation plan. The only trouble is, they are not cooperating.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for coming in to give evidence. As I said to previous people who have given evidence here today, we have been trying to get to Cooma since last year. A number of things have prevented us from doing so and we were determined to get here to get evidence from people in the region. That has been very comprehensive today and I thank you for the effort that you have made. I can assure you that this committee is a bipartisan committee that is unified as one person in trying to do something about the real concerns that you have raised. You may not remember, but some of us have had quite a lot to do with the Kosciuszko. Peter Cochran, when he was the member for Monaro, and I predicted that the park would go up and you would not be able to stop it and it would kill more—

**Mr Maguire**—I predicted that years ago and they burnt me out. We have to buy a \$70,000 dozer now to clean the mess up before my cattle get incinerated. The park will burn again, sooner than later, because the amount of stuff that is left there from the last fire is absolutely mind-boggling. The fire had such intensity that it vaporised aluminium in Tumut 1 power station—it is a cement bunker and it vaporised aluminium.

**CHAIR**—Thanks very much for that, Bob. We really appreciate it. We will use your evidence to make recommendations that hopefully will be picked up by governments. We cannot guarantee that they will be, but you can be assured that we as individuals will be pressing to make sure that they get the message very strongly. Thank you very much.

[1.28 pm]

**CONSTANCE, Mr Ernie, Private capacity**

**TALBOT, Mrs Coral Margaret, Private capacity**

**CHAIR**—Welcome, Mrs Talbot and Mr Constance. Would you like to comment on the capacity in which you appear today?

**Mrs Talbot**—I am a landowner.

**Mr Constance**—I am a land-holder on the east of Monaro.

**CHAIR**—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament and consequently warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Do either of you wish to make a brief statement in relation to your submissions or make some introductory remarks? Feel free to just talk about your concerns and be open and frank with the committee. You can say what you like within the framework of the hearing because you are under the protection of parliament. Please make your contribution and tell us what is wrong with the system and what you think should happen with the system. As an example, tell us whether you agree that the problems related to feral animals, particularly exotic species, should be the subject of a national body rather than state bodies and individual groups of people. Your comments on any of those sorts of issues would be very constructive.

**Mr Constance**—In my submission I touched on a number of pest animals. I touched on the dogs: they have been pretty well covered here. Over a five-year period from about 1998 until 2003 we had a lot of trouble with dogs. We lost 600 sheep. I also touched on eagles and a number of other things. I think dogs have been pretty well hammered, but I would like to add that the aerial baiting worked really well over the few years it was in operation in our area and we had no trouble at that time until the aerial baiting ceased.

In New South Wales we can no longer get permits to get rid of some eagles. The minister made the statement when the law was brought in and there was something put out in the paper saying how they had done tests on the diet of the eagle and they found they ate rabbits, small wallabies, feral cats and foxes but there was very little evidence of lambs or sheep. Being a sheep grazer I know that is a total fabrication because I have seen them take lambs. When those studies and trials were done I queried whether they were done in areas where there was a sheep population. I suspect they were done in parks very far removed from sheep.

I have had sheep with foot abscesses caused by the wet season, and any sheep that lay down with the foot abscess never got up again. The eagles came and took them. My sons were working around home that same year, shearing as professional shearers. One particular morning they saw a ewe with twin lambs in a neighbour's paddock, and two eagles were there. One lamb was already dead and the eagles were attacking the ewe to try to get to the other lamb. My sons

continued on. They came back that night and the ewe and the lamb were dead. Those two eagles killed the grown ewe. I realise it is a state jurisdiction and you are federal MPs, but if our laws say we can no longer get rid of our problem eagles what is going to happen? How many lambs do we lose?

In the 200 years that Australia has had grazing, governments of all persuasions have encouraged primary production—until the last 30 or 40 years. Suddenly we find we have no ear of government. The only people who have the ear of government are the radical extreme groups who peddle themselves as conservationists. I do not believe they are conservationists. Bob said a great deal about the conservation movement and how the parks are conserved et cetera. As a grazier, that is the way I feel. We are being whittled away on every side with native vegetation laws and endangered species laws, which bring in the dogs and the eagles I have just mentioned. It is not only the dogs and the eagles that are the problem; it is the whole political climate. We are trying to not only survive but produce. Believe me: there are a lot of very good producers on the Monaro but a lot of them are struggling against all these types of odds. The eagles and dogs are only part of an overall political climate in which we find ourselves.

**CHAIR**—Don't feel let down too much, Ernie. Whilst we cannot speak for the government, we understand the point that you are making. This is a joint committee of the House of Representatives of the Australian parliament and we are listening to what you are saying. You can rest assured that we will be making the appropriate recommendations to the government of the day as members of the Australian parliament and at arm's length from the government as to what we consider needs to be addressed as far as feral animals and introduced weed species are concerned.

It would be helpful for the committee for us to have your views—and I will go to Coral in a minute—collectively on whether we should be setting up a national committee which is responsible for compiling a national database on exotic pest animal and plant species and on the problems they are causing for agriculture as well. That would contain a database on those areas of Australia that from time to time have explosions of native animal species which become feral to the point where they are impacting not only on the environment but on agriculture as a whole. We have heard and seen evidence of our native species, such as possums and wallabies, being harvested and exported. They are being used as a natural resource during those periods of explosions. My long-winded question comes to this: do you believe we should set up a national database and do you believe we should have a national approach to all of the problems related to feral animals and weeds?

**Mrs Talbot**—Weeds, pest animals and protected species that are out of control are certainly a common problem for everybody, so they belong to everybody, so I think it is national. They know no borders, insects included. I also have reservations that we seem to be getting so many layers of people and so many meetings when it is really only the people on the ground that are going to make a difference. That is a concern of mine. I appreciate that we have to have layers of planners and all the rest of it. The cost of training—these days it is not only in time but in actual dollars—is also impacting. That is a real worry.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for that. That is very constructive. Ernie, would you like to make a comment?

**Mr Constance**—I would agree pretty much with what Coral said. A national register would be good as it is a national problem. A national register would be good as long as it does not create another little bureaucracy. At the end of the day it comes back to what Coral said: do we keep people on the ground to actually make the thing work?

**CHAIR**—I can assure you this committee's direction is not to do that. Our direction is to make recommendations to the government along the lines of national control and national databasing without an additional layer of bureaucracy but coupled to a reduction in the existing bureaucracy. I can assure you that is exactly where we are going.

**Mr Constance**—That comes back to what Bob Maguire was saying. We have got huge areas of country and parks which are harbouring all sorts of pests, exotic and native. I am sure Parks employ thousands and thousands of people but, having been to a number of meetings with park personnel, while we seem to have many people there working keyboards, drawing maps, et cetera, I am not so sure we have very many out there on the ground doing anything physically, doing the manual labour, which is what we as landholders have to do. It seems that Parks are a bit reluctant to get into that side of it.

**CHAIR**—So what you are saying is that the problem demands an immediate response in the interests—I am not trying to put words in your mouth—of protecting our native flora and fauna as well as protecting the industries that surround national parks, as an example, and is not being addressed. It is certainly not being addressed in a manner which would indicate that it is making an impact on the problem.

**Mr Constance**—I believe that. If you drive through Blowering, on the Snowy Mountains Highway, you see a beautiful piece of country there covered with kangaroos. It is a great place for kangaroos. But it is also covered with blackberries in the summer months and St John's Wort. That is what I come back to. I believe that the parks is just one big bureaucracy and the actual hands-on work is very scarce.

**CHAIR**—That is not just the National Parks, either. It is also the water commission—I don't know what they call it now—on the dam side of Blowering that has a problem with significant weed and pest animals.

**Mr Constance**—It probably comes back to most crown land areas. It comes back to possibly being one of the best managers. Bob said the grazing in the parks is the best way to control the fire problem.

**CHAIR**—You don't have to convince me.

**Mrs Talbot**—I can appreciate the problems that National Parks have but I do know that it is extremely big dollars. We have all heard on the radio about state funding—because that is where we live, New South Wales—and that they had a massive reduction in funds. I now live on an island in the Kybeyan nature reserve, so National Parks are my neighbours on all boundaries. I can only speak as I find them, but I find them to be good neighbours.

Mother lodes of serrated tussock surrounded me. We have owned the property for about 16 years, and it has been a constant battle with the tussock but we have got it on the run. Between

Landcare and a joint program with Nimmitabel and Numeralla Landcare about three years ago and the National Parks taking over the land in the south-eastern forestry agreement, they have really targeted the weed problem. We had an unfortunate situation with wild dogs, and I no longer farm because it was just terrible. I find them to be better neighbours than the freehold neighbours were. Their problem was probably beyond their financial resource to solve. These days people who own land are often working—they are not farming per se. They are financing it through it outside employment. They only have 24 hours a day in their life too. So it is really complex. I certainly empathise with people in different circumstances where park or crown land managers are not as active. I was on a national parks advisory tour and only did the tour of the new nature reserves—this is just the other week—and we went out to the Ironmungy nature reserve. I was informed there that in their first two years of owning that place—it had a severe serrated tussock problem—it cost \$90,000 for the first two chemical hits, and they have \$60,000 for a 10-year program to get on top of it. I think that is commendable. But because of the size of the national park system, it is limited to how many efforts they can have like that. For all of us, dollars are dollars. It will work and it won't work.

Also, in the Ironmungy district, Landcare and the rural lands protection board have had a joint program on rabbits, which was excellent but that was under the catchment management for southern rivers and our catchment management has a different emphasis. Weeds are a big target.

**CHAIR**—So there are boundaries within boundaries of the same department that are a problem.

**Mrs Talbot**—They are manmade boundaries. It is taxpayers' money so it belongs to all of us.

**CHAIR**—I would like to elaborate on the national body we are talking about. The national body would be set up with the cooperation and agreement of the states and territories across Australia and on that committee there would be a small group of people from each state, selected from those who currently give advice. That would filter down through the government agencies that are giving advice and taking action now and also organisations such as the New South Wales Farmers Association and community interest groups that are participating in farmers' organisations of various descriptions. So it would be a whole-of-community approach to the problem.

**Mrs Talbot**—We have to appreciate also, that certainly on the eastern seaboard of New South Wales—and this is starting to happen on both sides of the tablelands as well—rural lands protection boards have minimum ratepayers. I think Goulburn has 90 per cent minimum ratepayers and Yass has 60 per cent or 65 per cent minimum ratepayers, and we are about the same. It is no longer just the farmers who have the problem. We all own it.

**Mr FORREST**—I am really pleased we have come to Cooma, and that we insisted on getting here because of all the places we have seen this is the worst environment with regard to dogs. It is staggering. We have had photographic evidence and we know just how horrendous it is. I just wish that those in city lounge rooms could see the kind of imagery which shows the damage that these dogs do. We have to think very seriously about how we can promote a better balance in the way the discussion occurs. I would be interested to explore what the witnesses suggest in that regard. How do you collect the evidence? You have to be there when it is happening. These are the sorts of images that ought to appear in city lounge rooms. This kind of article in the



*Canberra Times* is excellent. The sheer size of these animals and the threatening posture they adopt is the sort of thing we need to use in a public relations exercise.

**CHAIR**—What Mr Forrest is saying is right. I will just give you an idea of what he is talking about. He is asking you what strategies you suggest this committee recommend should be put in an educational package for our urban based fellow Australians right across the nation—not just those in your area—keeping in mind that any recommendation we make would be on the basis that there would be an agreed contribution from states, territories and the national government.

Do you think a television program such as the one that is running at the moment to alert people to EC would be a very good start? The program could point out: ‘These are the feral animals we have in Australia; here are the problems they are creating for our native flora and fauna.’ We do not have to tell people about what it is doing to agriculture because you know what it is doing and so does your community. To get the message across I believe we have to focus on the unspoken amount of damage they are doing to our native species.

**Mrs Talbot**—I think a good documentary on wombats would be a start because they just love going up creeks and when the rain comes down, their holes collapse and all this ‘nutrification’—is that the word?—goes down the river.

**CHAIR**—The wombats have always done that, haven’t they?

**Mrs Talbot**—I think their numbers are breeding up, to be honest.

**CHAIR**—That is the point I wanted to get out of you.

**Mr Constance**—I would agree with that. We have changed the environment, we have improved our pastures and we have put fertiliser out, which has increased the nutrition for our livestock but has also increased the nutrition and fertility of wombats. In my area I would say they have increased hundredfold in my lifetime—the last 40 or 50 years. As Coral says, they go into the banks of the rivers and cause erosion. They cause as much silting up as—

**CHAIR**—There is a flow-on effect of that population explosion. I just want to pursue that. Is it true that it also creates a population explosion in the exotic predators like hybrid dogs et cetera that are out there?

**Mr Constance**—I would say it would do, yes.

**Mr FORREST**—The sort of thing I was thinking of was a pack of wild dogs tearing apart 11 wallabies and eating only one of them.

**CHAIR**—You have to have a camera and film with you to take footage of that stuff.

**Mr FORREST**—Yes, I know; you have to be in the right place at the right time.

**Mr Constance**—That is the case. They do it not only with wallabies but also with sheep. That is probably what a lot of people do not realise, particularly the townspeople that talk about it but do not see it in their lounge room. In my case, I lost 600 sheep over five years, but the dogs did

not come in and kill and eat one sheep; they would come in and maim a dozen sheep, kill four or five and only get a feed off perhaps one of them. It is the same with the wallabies. They go and tear them apart; it is their sport.

**Mr FORREST**—They go into a feeding frenzy like sharks.

**Mr Constance**—It is like a mob of children chasing a ball. The dogs get a sheep running down the side of a hill and they all go after it and they catch it. So then they look for another ball to chase and there is another ball of wool lying over on the hills so they chase it down until they catch it.

**Mrs Talbot**—They chase them into dams.

**Mr Constance**—They will chase them into dams and rivers. That is another thing that makes it very difficult to put exact numbers on how many sheep are killed, because once a sheep gets a pack of dogs after it, it flees in fear and it will probably end up in a hollow log, a dam, a creek, in a patch of tea tree or a patch of scrub, where the remains will never be found by a human being because it has died in an inaccessible spot.

**Mr FORREST**—There is another thing in this inquiry that has fascinated me. I automatically think of rabbits, dogs and pigs when I think of feral pests, but we have picked up a lot of evidence about insects as well, especially the impact they are having in Tasmania on the forestry industry. In your submission, Mr Constance, you mentioned wingless grasshoppers. You have not said anything about that. What is the nature of their threat and the damage they cause?

**Mr Constance**—Basically, it seems to come on the heels of a dry summer or two. If you get hot, dry seasons they hatch in numbers of thousands per square metre and wipe it out; it is like you had a fire go through—

**Mr FORREST**—They are wiping out pasture.

**Mr Constance**—They wipe out pasture until there is just nothing left. You can go from having green pastures one week to being in a drought the following week because they come through and wipe everything out. They are pretty similar to the plague locust except that they are only little fellows. They call them ‘wingless’, but some species of them do have wings. I have had crops of turnips which are going well one week and when you look at them the following week there are lines moving in from the outside on bare ground and you just have to get in, spray them and get rid of them.

**Mr FORREST**—We have a reasonable Plague Locust Commission. Has this particular insect got under their guard in terms of control?

**Mr Constance**—I am not sure what the story is there.

**Mrs Talbot**—I think because the plague locust is the big problem, and because the problem with the wingless grasshopper does not occur every year, it has been difficult. I think they did do some research on a fungi. There is a product called Green Guard, but I think that new agent only came on-line commercially last year. I do not know if it is still readily available, but it is very

expensive. So, unless people have got a valuable crop, it is not used. Also, the grasshoppers are not as bad as some pests; they are only bad in some seasons. Richard Litchfield's wife was telling me that in the 1980s, when they were really bad, they had them blowing up against their house. So they really are a problem.

Going back to the plague locusts, they were found in three small spots in the Monaro last summer, which was a bit of a worry. Whether they came on vehicles, in fodder or were blown in with the winds, we do not know. They were certainly treated.

**Mr FORREST**—Should we make a recommendation that, for example, these particular insects be included in the research and observation that goes on in respect of locusts? My understanding is that that program works well—it covers the issue of state boundaries and it is backed up by federal environment funding—but has this insect got under their radar?

**Mrs Talbot**—I think you will find that the Plague Locust Commission do have scientists working on it. But it is difficult to get answers on whether it is fully funded or not.

**Mr FORREST**—We will put in a recommendation.

**Mr Constance**—My understanding—and Coral is an RLPB board member, so she could probably clarify this—is that we pay an insect levy on our RLPB rates, but we do not get any help with the wingless grasshopper, and I think I made that point in my submission.

**Mrs Talbot**—That is right; we do not.

**CHAIR**—That is at the local level. What we are talking about is the ability of an issue like that to be included on the national list, which puts it automatically into a position where it can attract federal funding.

**Mr Constance**—They are a significant pest in this area and they nearly always coincide with drought times. So when you have a drought, if you manage to get a crop in, next thing you are hit by the wingless grasshopper and your crop is gone.

**CHAIR**—I think the point John is making is that it is not heard about anywhere but in your own area. We should put it in a position where, even if it is not heard about, people are aware of where it occurs, why it occurs and how much damage it does, and funds are made available. Whether it is winged or non-winged, if it comes out in plague proportions from time to time, you can bet that the nesting areas they hatch from will be expanded if we do not do anything about them.

**Mrs Talbot**—The CRC have done some really good work.

**CHAIR**—That is good to hear.

**Mrs Talbot**—I do not think it is these insects only that we should be worrying about. My mother's people came from Cohuna in Victoria. In the early seventies, people around the district were coming down with a mysterious illness. The CSIRO came to take blood samples to try and establish the cause—some of my cousins were included in the program—and it turned out to be

Ross River fever. Each summer for the last three years there has been a Ross River fever alert at Batemans Bay. I figure it has taken 30 years to come from Cohuna to here. It is carried by mosquitoes and gets into the blood of ducks. They are infected. It came from the north, from Darwin, down a corridor. These sorts of things should be better taken into account at a bigger level. I am sure that, as we get warmer, these things will come south.

**CHAIR**—There is a good argument for cross-border cooperation. That means our idea of a national body is even better, because it would carry the records in relation to activity on vertebrate and invertebrate pests. That is part of the agenda for our report and for the recommendations that we are making. We have heard some very interesting evidence here today, including evidence about insects, which makes me want to reinforce my parliamentary colleague's point that we are really pleased that we finally got to Cooma.

**Mrs Talbot**—Cattle tick is another problem. I understand there has been one case in the Bega board area and one of our directors has had cattle tick at Dalgety, obviously with stock brought in. At the rural lands protection board state conference it was quite an issue.

**CHAIR**—Quarantine issues.

**Mrs Talbot**—Yes.

**Mr FORREST**—It is not through lack of interest that I do not ask some more questions—I am just conscious of the time.

**CHAIR**—All I can say, as I have said to those people who have given evidence here today, is that we are just so grateful that people make themselves available. Sure, it can be argued that people come to talk to government committees because they have got a particular issue they have concerns about and they are frustrated because nothing seems to be done. But in this instance, as far as our committee is concerned, we can assure you that the evidence we have received from you will be used very constructively. I am quite proud of the fact, and I have made public comment on it, that this committee is probably the best committee that I have been involved in, in terms of the cooperative approach and the common approach by the members to their concerns about an issue that we all feel concerned about. It does not matter whether the committee members are of one political persuasion or another or whether they come from urban or rural areas, they have all been sufficiently educated in the process we have on this standing committee to understand the real problems out there and to be very concerned about the ramifications of those problems. More importantly, they have become very concerned about the issue of governments of both political persuasions at state and territory level not addressing the issue of introduced or exotic species in particular, both animal and vegetable, to such an extent that it has now started to become a national problem, which it would not have become if it had been addressed properly in the first place.

I would again like to thank you as individuals and to thank the group collectively for coming here today and for the significant contribution you have made. It will allow us to put together a report with recommendations that we hope and pray the government of the day will take up. What we are talking about here is the protection of our flora and fauna, despite what the so-called caring environmental movement might think about people on the land. Hopefully it gives us very compelling evidence that will make our government and any future government

understand that the concerns that have been raised here today, and on the many days that this committee has sat and listened to evidence, are the concerns of ordinary Australians who depend for their livelihood on working in agriculture and who have a deep, caring concern for maintaining and protecting the native flora and fauna that we have in this country and that we hope will be there for our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. I thank each and every one of you for the contribution you have made here today. You have made our jobs a lot easier because of it.

**Mr Constance**—I would like to table these papers. One of them relates to the way wild dogs chase animals. It is from the *Cooma-Monaro Express* of Thursday, 7 August, and shows a picture of about 20 sheep which have been run into the Murrumbidgee River and drowned.

**Mr FORREST**—We could put that on the front page of the report, in colour.

**CHAIR**—Thank you again.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 2.04 pm**