

INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF PEST ANIMALS ON AGRICULTURE

To the Committee Secretary,
Agriculture, Fishers and Forestry Committee,
House of Representatives,
Parliament House,
Canberra ACT 2600

The Ovens Catchment is situated in NE Victoria and is inclusive of 23 landcare groups, each group has an average membership of 100 members. The Ovens catchment neighbours and is inclusive of national and state parks.

This submission is endorsed by the Ovens Landcare Network committee.

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1. Linking Commonwealth and State Government processes for a more coordinated management of significant pest animal issues across state boundaries

- This is essential for all programs. Too often the state and commonwealth are pulling in different directions which are detrimental to programs and on ground delivery.
- Coordination and support between Commonwealth and state is always appreciated and felt on the ground. If there is one uncooperative state lets implement the programs in a unified fashion across the other states and take the success to the reluctant state, for possible inclusion at a later date.

2. The approaches to pest animal issues across all relevant jurisdictions including:

a. Prevention of new pest animals becoming established:

- Once a pest species is established, it is very expensive to eradicate.
- Prevention of pest animals is ideal. It is a bit like insurance but government must support this approach.
- Slowing the rate of spread: all pest species will fill their ecological limits so a management approach to control of pest animals must be taken.
- It is our understanding that a strategic approach is in place in all states to address this issue. It is our suggestion that the programs need to be implemented. They also may benefit from being extended thus becoming more specific eg no deer's or goats to be farmed beside National Parks.

b. Detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals

- Pest animal infestations must be understood. As a consequence infestations must be mapped for distribution, quantity and potential threat at a local, catchment and state level. It is our understanding that state strategic plans recommend mapping of

pest infestations but it appears not to be occurring on the ground. For example European wasps are meant to be monitored but they are not at a local level and the spread of this pest continuous.

c. Eradication of infestations (particularly newly established species or ‘sleeper’ populations of species which are considered to be high risk) where feasible and appropriate and

- Again we are lead to believe that strategic plans are in place at Commonwealth levels. It is our understanding it is an implementation issue which is dependant on funding. State and Commonwealth governments must start implementing existing strategies; if strategies do not exist then they need to be developed and implemented support with appropriate funding levels.
- Revegetation programs are creating habitat for pest animals such as rabbits. It is important that these areas are monitored before they become an issue.

d. Reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations

- On ground coordinated programs are essential. These programs must include education (how to, benefits, responsibility etc), incentives and enforcement that are supported at state and Commonwealth levels. Programs are to include information and engagement opportunities plus the landholders sharing positive outcomes.
- Revegetation programs are creating habitat for rabbits – they must be monitored.

3. 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

- The Ovens Catchment neighbours and is inclusive of national and state parks and public land. Many of our landcare members have an immediate relationship with public land as adjoining neighbours. Good Neighbour programs with public land managers are urgently required with government leading by example.

The lack of management priorities with particular reference to National Parks is an aggravating issue with Landholders in the Ovens Catchment. It is a long felt unifying issue that public land is not managed appropriately in terms of pest infestations.

Some private landholders are also irresponsible. Our members are particularly keen to see a strong enforcement program implemented for irresponsible private landholders. We also require public land managers to lead by example.

It has been proven in the Fairview Conservation Park that through a reduction of rabbits the Paterson’s Curse reduced it spread. In the Sunset Nation Park with the reduction of rabbits a return of shrub land occurred. The land started to heal itself once a reduction of

pests occurred. Related land management issues were reduced once the source of the problem was addressed.

4. The scope for industry groups and R&D Corporations to improve their response to landholder concerns about pest animals.

- Greater partnerships, information and communication between all bodies, from landcare Groups and coordinators, DPI, R&D Corporations and Industry would greatly assist the situation. It is essential as part of this approach government leads by example on public land.
- Research industry must be proactive if the situation is to be managed. So no there must be an improvement in this area.

5. Consider ways to promote community understanding of and involvement in pest animals and their management.

An integrated multifaceted program approach based on excellent coordination would be a good start. In other words on ground coordination based on involvement, interactive and educational principles with state and Commonwealth program support. Other elements of an on-ground program include:

- Strategic approach which includes mapping and monitoring
- Incentive program
- An effective enforcement program
- Information transfer must include the benefits of pest control; information must include enhanced productivity messages on role model properties.
- Rewarding landholder actions
- Government leading by example on public land
- Solutions for urban pest animals' actions for householders to be involved in. Thus building understanding by urban people.
- Implementation of existing strategies.

An additional point: Strategies need to be developed for native animals that are increasing in population due to an expansion of their ecological niche: such as auditing of grazing and total environment resource. Initiatives may include the collection of grain harvesting screenings thus reducing and food source.

Government needs to be the leader with specific knowledge of catchment and ecosystems. One major issue is that government keeps changing.