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

Dear Sir/Madam

RE Inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals

I provide the following information on behalf of the Northern Territory government in response to the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals, 2004.

1. Nationally significant pest animal issues.
 - a. Implementing effective control programmes over the vast area of inland Australia which is very sparsely populated and has only limited road access. This applies to parts of the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. While there is currently only limited agricultural production in these areas, the pest animal problems are immense. The feral camel, which is largely confined to these areas at present, is encroaching more and more onto pastoral areas as populations increase. It is predicted that the camel will have significant impacts on pastoral production in central Australia in years to come.
 - b. Lack of Commonwealth resources targeting the problem of pest animals, particularly in the research and development area.
 - c. Need for more strategic approach to addressing pest animal issues. This could be achieved in part by having an overarching national pest animal strategy similar to the weeds strategy.
 - d. Adoption of best practice humane control techniques across all jurisdictions. This could be achieved in part by having an overarching national pest animal strategy similar to the weeds strategy.
 - e. Species specific issues include the need for improved methods for the control for feral pigs, recognition of the potential pest status of



feral camels, recognition of the potential pest status of feral deer and the need for research into the control of feral cats and cane toads.

2. Approaches to pest animal issues across relevant jurisdictions.

a. Prevention of new pests becoming established/detection and reporting systems

There is a major role for the Commonwealth here in preventing the import of species that may pose a risk. There is a role for the states and territories to monitor in order to detect new establishments. Because monitoring is both difficult and costly, public education is probably a more cost effective way of minimising the incidences of new pest populations establishing. There is also a role for the states and territories in restricting the movement of certain species between jurisdictions. This requires effective legislation, public education and enforcement. A major problem at present is the movement of animals like pigs and deer from one place to another by hunters in order to establish new populations for hunting purposes. State and territory governments need to clamp down on this process, making it plainly clear that such activities will not be tolerated. There is a need for effective legislation and active enforcement to combat this problem.

b. Eradication where feasible and appropriate

A worthy goal but needs to be properly resourced as can be very expensive. In most cases eradication will not be possible and there will be a need for continued control. Control programmes need to be well designed, well resourced and pursued with vigour in order for them to be effective in the long term.

c. Reduction of the impact of established pests

In many instances, landholders do not have the resources to invest in pest animal control. This is a major impediment to reducing the impacts of established pests. Another impediment is a lack of coordinated control across land tenures and property boundaries. One strategy which has worked well in the Northern Territory is the declaration of regional pest control areas. In declared areas, all land holders are legally obliged to invest resources in controlling the identified pest species and to meet predetermined goals in terms of population reduction on their landholding. Effective control of feral pigs is inhibited by a lack of safe and effective broadscale control techniques. In the Northern Territory, the government provides a wild dog control service to pastoral landholders which aims to strike a balance between conserving the dingo in its wild state and mitigating damage to the pastoral industry. The costs of this programme are shared between government and industry on about a 70:30 basis.

3. Adequacy of state government expenditure on pest animal control.

Expenditure on pest control in the Northern Territory could be increased significantly, but bear in mind that the Northern Territory government has to address a multitude of priorities across vast and sparsely populated areas. Distance and access are a major challenge to many pest control programs.

4. Scope for industry groups and R&D corporations to improve their response to landholder concerns

There is always room for improvement. This could be achieved in part by having an overarching national pest animal strategy similar to the weeds strategy. Such a strategy would be developed in consultation with landholders and industry bodies.

5. Promotion of community understanding of and involvement in pest animals and their management

A sensible, balanced and targeted public education programme is the key to promoting community understanding. In terms of promoting community involvement in the management of pest animals, the regional approach to NRM is a step in the right direction. However, the problem is that many of the people involved in developing these plans have no knowledge of pest animal issues and are not even aware that their particular region has a problem. The development of the National Weeds Strategy has helped to raise the profile of weed issues in the general community and has led to increased involvement in weed management. Development of a National Pest Animal Strategy is likely to have a similar effect in respect of pest animals.

Yours sincerely

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SENIOR SCIENTIST, WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT