

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

Geoff & Alison Burston

12th May 2004

Re:- The Impact of Pest Animals on Agriculture

Alison & I have been farming at Benambra for the past 35 years. Since the cessation of aerial baiting, a reduction in the number of dog trappers and areas of fuel reduction burns, the wild dog numbers have slowly increased until now where they are out of control.

I am a member of the Victorian & N.S.W. Wild Dog co-ordinating Committee which organised the National Summit on wild dogs in Wodonga two years ago and also a member of the Gippsland Wild Dog Management Committee, which was set up to advise the department on dog control in this State. We as a committee have been advised not to put a submission in to this inquiry as was the case with the National Summit when Dept. Employees were threatened if they attended.

Victoria's wild dog strategy talks of minimizing predation on domestic stock and having a 3 km dog free zone abutting private property. Also the employment of dog trappers who are full time chasing killings, a poisoning program(which I question the its effectiveness), and electric fencing.

In the 70's & 80's together with Bob Piesse we developed effective feral fencing. The concept of a continuous electrified boundary against the crown is not feasible in Victoria under current government policy, due to-

- different fence management between properties.
- absentee landlords.
- lack of interest or initiative by some landholders.
- the Department having no teeth to enforce fence maintenance.

Other pest animals such as pigs & goats take priority over dogs especially within the park service. Dog trappers are often used to hunt these animals, taking them away from their dogging duty. This outside work help make up the short fall in the dog mans wages.

➤ The National Summit was aimed at putting wild dogs at a national level so that co-ordinated control could be achieved between all Governments.

< Since the bush fires in January & February 2003 the impact of wild dogs on native fauna has been devistating in this area. Over 1000 dogs have been shot, trapped poisoned or run over during the past 12 months in the old Omeo Shire, close to freehold country. Since Christmas 1008 sheep have been killed by wild dogs in this area, estimated value \$89,200.This is hard on the community after experiencing two droughts and a major wild fire in the last 5 years.

< The State Government falls short of supplying sufficient funds for pest animal control. The policy is management not control.

The "do nothing" policy of conservation, shutting up large areas of Crown land, reducing areas grazed and restricting human access together with little fuel reduction burning has led to the deterioration of our once fire tolerant bush which is now destroyed by fire.

Some of our bush had an estimated 240 tons of fuel on the forest floor. Ten tons is considered a safe fuel load. The recent fire has totally changed the environment ; with

little open grazing for our native fauna, and no control on wild dogs outside the 3km zone, the results are devastating.

< R&D soaks up enormous amount of money. Our major concern is the use of buried baits. This technique has become the acceptable method as non target species can not access the bait. It is a very effective method of baiting foxes. If the wild dog numbers are not reduced there will be no non target species left.

< The local community at Benambra, Omeo & Swifts Creek have been involved with an autumn baiting program for many years, but the governments policies are not working; if a better co-ordinated approach were to be undertaken we, the land holders wouldn't be reduced to taking matters into our own hands.

<High risk of disease spread . Hydatid
Neorspora caninum

Neorspora has recently been discovered as a major cause of abortion in cattle in Australia. If this disease becomes established many of our holdings will become unviable. One of the major spreading agents are wild dogs & foxes.

<Deer have had a population explosion in the Eastern Highlands, samber and fallow.

Last spring we lost 193 sheep and weaned 27 lambs from 620 ewes. We also lost a number of calves. This we found hard after spending in excess of \$60,000 to feed the stock after the fire.

In the fires we lost 25km of fencing which we are replacing.

Recommendations:

<The formation of a National body, which includes landholder representation, to establish a list of pest animals of National significance. To provide a forum for interaction between state bodies covering:-

- a) eradication methods
- b) development of strategies for interstate co-operation for adjoining areas eg Eastern highlands
- c) study the social and economic impact on communities affected by these animals,(not a \$ per capita argument but an overall view.)
- d) active monitoring of spread of diseases carried by pest animals eg dogs and foxes

-hydatids
-neorspora
-rabies etc.

- e)research and devolopment

< Adopt methods of management which control dog numbers to a level which protects native fauna populations and enables the farming community to conduct a viable business by-

- a) increased numbers of dog trappers
- b) stratigic areial baiting
- c) funding to be sought from industry
- d) genuine interest by State governments especially Victoria in a funding commitment to this aim.

This aim is of vital importance with the current situation in SE NSW and the NE of Victoria including Gippsland after the 2003 bush fires. A contributing factor to the severity of the bush fires was the “no action” management strategy. Let us learn from this and adopt an action management policy.