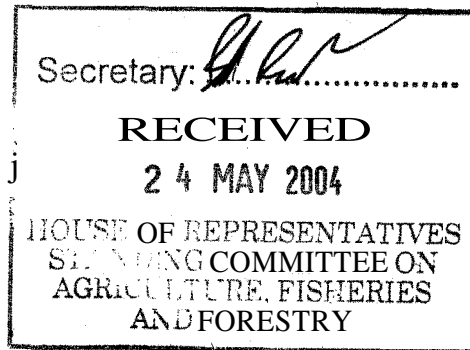


14 May 2004

Mr Bill Pender
House of Representatives
Standing Committees
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries
and Forestry
Parliament House Canberra
ACT 2600



Dear Sir

RE: ENQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE OF PEST ANIMALS

Thank you for providing a copy of the terms of reference of the Enquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals. I have perused the Terms of Reference with great interest as the area being covered by the Enquiry is an area of the future development of Australia which has caused me considerable concern over a period of time.

By way of background my wife and I are farmers on approximately 1,000 acres to the south west of Gulgong. We have had many years of experience on the land running stock and cropping.

My wife and myself have earned our living from the land however over a period of time we have managed to diversify our investments and we could no longer say that our primary source of income was from the land however a substantial portion of our income remains from our property. We continue on our farm to breed pure-poll Herefords of outstanding quality.

I note the Committee is undertaking an enquiry into the essential issues related to pest animals both new and currently existing within Australia and believe this Enquiry is one of the most important enquires undertaken in Australia in recent times.

Over my time on the land I have had a significant concern in relation to what I would call feral animals both in relation to the damage they are causing to farming businesses and in relation to the damage they cause within the general community.

Over the years I have seen a significant increase in my region of the feral pig problem, wild deer and the rabbit plague. Both are classic examples of pest animals out of control and causing substantial damage within the community. These well established feral animals are not only causing damage to property, but they are also causing significant loss of revenue to Australia.

However let me say that these concerns though they are very significant and should be addressed in the Enquiry are not my main concerns at this point in time.

We are all too aware of the significant issues which can arise from the introduction into this country of foreign diseases for example foot and mouth disease. The introduction of such a foreign disease into Australia by whatever means would impose a significant financial and economic problem for Australia as the established feral animal population is a perfect source for distributing such a "plague" throughout the country. An example I would like to use before the Enquiry would be that of the feral pig population in Australia. I understand from a recent show on the ABC that feral pigs in Australia at this point in time number approximately 23 million, but

they are impossible to eradicate and are disease carriers in themselves. This was noted in the show *Catalyst* on the 11th of March 2004.

Such eminent people as Mr Bill Gee, who I understand to be the head Veterinarian expert for Australia for 15 years, at length and in public warned Australia of the increased risk of disease and the easy spread of disease through the feral animal population in Australia. If a foreign disease was introduced into the feral animal population of Australia such a disease would be impossible to eradicate.

In the current international climate we live in there are any number of sources where such a disease could be introduced. Firstly, and no doubt the Enquiry know this, an easy source of introduction of a foreign disease could be mismanagement and negligence on the part of customs and the quarantine service. We are all human and errors occur and such mistakes could have untold consequences for Australia. However of more significant concern to me in the current international climate is the potential for the release of a foreign disease amongst stock and the feral animal population of Australia by a foreign terrorist organisation. This is not an issue of negligence or mistake but an organisation undertaking a deliberate intent to release such a "plague" within Australia with the aim of demolishing the rural economy.

We understand from numerous sources that the feral animal population is out of control for a number of reasons. These are climatic and statistically it can be shown that since 1996 (at the time when the gun control laws in New South Wales were passed) the problem within New South Wales has deteriorated dramatically. We as farmers understand this as we ourselves are not in a position undertake effective control of the feral animals on our own property because of the removal of our own firearms.

In the *Land* newspaper on the 21st of February 2002 in the section headed "Up Front Opinion". Bill Gee who was titled Australia's Chief Veterinarian Officer at the time made the following comment in that article "*Livestock property owners, who are the essential forefront of any disease control program should have their rights returned – to own and use high powered firearm suitable for pig control. National Legislation would be essential to empower these activities.*"

Furthermore in that same article Bill Gee stated, "*Year 2001 UK FMD outbreak cost about \$A15 billion and feral pigs were not in the equation.*"

I attach a photocopy of that article as I believe it is essential reading for this Enquiry.

In a letter to the *Land* on the 20th of September 2001 (a copy of which is attached) Bill Gee warns once again of the problems relating to uncontrolled feral pig population in the rural community. My family hold views similar to those of Mr Gee at the time that the significant pest control problems being faced by our community would be significantly relieved if farmers were able to employ satisfactory control methods including owning rifles capable of effectively controlling feral animals.

It is my respectful submission to the Enquiry that part of any coordinated management of significant pest control issue across state boundaries and within New South Wales must be a reinstatement of the right to carry and own effective firearms.

I realise this may seem to the Enquiry that I am a "one agenda" person however I cannot over emphasise the huge disadvantage in feral pest control that is placed upon any farmer by the

removal of any form of effective firearm for the feral pest control. In particular the eradication of current infestations and any future infestation in a humane and precise manner is not possible under the current environment of gun control in which we work. I know a significant number of farmers who have complied with the law and handed in rifles which have been and always would have been used exclusively for farming purposes who are now without any effective form of redress of a concise nature. Baiting of course is an alternative but is hardly a precise or effective form of pest control. In this respect I once again would ask the Enquiry to examine the show at 8:00 on the 11th of March 2004 on the ABC Television Network known as *Catalyst* which examines in particular the issue of wild pigs and their control.

I would respectfully submit that once Firearm Laws had been suitably amended (and in this respect I only suggest amendment in relation to farming activities not in relation to general gun ownership) men it may be appropriate, as pest animals have a potentially significant economic effect, for the Government to consider the imposition of a bounty on certain species of a nominal amount merely to help farmers and others recoup their costs in controlling feral animals. For example if the *Catalyst* show estimate of 23 million wild pigs throughout Australia is accurate a bounty of \$5 per head would lead potentially to the eradication of the species at a cost of \$150 to \$200 million dollars. This would be a form of subsidy available for the drought effected farmer whilst at the same time substantial control could be implemented by each individual farmer of his wild pig population. The farmers would then, with the reinstatement of certain firearms, be in a position to take advantage of that bounty benefits therefore flowing both to the economy and to the individual farmer rather than by Government Grant.

There are a significant number of issues I would like to address the Enquiry on and I would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Enquiry to put these matters to them.

I think this Enquiry is well overdue and I only hope that a solution to the feral animal population in Australia can be implemented at this late point in time. It is unfortunate that this Enquiry was not held some ten years ago however I am optimistic that the problems we face in Australia because of feral/pest animals can be solved with a little common sense on the part of governments, farmers and regulatory authorities.

I would appreciate an opportunity of addressing the Committee at your convenience.

Yours faithfully

W. J. Gossage *G. Gossage*

Bill and Gloria Gossage

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION HELD BY THE COMMITTEE

ATTACHMENT TO SUBMISSION NO. 58

**ATTACHMENTS, APPENDICES AND PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED WITH
SUBMISSIONS ARE HELD IN THE COMMITTEE OFFICE**