

## Pests as resources

### Overview

- 8.1 An interesting aspect of this inquiry has been the concept that some pest animals, rather than being considered as 'pests', should be treated as resources. It was argued by one submitter that abundant species are more appropriately managed when they are treated as a source of income, rather than a problem to be eliminated.<sup>1</sup> This might occur through harvesting pest animals for meat or skins, or by charging hunters a fee for the right to hunt pest animals on private or state-owned property.
- 8.2 The committee acknowledges that this approach does not work across the broad spectrum of pest animals that currently exists in Australia. The committee is not aware, for example, of any commercial use or benefit that can be obtained from wild dogs, feral cats or cane toads. Where the approach is applicable, however, the committee believes that it has a part to play in the control and management of pest animal species.
- 8.3 As pointed out in Chapter 6 of this report, it is important that landholders have available to them a range of methods and approaches for dealing with pest animal problems. Within this range of available methods, utilising pest animals as a resource has the potential to assist in reducing pest populations while also generating additional revenue for farmers and other landholders.

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1 TGMSU, *Submission 68*.

- 8.4 In particular, the committee considers that harvesting of pest animals is a useful and desirable strategy with regard to native species considered by some to be pests. The committee received evidence that programs for harvesting kangaroos, wallabies and possums are already in place. The committee is of the view that there is potential for further expansion and development of these programs.
- 8.5 In relation to introduced pest species, the committee emphasises that the 'pests as resources' strategy is not, in and of itself, a solution to the problem. It is important that, where species are commercially used or harvested, that does not result in attempts to sustain populations of pest animals for the purpose of industry. Commercial use is only a useful strategy for pest animal control if it is used as part of an integrated program to reduce pest animal numbers.

## Rationale for utilising pests as resources

- 8.6 A number of submissions were made in support of the use of pest animals as resources.<sup>2</sup> This was conditional, for some witnesses, on harvesting being conducted humanely and, where native species are involved, compliance with conservation objectives and plans.<sup>3</sup>
- 8.7 The commercial use of some pest species constitutes a lucrative business. The export of wild pig meat, for example, has generated between \$3 and \$5 million annually in revenue over the last few years,<sup>4</sup> while the recreational pig-hunting industry is valued at \$200 million per year.<sup>5</sup> The Australian kangaroo industry has an estimated value of \$100 million annually.<sup>6</sup> Exports of goat meat are currently at record levels, with \$31 million worth

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2 Submissions 18, 19, p. 3, 31, p. 4, 46, 77, p. 3, 78, p. 3, 86, p. 4, 90, Dr Kevin Doyle, AVA, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 7, Dr Linton Staples, Animal Control Technologies, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 15, Mr Rod Drew, FGA, *Transcript of evidence*, 25 May 2005, p. 7, Dr Tony Peacock, PAC CRC, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 May 2005, pp. 4-5, Mr Chris Tallentire, CCWA, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 April 2005, p. 2, Mr Ian Whyte, TFGA, *Transcript of evidence*, 29 March 2005, p. 18, Mr Ian Lobban, VFF Barnawartha Branch, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2004, p. 27.

3 Dr Kevin Doyle, AVA, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 7, Mr Mick Trimmer, DEH, *Transcript of evidence*, 1 June 2005.

4 QFF, *Submission 59*, p. 11.

5 TGMSU, *Submission 68*.

6 TGMSU, *Submission 68*.

of goat meat exported during the first five months of 2005, representing an increase of more than 50 percent from 2004.<sup>7</sup>

- 8.8 It was submitted that the characterisation of certain animals as ‘resources’ rather than ‘pests’ allows for better management of those species. This was explained by Dr Graham Hall, Senior Game Management Services Officer of the TGMSU, who gave the following evidence in a private capacity:

When I read the terms of inquiry, the first point that raised in my mind was: what is a pest? I think that is a fundamental issue in terms of how we manage wildlife in Australia. What is a pest to one may be a resource to somebody else. There are a number of occasions where so-called pests are actually quite economically valuable species. Kangaroos are a pest to some and an iconic species to others – and are obviously on the coat of arms. We can talk about rabbits being pests, yet the rabbit industry is probably worth several million dollars. We can talk about feral pigs as pests, but pig-hunting is worth probably \$200 million a year. The definition of a pest is not merely a pedantic point but, if we talk about resources rather than pests, then we can manage for all sorts of outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

- 8.9 Although native species, like introduced species, have the capacity to be harvested for profit, it appears that there are some impediments to the commercial use of native species. The committee believes that, as indicated in a number of submissions, where the potential exists for landholders to profit from pest animals, shooting and leaving them to rot is a waste of a valuable resource.<sup>9</sup> The Hume RLPB gave the following evidence:

It seems to be quite ridiculous that Kangaroos may be shot and harvested for both human consumption and pet food manufacture in a large area of NSW, but the area along the Southern Tablelands in NSW is gazetted as a non harvest zone. Farmers adversely affected by Kangaroos can apply for a permit to cull Kangaroos on their properties, the carcass is then required to be tagged and left to rot in the paddock and in many cases to provide easy food for foxes, feral pigs and wild dogs. Where is the logic in this, surely if thousands of Kangaroos are being culled every year, why not

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7 ABC Rural, *Goat meat proves golden to exporters*, ABC Rural, 27 July 2005, viewed 27 September 2005, <<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/content/2005/s1423563.htm>>.

8 *Transcript of evidence*, 29 March 2005, p. 31.

9 *Submissions 77, 100*, pp. 6-7, Mr Colin Wood, SSAA, *Transcript of evidence*, 25 May 2005, p. 3, Mr Anthony Griffiths, VFF Wangaratta Branch, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2004, pp. 15-16.

utilise the carcass to at least cover the costs involved in the culling process.<sup>10</sup>

8.10 It appears that in Victoria also, kangaroo carcasses must be left to rot, rather than being utilised for skins and meat.<sup>11</sup>

8.11 Similar evidence was provided to the committee in a joint submission by FGA and the SSAA, who stated:

While pest destruction permits offer a practical solution it often takes time to obtain them, the numbers issued are inadequate and current destruction permits demands (sic) wastage of culled animals. The wastage of resources, even those resulting from culled animals, is ethically unsustainable. Furthermore, it can lead to an increase in other pest populations by providing a ready resource which encourages an increase in numbers, e.g. the fox accessing carrion from discarded carcasses.<sup>12</sup>

8.12 The committee spoke with landholders at Yuin Station in Western Australia, where emus at times reach plague proportions. Pastoralists there expressed frustration that they are not able to make commercial use of emus, which can be used for eggs, crayfish bait and emu oil. The committee was told that by the time emus reach plague proportions they are in such poor condition that no commercially effective use can be made of them.<sup>13</sup>

8.13 When questioned in relation to this problem, Mr Gordon Wyre, Acting Director of Nature Conservation in CALM, responded:

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

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10 *Submission 77*, p. 3.

11 Mr Ian Lobban, VFF Barnawartha Branch, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2004, p. 27.

12 *Submission 90*.

13 Inspection at Yuin Station, Western Australia, 12 April 2005.

industry, because it was seen to be potentially unfair competition if people were putting the effort into raising emus on farm.<sup>14</sup>

- 8.14 The committee notes that the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee has considered the issue of commercial utilisation of native species. In its report, it indicated that there are several benefits of commercial use, including the provision of opportunities for struggling rural businesses to broaden their income-base.<sup>15</sup>
- 8.15 The Senate Committee noted potential commercial uses for a number of native species considered by some to be pest animals, including kangaroos, possums, emus, flying foxes and some native bird species. Some of these animals are already commercially harvested, however, the committee believes that there is potential for commercial wildlife trade to be expanded and utilised as part of a broader strategy of dealing with overabundant species.
- 8.16 The committee believes that commercial use of pest animals and native resources can play a useful part in an overall pest animal control strategy. The committee considers that state and territory governments should take steps to create more possibilities for commercial use of pest animals, particularly native species, where existing regulations constitute an impediment.

## Possibilities for using pests as resources

### Department of Environment and Heritage – Wildlife Trade Management Plans

- 8.17 Overseas market demand exists for the products of some native species that are abundant in Australia, like possums and kangaroos. In order to export products from native species, it is necessary to obtain a permit from DEH. Generally, a permit will only be granted if the export operation is organised under the auspices of an approved wildlife trade management plan or approved wildlife trade operation.<sup>16</sup>

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14 *Transcript of evidence*, 20 July 2005, p. 13.

15 Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, *Commercial Utilisation of Australian Native Wildlife*, Commonwealth of Australia, June 1998, pp. xiii-xiv.

16 DEH, *Wildlife Trade Guidelines: How to Apply for Approval of a Wildlife Trade Operation*, DEH, viewed 13 October 2005, <<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/sources/pubs/wto.pdf>>.

- 8.18 Approved wildlife trade operations apply mainly to market-testing and small-scale operations. Wildlife trade management plans are for larger scale harvesting operations. A different process applies to operations involving the export of freshwater and marine plants and animals.<sup>17</sup>
- 8.19 Management plans and operations are usually submitted by state and territory governments and approved by the federal Minister for Environment and Heritage. A management program can only be approved if effective state and territory legislation is in place for the conservation and management of the species in question.
- 8.20 To be approved, a wildlife trade management plan must assess the environmental impact on a species of the proposed use and provide management controls to ensure that the impact is ecologically sustainable. Monitoring to identify, mitigate and minimise environmental change must be put in place, and animal welfare requirements must be met.
- 8.21 At an inspection in Tasmania, the committee heard from a representative of Lenah Game Meats, which produces wallaby and possum meat, about difficulties experienced in exporting skins and furs from wallabies and possums due to the absence of a relevant wildlife trade management plan in Tasmania.<sup>18</sup>
- 8.22 Although there is nothing to prevent an individual or company submitting a plan of its own for federal approval, the committee heard that:

**Mr Trimmer:** ... [G]enerally speaking you just do not get that sort of approach coming from the private sector, mainly because private people tend to be focusing on a particular area or localised industry, whereas the state produces the plan in order to cover all activities within its jurisdiction to allow the industry or industries within its jurisdiction to develop and prosper. ...

**Mrs Steensby:** If somebody in Victoria wanted to harvest kangaroos or somebody in South Australia wanted to harvest cockatoos for meat, it would be harder to do because those animals are protected under state legislation and, therefore, you would have to have that state licence to be able to do it. So a state might not want to do a management plan but, in the case of an animal

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17 Mr Mick Trimmer, DEH, *Transcript of evidence*, 1 June 2005, p. 2, DEH, *Application for approval of wildlife program*, DEH, 1 July 2004, viewed 13 October 2005, <<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/sources/forms/wildlife-programs.html#download>>, DEH, *Wild harvest of native species*, DEH, 20 June 2004, viewed 13 October 2005, <<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/trade-use/wild-harvest/>>.

18 Inspection at Lenah Game Meats, Tasmania, 30 March 2005.

that is protected in that state which requires a permit to be able to kill, injure or take, they would have to demonstrate that they have got that state approval.<sup>19</sup>

- 8.23 The role of state and territory governments in the export of wildlife products is of great significance. Without the cooperation of the relevant state or territory government in submitting a wildlife trade management plan for approval, would-be exporters are seriously limited in the measures they can take to export wildlife products overseas. The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee noted in its report that government should make efforts to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to impede commercial utilisation of native pest species.<sup>20</sup> The committee agrees with this recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 41**

- 8.24 **The committee recommends that the Australian Government encourage state and territory governments to remove existing impediments to the commercial utilisation of native pest species, whether those impediments be economic, legal or administrative.**

### **Tasmanian Property-based Game Management Plans**

- 8.25 The committee heard evidence in relation to a Tasmanian program which is aimed at managing game species that have acquired pest status for hunting.<sup>21</sup> Property-based Game Management Plans are written plans that are developed and implemented by private landholders with the assistance of the TGMSU and provide a basis for hunters and shooters to hunt pest animals on the property. This assists landholders in managing pest animal problems on their land while also, in some cases, providing a source of revenue through payments made by hunters in return for the opportunity to shoot. Organised hunting and sporting organisations are also involved in these programs.<sup>22</sup>

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19 Mr Mick Trimmer and Mrs Cindy Steensby, DEH, *Transcript of evidence*, 1 June 2005, pp. 5-6.

20 Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, Recommendation 5.

21 TGMSU, *Submission 68*.

22 Dr Graham Hall, *Transcript of evidence*, 29 March 2005, p. 37.

- 8.26 In March 2005, the committee conducted an inspection of Connorville Station, a 44,000 acre property 14 kilometres south of Cressy in Tasmania. Deer are a major problem at the station, trampling crops and competing with livestock for feed. The owner of the station, Roderick O'Connor, informed the committee that Connorville Station has had a Property-based Game Management Plan in place for over ten years. Shooters are required to pay an annual fee, and must observe rules while hunting on the property, including rules about the age, size and sex of animals that can be killed. Each year, approximately 500 deer are shot, in addition to approximately 4,000 wallabies and 4,000 possums, which are also considered pest animals in the area.<sup>23</sup>
- 8.27 Connorville Station has experienced problems with poachers, who threaten and intimidate other shooters, and private security arrangements have been put in place to deal with these problems, in addition to visits from police task forces.
- 8.28 The Tasmanian Government, through the TGMSU, has helped to implement these plans on over 500 properties in Tasmania spread across 1.5 million hectares. The program has also been successfully exported to approximately 600,000 hectares in New South Wales and Queensland.<sup>24</sup>
- 8.29 Mr Colin Wood, from the SSAA, indicated that plans of the kind developed in Tasmania have been considered in the Victorian context, and are considered by the organisation to be a good model for game management.<sup>25</sup>
- 8.30 The committee notes that in New South Wales, the Game Council facilitates involvement of licensed hunters in community-based game and feral animal control programs. An example is the coordination by the Game Council of deer management by members of the Mid North Coast Deer Working Group in July 2004. The programs between hunters, landholders and government agencies are modelled on the Tasmanian program.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Inspection at Connorville Station, Tasmania, 29 March 2005, Information provided by Mr Roderick O'Connor.

24 Dr Graham Hall, *Transcript of evidence*, 29 March 2005, p. 35.

25 *Transcript of evidence*, 25 May 2005, p. 12.

26 C Henderson, 'Private hunter involvement in community-based feral animal control programs', in S Balogh (ed), *Proceedings of the third NSW Pest Animal Control Conference*, NSW Department of Primary Industries, 4-7 July 2005, pp. 23-26.



- 8.31 The committee also notes with approval that the Rural Industries RDC is currently supporting trials that will investigate whether utilising wildlife through tourism or commercial use can act as an incentive to landholders to restore on-farm habitat. It is anticipated that up to six such trials will be established in 2006.<sup>27</sup> This is a positive development that will hopefully go some way towards extending the potential for sustainable use of native species, particularly where they constitute a pest to farmers.
- 8.32 The committee is impressed by the success of the Tasmanian model in allowing the involvement of private hunters in helping to reduce pest animal numbers. The committee believes that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee should explore possibilities for expanding this program further throughout mainland Australia.

## Concerns with commercial use of pest animals

- 8.33 Some people expressed concern with the resource-based approach to pest animal management on the basis that allowing pest animals to be used as resources may encourage those who derive a benefit to maintain exotic pest populations at sustainable levels.<sup>28</sup> Some submitters who were supportive of commercial uses emphasised that their support was conditional on commercial use being part of an overarching strategy to reduce pest numbers but not being used to create sustainable industries.<sup>29</sup>
- 8.34 The committee received evidence, for example, from field officers in DAWA, that its donkey culling program had been opposed by some within the pet meat industry who rely on a continuing source of donkeys, and from landholders wanting to maintain a donkey population for the benefit of tourism enterprises on their lands.<sup>30</sup>

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27 GR Wilson and B Mitchell, *A Strategic Plan for Trialling Sustainable Wildlife Enterprises: Guidelines for conservation-based enterprises as an incentive to restore on-farm habitat*, Rural Industries RDC, Canberra, July 2005, viewed 27 September 2005, <<http://www.rirdc.gov.au/reports/RWS/05-106.pdf>>.

28 *Submissions 59*, p. 11, 84, pp. 28, 33.

29 Ms Noeline Franklin, *Submission 35*, Dr Linton Staples, Animal Control Technologies, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 15.

30 *Transcript of evidence*, 22 July 2005, p. 16.

8.35 Mr Quentin Hart, from the BRS, stated:

There is no doubt that in times of drought things like feral goat harvesting and feral pig shooting can inject some significant resources into some communities, but they also cause a fair bit of conflict between land-holders – for example, land-holders who want to drive goats down to very low numbers versus land-holders who want to keep them as a sustainable resource so they can continually harvest them.<sup>31</sup>

8.36 Dr Kevin Doyle, of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), was supportive of commercial harvesting but noted that industries developed for commercial harvesting could not constitute a reason for sustaining populations of feral animals.<sup>32</sup> This is particularly the case where commercial use of pest animals only has the potential to remove very small numbers of animals within a pest animal species.

8.37 The committee is aware of recent endeavours in the Northern Territory to harvest live camels for export and for camel meat and other products.<sup>33</sup> The committee was told at Warrawagine Station in Western Australia that, despite the existence of some operations to use camels for tourism and produce camel products, it is very difficult to operate a camel industry in remote areas due to logistical difficulties such as high transport costs. Although camels may provide a useful resource for a number of operators, commercial harvesting and use of camels does not have the potential to play a large role in the control of feral camels.<sup>34</sup>

8.38 Dr Tony Peacock, from the AIA CRC, stated:

I think New South Wales has gone a bit too far in trying to get the Game Council to control feral animals and I think they will run into problems with the deer situation. There is now a real tension between controlling deer because they should not be there and the need to have them there for people to hunt. So you have to be careful what you set up, but you cannot exclude commercial control.<sup>35</sup>

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31 *Transcript of evidence*, 16 February 2005, p. 9.

32 *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 7.

33 'Camel farm dream becomes reality', *7.30 Report*, television program, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Canberra, 23 August 2005, *ABC News*, television program, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Canberra, 13 April 2005.

34 Discussions at Warrawagine Station, Western Australia, 21 July 2005.

35 *Transcript of evidence*, 11 May 2005, p. 5.

- 8.39 Although the committee acknowledges that some pest animals have the potential to generate revenue for landholders, the committee emphasises that commercial use of introduced pest animals must never be used as a rationale for sustaining pest animal populations. The commercial benefits of pig hunting in Australia, for example, amount to approximately \$200 million per annum,<sup>36</sup> but this figure pales in comparison with the cost to agriculture and the environment caused by these feral animals, and in particular with the estimated cost to agriculture in the event of a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak.<sup>37</sup> The committee takes note of the McLeod Report's findings that, although some pest species may have value as commercial resources, benefits are relatively minor in comparison to cost impacts in most cases.<sup>38</sup>
- 8.40 The proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee should encourage the commercial use of pest animals where appropriate, but on the basis that population reduction and eradication should be the key objectives of introduced pest animal control.

#### **Recommendation 42**

- 8.41 **The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee:**
- **coordinate the development and implementation of pest animal management programs modelled on the Tasmanian Property-based Game Management Plan program; and**
  - **encourage commercial use of pest animals, but on the proviso that commercial use not be used as a reason to sustain populations of introduced pest animal species.**

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36 Dr Graham Hall, *Transcript of evidence*, 29 March 2005, p. 31.

37 BRS, *Submission 76*, Attachment F, D Choquenot, J McIlroy and T Korn, *Managing Vertebrate Pests: Feral Pigs*, Bureau of Resource Sciences, Australian Government Publishing Services, Canberra, 1996, p. 45.

38 R McLeod, *Counting the Cost: Impact of Invasive Animals in Australia*, PAC CRC, Canberra, 2004, p. 7.

8.42 The committee notes that in relation to native pest resources, the emphasis in commercial use must be placed upon sustainability. The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee recognised this in its inquiry into the commercial utilisation of native wildlife, stating:

The principle of ecologically sustainable development should underpin any assessment of commercial use of wildlife and before any approval is given for commercial utilisation of wildlife, it should be proven beyond reasonable doubt that such use will be ecologically sustainable.<sup>39</sup>

8.43 The committee notes that this is already an important consideration in the granting of approval for Wildlife Trade Management Plans through DEH.<sup>40</sup> The committee encourages commercial utilisation of native species as part of a broader approach to pest animal management, but emphasises that ecological sustainability must remain the primary focus of these programs.

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39 Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, p. xxv.

40 Mr Mick Trimmer, DEH, *Transcript of evidence*, 1 June 2005, p. 2.