

Ref No 50/1/5 (O13174)

5/20/2004

The Secretary  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

***Re : Inquiry – The Impact of Pest Animals on Agriculture***

Council acknowledges the Inquiry by the House of Representatives Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Committee in examining the issues of the impact of Pest Animals on Agriculture.

The District Council of Grant is the most southern local government area in South Australia. The Council is predominantly rural with a number of small townships serving a population of approximately 8,500, covering an area of 188,493 hectares. Major industries include dairying, horticulture, agriculture, forestry, rock lobster, fishing, prime lamb production and beef cattle. The Council area has many lamb producers.

Fox control measures to decrease lamb losses, as well as native animals and bird losses has been a major priority for the District Council of Grant. It is recognised that foxes are a proclaimed species under the Animal and Plant Control Act 1986 which is administered and enforced by the State Animal and Plant Control Commission. The Control Strategies Group within the Animal and Plant Control Commission completed a Natural Heritage Trust Project in 2002 to measure the benefits of fox control and determine factors influencing losses for lamb production. The key findings were as follows :-

- Properties with low lambing percentages have most to gain from fox control.
- Ewe nutrition is important, and more lambs survive when ewes have higher fat scores.
- The total fox population in a region determines losses because foxes range over large areas.
- The benefits of fox control for lamb production were demonstrated on a landscape scale whereby the total level of baiting influences average losses across the region.
- Landholders need to prioritise management strategies to include better ewe nutrition and/or fox control depending on current lamb marking percentages.

The study indicated a significant benefit to producers from fox baiting. It further highlighted greater benefits through coordinated fox control involving neighbouring landowners.

It is recognised that the main involvement of the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in pest animal management is through the National Feral Animal Control Program, administered by the Bureau of Rural Sciences under the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust Program.

Council has previously been advised that major studies on fox bounty programs have all concluded that the arguments in favour of fox bounty systems for pest management cannot be substantiated. Council recognises that the Commonwealth Government through the Natural Heritage Trust has continued to support fox control activities (including fox baiting programs) that address the objectives and actions in the Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by the European Red Fox. Funding under the Natural Heritage Trust Program and Natural Action Plan Program has been noted in the 2004/05 budget.

As part of the Inquiry examining the issue of Pest Animals, the District Council of Grant wishes to strongly reiterate that increased funding for fox control measures and in particular fox baiting programs is essential, both at the Federal and State levels.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Peate', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Russell J Peate  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

*RJP:mgm*