

## National coordination

### Overview

- 4.1 In determining the best management approaches for pest animal issues, it is important to recognise that pest animals do not acknowledge or respect borders.<sup>1</sup> The issue of pest animals, and the problems that they cause to agriculture and to the environment, is one that concerns the entire nation.
- 4.2 Although each state and territory is faced with its own particular pest animal problems, there are a number of pest species that are spread widely across the country, such as wild dogs, rabbits and feral pigs. There are also pest animals that, although largely confined to areas within one or two states or territories, have a significant impact on the national economy through the damage they inflict on agriculture and the environment. The committee considers, accordingly, that pest animal issues require coordination at the national level.
- 4.3 The committee received overwhelming evidence supporting the need for more involvement at the federal level. Although submitters differed in their opinions as to the desirable extent and character of federal involvement, most who canvassed the issue were in support of national coordination.

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<sup>1</sup> *Submissions 15*, p. 1, 26, 27, p. 4, 40, 60, 77, p. 3, 86, p. 3, Mr Antony Plowman, Member for Benambra, Victorian Parliament, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2004, p. 35.

## Current national programs

- 4.4 Although pest animal issues are not currently coordinated at a national level, there are a number of national initiatives in place. The Vertebrate Pests Committee (VPC) and the National Feral Animal Control Program (NFACP) both play a part in giving a national focus to pest animal issues. A national Pest Animal Strategy and a National Invasive Species Framework are both under development at the time of writing this report. National biosecurity and disease control responses are in place through Animal Health Australia (AHA), the Australian Wildlife Health Network, Product Integrity/ Animal and Plant Health (PIAPH), Plant Health Australia (PHA) and Biosecurity Australia. Each of these initiatives has its part to play in terms of an overall national strategy for pest animal control.
- 4.5 While recognising the need for national coordination, the committee is cognisant of the excellent pest animal control work already being conducted by local and regional groups. The committee acknowledges that it is important that any national approach harnesses the efforts and expertise of these local and regional groups in the fight against pest animals.

## Vertebrate Pests Committee

- 4.6 The VPC is an Australasian body that provides coordinated policy and planning solutions to pest animal issues. It operates in accordance with terms of reference developed by the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee (NRMSC) of the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (NRMMC). The VPC reports to that Committee through the Natural Resources Policies and Programs Committee.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.7 The VPC has the following members:
- New South Wales Department of Primary Industries;
  - Environment ACT;
  - Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM);
  - Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE);
  - Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (DPIWE);

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2 Lapidge, Bourne, Braysher, and Sarre (2004-present) feral.org.au [Online], viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://www.feral.org.au>>.

- South Australian Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation;
- Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission;
- DAWA;
- Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF);
- DEH;
- New Zealand Landcare Research (Manaaki Whenua); and
- CSIRO Division of Sustainable Ecosystems (observer).

4.8 The chairpersonship of the VPC is rotated between the states every three years. The host state for that period provides the secretariat for the VPC. The terms of reference for the VPC are:

Ensure an integrated approach to all aspects of vertebrate pest management by:

1. Providing national policy and planning solutions to vertebrate pest issues.
2. Developing a National Vertebrate Pest Strategy and planning, coordinating and monitoring its implementation.
3. Providing policy and planning advice to Natural Resource Management Standing Committee (NRMSC) and Primary Industries Standing Committee (PISC) on national vertebrate pest issues or as directed by NRMSC. Identify and facilitate implementation of action on significant vertebrate pest issues.
4. Building linkages with NRMSC, PISC, Plant Health Australia, Animal Health Australia, and fisheries and research agencies in Australia and New Zealand on vertebrate pest issues.
5. Identifying potential and emerging vertebrate pest problems and recommend appropriate actions to NRMSC.
6. Identifying and facilitating development, planning, coordination, implementation and monitoring of consistent national approaches to vertebrate pest management including:
  - National strategies
  - Codes of Practice

- Vertebrate Pest Threat Abatement Plans
  - Biological control programs
  - Harmonisation of relevant legislation
  - Vertebrate risk assessment processes
  - Research, education, extension and training
  - Harmonisation of vertebrate pest data collection and management systems
  - Response to emergency vertebrate pest incursions.
7. To promote consistent approaches to vertebrate pest issues across all relevant jurisdictions, including:
- prevention;
  - preparedness for new incursions;
  - reduction of the impact of established populations;
  - consistent, co-ordinated and strategic approaches to management of the economic, environmental and social impacts;
  - eradication of infestations where feasible and appropriate; and
  - standards for management responses.
8. Developing a communications strategy for increasing the profile of vertebrate pests throughout the community, government and key stakeholders.
- 4.9 A number of deficiencies with the VPC in its current form were identified in various submissions received by the committee. These perceived deficiencies include that the VPC:
- only deals with exotic pest animals and not native species regarded by some as pests;<sup>3</sup>
  - has terms of reference that only allow it to deal with vertebrate pests, not invertebrate pests;<sup>4</sup>
  - is inadequately funded to perform its functions;<sup>5</sup> and
  - has no permanent secretariat.<sup>6</sup>

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3 Western Australian Government, *Submission 70*, p. 6.

4 CSIRO, *Submission 55*, p. 5.

5 Western Australian Government, *Submission 70*, p. 6.

6 Animal Control Technologies, *Submission 84*, p. 41.

## National Feral Animal Control Program

- 4.10 The NFACP was established under the Natural Heritage Trust to develop and implement programs to reduce pest animal damage to agriculture in cooperation with state, territory and local governments. Since 1996, it has been administered by the BRS.<sup>7</sup>
- 4.11 The main objectives of the NFACP are to:
- develop integrated, strategic approaches to manage the impacts of nationally significant pest animals;
  - improve the effectiveness of control techniques and strategies for reducing pest animal impact; and
  - produce guidelines for the management of nationally significant pest animals.<sup>8</sup>
- 4.12 The program provides support for a range of activities, including large and small scale field studies, extension activities and development of more efficacious, cost-effective and humane control techniques.
- 4.13 The NFACP has available funding of approximately \$500,000 per annum, and applicants are required to match funds provided by direct financial contributions. Preference is given to projects that involve collaboration between government and non-government agencies and community groups.<sup>9</sup>

## National Pest Animal Strategy

- 4.14 It is expected that the National Pest Animal Strategy currently under development by a sub-committee of the VPC will be provided to the NRMCC for its approval some time in April 2006. A draft strategy is expected to be available for public comment later this year, although at the time of writing this report, the draft had not been released. The national strategy is being drafted in response to a recommendation made by the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee.<sup>10</sup> It will serve a similar purpose to the

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7 BRS, *Submission 76*, p. 4.

8 DAFF, *National Feral Animal Control Program*, DAFF, Canberra, 21 September 2005, viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://www.affa.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=D2C48F86-BA1A-11A1-A2200060B0A06278#what>>.

9 DAFF, *National Feral Animal Control Program*.

10 Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee, *Report on the regulation, control and management of invasive species and the*

National Weeds Strategy, developed by the Australian Weeds Committee. The National Weeds Strategy provides a framework for reducing the impact of weeds on agriculture and the environment.

- 4.15 The following terms of reference were established by the VPC to guide development of a national strategy:
- Develop a national framework for managing the impacts of pest animal species in Australia;
  - Ensure consistency and links with other national and state invasive species strategies;
  - Clearly define the scope of the strategy in terms of the species and issues included and excluded;
  - Identify clear roles and responsibilities for pest management;
  - Ensure the strategy identifies prevention, detection, intervention, eradication and control processes; and
  - Ensure that the risk posed by the importation of exotic species is assessed.<sup>11</sup>
- 4.16 The strategy will include vertebrate pests and problem native vertebrate species that cause negative economic, social and environmental impacts. It will be aimed at ensuring that new incursions are prevented, that pests are managed in infested areas and that there is limited movement between infested and uninfested areas. The strategy will not address exotic diseases, invertebrates or marine species.<sup>12</sup>

## National Invasive Species Framework

- 4.17 The committee notes that, in addition to a National Pest Animal Strategy, a National Invasive Species Framework is also under development. The Framework is being developed by the NRMSC Invasive Species Task Group, and is aimed at preventing the establishment of significant new invasive species and reducing the impacts of current major pests. The Framework will incorporate both pest animals and pest weeds.

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*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Invasive Species) Bill 2002*, Commonwealth Parliament, Canberra, December 2004, Recommendation 11.

11 R Enright, C Walton, F Keenan and J Thompson, *National Pest Animal Strategy – Discussion Paper*, February 2005, p. 2.

12 Enright et al, p. 2.

- 4.18 It is expected that the framework will set out the roles and responsibilities of governments, landholders, non-government organisations and community groups; identify key invasive species issues facing Australia; and outline and describe desirable arrangements and interactions necessary for a coordinated national approach to pest animals and weeds.<sup>13</sup>
- 4.19 The NRMSC is developing the national framework in cooperation with the Primary Industries Standing Committee (PISC), which is developing a National Biosecurity System for managing biosecurity issues in relation to the management of animal, plant and marine pest and disease incursions. This will ensure that there is a proper linkage between the two frameworks.<sup>14</sup>
- 4.20 A research paper has been prepared by Agtrans Research in conjunction with Noel Dawson at the direction of the NRMSC Invasive Species Task Group (the Agtrans Report). The committee takes note of this research paper, the purpose of which is to assess progress that has been made over the past ten years in the prevention and control of pests and weeds.<sup>15</sup>
- 4.21 The committee approves of the amalgamation of pest animal and weed issues into one national framework. It is appropriate and efficient to deal with both issues together, as the two are sometimes related (for example, pest weeds and plants can provide harbour for some pest animals). Combining the two issues into one framework can also result in economies of scale (for example, by conducting control programs for pest animals and weeds in the one area at the same time, where appropriate).
- 4.22 In line with the new National Invasive Species Framework, the committee considers that pest animal and pest weed issues should be managed by a single national coordinating body. The issue of an appropriate body is considered later in this chapter.

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13 Mr Ian Thompson, NRM, DAFF, *Transcript of evidence*, 16 February 2005, p. 3.

14 *NRMMC Resolution No. 6.8*, 16 April 2004, *PIMC Resolution No. 5.5*, 19 May 2004.

15 Agtrans Research in conjunction with Noel Dawson, *Review of Progress on Invasive Species – Final Report to Department of Environment and Heritage*, DEH, Canberra, 12 April 2005, viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://deh.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/review/pubs/review-full.pdf>> (Agtrans Report).

## Biosecurity and disease control responses

### Animal Health Australia

- 4.23 AHA was established by the federal, state and territory governments and major national livestock industry organisations.<sup>16</sup> Its role is to ensure that the national animal health system delivers a competitive advantage and preferred market access for Australian livestock industries. AHA has 24 member organisations that fund company activities via annual subscriptions.
- 4.24 The Animal Disease Surveillance Program provides a nationally integrated surveillance system for animal health. Detailed reports on livestock health and status are available through the National Animal Health Information System.
- 4.25 The Emergency Animal Disease Preparedness Program combines biosecurity planning to reduce the risk of entry and spread of emergency animal disease with disaster preparedness planning. AUSVETPLAN is a series of technical response plans that set out how Australia would respond in the event of an exotic disease outbreak.

### Australian Wildlife Health Network

- 4.26 The role of the Australian Wildlife Health Network is to promote and facilitate collaborative links in the investigation and management of wildlife health.<sup>17</sup> The organisation operates a national database of wildlife health information and provides information about wildlife health to the community. Key stakeholders include federal and state agriculture departments, primary industries, veterinary laboratories, wildlife, conservation and environmental protection groups and public health agencies.

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16 AHA, AHA, Canberra, 1 July 2005, viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au>>.

17 Australian Fauna Care, *Australian Wildlife Health Network factsheet*, Australian Fauna Care, December 2004, viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://www.fauna.org.au/Downloads/AWHN%20fact%20Sheet.doc>>.



## Product Integrity / Animal and Plant Health

- 4.27 Product Integrity/ Animal and Plant Health (PIAPH) works to improve the health and welfare of Australian farm animals and commercial and native plants.<sup>18</sup> One of its major concerns is how to minimise the impact of pests and diseases on agriculture, fisheries and forestry. It falls under the umbrella of DAFF.
- 4.28 Branches of PIAPH include the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and the Office of the Chief Plant Protection Officer. The Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer is concerned with international animal disease coordination, emergency disease response and preparedness and endemic animal disease programs. The role of the Office of the Chief Plant Protection Officer is to protect Australian plant industries from incursions of invertebrate pests.

## Plant Health Australia

- 4.29 PHA is an industry-government company, which aims to protect Australia's plant industries from the risks posed by organisms, including invertebrate pests.<sup>19</sup> It is a national coordinating body that identifies and commissions projects and coordinates policy development nationally.
- 4.30 Company activities are funded from annual member subscriptions. Members include the federal government, all state and territory governments and national representative plant industry organisations.
- 4.31 The mission of PHA is to, inter alia, be the key adviser to industry, governments and stakeholders on national plant health policy; commission, coordinate, facilitate and manage agreed national plant health programs; and complement the work of industry and government groups.

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18 DAFF, *PIAPH*, DAFF, Canberra, 26 August 2005, viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://www.affa.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=3E48F86-AA1A-11A1-B6300060B0AA00002>>.

19 PHA, PHA, Canberra, 18 June 2003, viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au>>.

## Biosecurity Australia

- 4.32 Biosecurity Australia is an independent agency within the federal DAFF portfolio.<sup>20</sup> Its role is to provide science-based quarantine assessments and policy advice to protect Australia's favourable pest and disease status. It assists in the development of international quarantine standards.
- 4.33 Animal Biosecurity is a branch of Biosecurity Australia. It develops quarantine policies that protect Australia's farmed, domestic and wild animals and natural environments from exotic pests and diseases. Plant Biosecurity is another branch that develops quarantine policies protecting Australia's horticultural industries and the natural environment from pests and diseases.
- 4.34 Biosecurity Australia is responsible for conducting import risk analyses in relation to new imports. An import risk analysis is required where there is no quarantine policy or a significant change in existing quarantine policy is to be considered in relation to an import.

## A new approach to national coordination of pest issues

- 4.35 The committee agrees with the overwhelming majority of submissions addressing the issue that argued for a national approach to the issue of pest animals.<sup>21</sup> A national approach has a number of perceived advantages, which include increased consistency of approach, national best practice implementation, national direction, increased knowledge about pest animal populations and distribution, and more efficient use of resources.
- 4.36 Problems with the absence of a national approach to pest animal management manifest themselves in a lack of consistency in how control measures are implemented in different states and territories. An example was provided at the Wodonga Wild Dog Summit in February 2002. The

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20 DAFF, *Biosecurity Australia*, DAFF, Canberra, 21 September 2005, viewed 21 September 2005, <<http://www.affa.gov.au/biosecurityaustralia>>.

21 *Submissions* 6, 11, 15, p. 2, 22, 27, p. 4, 34, 35, 43, p. 2, 47, p. 2, 49, p. 1, 52, p. 1, 54, p. 3, 55, pp. 4-5, 60, 64, 66, 70, p. 4, 71, 77, p. 3, 78, p. 4, 81, p. 5, 84, p. 41, 90, 94, Mr Brian Clifford, Cooma RLPB, *Transcript of evidence*, 9 September 2005, p. 6, Dr Ashley Mercy, DAWA, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 April 2005, pp. 14, 20, Mr Keiran McNamara, CALM, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 April 2005, p. 26, Mr Antony Plowman, Member for Benambra, Victorian Parliament, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2004, p. 35, Mr John Sinclair, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2004, p. 72, N Ward, 'Summation', in *Exhibit 3, Proceedings of the National Wild Dog Summit*, Wodonga, 22 February 2002.

proceedings of the Summit discuss the different approaches to wild dog management across states and territories. While Queensland was shown to be proactive and progressive in its wild dog management, frustration was expressed at the lack of management in Victoria. There were also different approaches in relation to the use of aerial baiting, with some states permitting it and others prohibiting the practice.<sup>22</sup>

- 4.37 The Western Australian Government, in its submission, highlighted the need for national coordination through a body such as the VPC:

Through national coordination and increased Commonwealth funding, the impacts of pest animals can be better managed. There is a need for a national body, such as the Vertebrate Pest Committee (VPC), to provide guidance at a national level. The role of the VPC should extend to developing national and uniform pest animal policies, standardisation of control techniques and strategies, directing where research efforts should be heading, providing expert advice, and monitoring and reporting of pest animal impacts. This is not achievable without commitment of funds by the Commonwealth and in principle support of such a body by the States.<sup>23</sup>

- 4.38 Mr Michael Hartmann, of the Cattle Council of Australia (CCA), discussed the need for a national approach in the context of the feral pig problem:

We need to stop thinking about it on a state-by-state basis. We need to think of ourselves as a country, focusing, firstly, on the areas where there are not many pigs, putting in baiting programs and the like and using surveillance to ensure the pigs are not repopulating, and then focusing into the really hot spots.<sup>24</sup>

- 4.39 Mr Andy McMillan, of the Western Australian Farmers Federation (WAFF), discussed the potential for reducing duplication of resources at a state level through a national approach:

Even though they will deny it, CALM and the APB here have competing agendas. There are resources being duplicated, particularly in the administrative function, that would be better spent through a joint approach to pest management, achieving

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22 N Ward, 'Summation', in *Exhibit 3, Proceedings of the National Wild Dog Summit*, Wodonga, 22 February 2002.

23 *Submission 70*, pp. 4-5.

24 *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 8.

some on-ground results. So if there is some way of that being controlled from a federal point of view, that would be good.<sup>25</sup>

- 4.40 The Discussion Paper arising out of the RSPCA Australia joint workshop on humane vertebrate pest control called for a national approach to address humaneness of control methods:

Pest animal control is a national problem that cuts across government departments and State and Federal jurisdictions. Yet it is clear that the development of an implementation process to tackle this problem cannot rely solely on existing mechanisms. Improving the humaneness of control methods is a challenge that needs to be addressed by a coordinated national approach, but without a national body to provide this coordination, there is no identifiable means of advancing the priorities and actions set out in this document.<sup>26</sup>

- 4.41 A few people expressed concern about potential problems with a national approach. In particular, concern was expressed that Western Australia would obtain little benefit from participation in a national effort, due to its isolation from most other states and territories and the unique nature of problems experienced in entry of new pest species through western coastal ports.<sup>27</sup> At Warrawagine Station, pastoralists were concerned that a national approach would divert money away from on-ground control and towards administrative costs.<sup>28</sup>
- 4.42 The committee acknowledges these concerns in relation to a national approach, and recognises the need for them to be addressed. On balance, however, the committee believes that the pest animal problem in Australia is of such significance that a national approach to the issue is essential. The committee considers that a national approach will be of particular benefit in helping to address pest animals that cross state and territory boundaries, such as wild dogs, feral pigs, camels and foxes. The committee believes there is a need for a national body to coordinate pest animal control and management across the country.

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25 *Transcript of evidence*, 20 July 2005, pp. 38-39.

26 *Exhibit 11, A National approach towards humane vertebrate pest control*, Discussion paper arising from the proceedings of an RSPCA Australia/ AWC/VPC joint workshop, Melbourne, 4-5 August 2003, p. 36.

27 Mr Gordon Wyre, CALM and Mr David Leake, WAFF, *Transcript of evidence*, 20 July 2005, pp. 27, 39.

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

## The need for integrated control

- 4.43 The committee notes that it is important to ensure that pest animal problems are not managed in isolation from other issues relating to land management, including other pest animal and weed issues.
- 4.44 CSIRO, in its submission, stated:
- A common policy framework is required for dealing with invasive species across the spectrum, from prevention through rapid response to new incursions to long-term control and eradication.
- A national strategy for invasive species should be developed to reflect this policy framework, incorporating weeds, invertebrates and vertebrate pests.<sup>29</sup>
- 4.45 The committee notes that the National Invasive Species Framework, currently being developed by the NRMSC Invasive Species Task Group, should go some way towards addressing the issue of a lack of a national strategy incorporating both pest animal and weed issues.
- 4.46 The committee notes the complex interaction and inter-relationships that may exist between pest animal species, between pests and non-pests and between pest weeds and animals. It was noted in a number of submissions and other evidence to the inquiry that reduction in population numbers of one pest animal species may lead to a corresponding increase in the population of another pest species.<sup>30</sup> As an example, it has been noted that where fox control is undertaken, the benefits of that control can be outweighed by the cost of increased rabbit abundance, as foxes are a major predator of rabbits.<sup>31</sup>
- 4.47 In Western Australia, Mr Pete de Long, a property owner, stated his opinion that the successful Judas donkey program that has operated in regions of the state has increased the population of wild dogs, as donkeys that have been shot are left in paddocks and provide a food source for the dogs.<sup>32</sup>

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29 *Submission 55*, p. 8.

30 *Submissions 4, 46, 76*, Attachment H, K Williams, I Parer, BJ Coman, J Burley and ML Braysher, *Managing Vertebrate Pests: Rabbits*, Bureau of Resource Sciences/CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1995, p. 41.

31 ACT Government, *Submission 63*, Appendix, Environment ACT, *ACT Vertebrate Pest Management Strategy*, ACT Government, Canberra, 2002, p. 11.

32 *Transcript of evidence*, 22 July 2005, p. 20.

- 4.48 The committee was told that infestations of blackberry (an introduced plant species) serve as harbour for dogs, pigs, cats and foxes, which then use that harbour as 'stockyards' to capture native wildlife.<sup>33</sup>
- 4.49 Because of these inter-relationships, the committee believes that the most effective way to manage pest problems is to vest responsibility for pest animal and weed issues in one national body. It is also important that any body set up to coordinate pest animal issues at the national level be in a position to address the problem of local pest problems with native species, such as possums and kangaroos. The committee notes that the new National Pest Animal Strategy being developed by the VPC will include native species and believes that this is a positive development towards integrated consideration of pest issues.

## A new National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee

- 4.50 The committee notes that it is likely the Invasive Species Framework, due to be released next year, will propose new administrative arrangements for management of invasive species. The committee has not had the benefit of access to detail about the framework at this stage, but hopes that the framework will be consistent with the recommendations for national coordination contained in this report.
- 4.51 A number of different possibilities for a national coordinating body were presented to the committee. In summary, these bodies were:
- the existing VPC;<sup>34</sup>
  - a National Pest Species Council;<sup>35</sup>
  - an invasives group dealing with both pest animals and weeds;<sup>36</sup>
  - a national body modelled on the Western Australian Weeds Committee;<sup>37</sup>
  - a new body modelled on the Berryman Institute in the United States;<sup>38</sup>

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33 Victorian and NSW Wild Dog Coordinating Committee, *Submission 66*.

34 *Submissions 70*, pp. 4-5, 84, p. 41, Dr Linton Staples, Animal Control Technologies, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 13, Mr Keiran McNamara, CALM, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 April 2005, p. 26, *Exhibit 11, A National approach towards humane vertebrate pest control*, Discussion paper arising from the proceedings of an RSPCA Australia/AWC/VPC joint workshop, Melbourne, 4-5 August 2003, p. 26.

35 Ms Noeline Franklin, *Submission 35*.

36 Dr Tony Peacock, PAC CRC, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 May 2005, p. 15.

37 Ms Anna-Marie Penna, CCWA, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 April 2005, p. 5.

38 Dr Graham Hall, *Transcript of evidence*, 29 March 2005, p. 33.

- a Federal Ministerial Council to ensure consistency of wild dog control programs between states and territories;<sup>39</sup>
  - a Feral Pig Control Coordination Committee to develop and manage a national plan for feral pig control through a Feral Pig Operations Committee.<sup>40</sup>
- 4.52 Taking into account these suggestions, and existing arrangements, the committee believes that the best option is to amalgamate the VPC and the Australian Weeds Committee to form one national body responsible for management of pest animals and plants (a National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee).
- 4.53 Amalgamation of the two bodies should be simplified by the fact that the terms of reference for the committees are virtually identical (except that they relate to weeds and pest animals respectively) and the membership of both bodies is also similar. Membership would *not* be reduced from its current level, that is, each state and relevant agency would contribute one representative in relation to weeds and one representative in relation to pest animals.
- 4.54 It has been noted that the management of pest animals, to be most effective, should be integrated into a whole-of-system approach that takes into consideration both the social and economic implications of pest management as well as environmental considerations.<sup>41</sup> As has been pointed out by the Australian Biosecurity Group, where environmental and agricultural pests are dealt with separately, the same pest is often targeted by different groups working in isolation.<sup>42</sup> The report on the management of feral animals by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) considered that, "Feral animal control should be viewed as one element of a whole system approach to land management, and addressed in the context of land degradation and habitat fragmentation."<sup>43</sup>

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39 'Copy of motions', Motion Four, in *Exhibit 3, Proceedings of the National Wild Dog Summit*, Wodonga, 22 February 2002.

40 CCA/AVA, *Submission 49*, p. 6.

41 ACT Government, *Submission 63*, Appendix, p. 1.

42 Australian Biosecurity Group, *Invasive Weeds, Pests and Diseases: Solutions to Secure Australia*, PAC CRC, CRC for Australian Weed Management and WWF, Canberra, 2005, p. 14.

43 Associate Professor AW English and Dr RS Chapple, *A Report on the Management of Feral Animals by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service*, Executive Summary, NSW NPWS, 5 July 2002, viewed 23 September 2005, <[http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/PDFs/english\\_report\\_pest\\_animal\\_progs\\_execsum.pdf](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/PDFs/english_report_pest_animal_progs_execsum.pdf)>, p. 7.

- 4.55 Although the focus of this report is on pest animals and their impact on agriculture, the committee considers that the most useful approach is to have one committee managing economic and environmental impacts of both animal and plant pests. The proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee would serve this function. The committee notes that the Australian Weeds Committee already deals with both economic and environmental impacts of weeds.
- 4.56 The establishment of a combined Pest Animals and Weeds Committee would also be timely, given the impending release of the National Invasive Species Framework being prepared by the NRMSC Invasive Species Task Group. This framework will cover both pest animal and weed issues, and it is apt that a national body responsible for dealing with both issues be established at the same time.
- 4.57 As indicated above, the VPC, as the name suggests, performs its functions only in relation to vertebrate and not invertebrate pests. The scope of the National Invasive Species Framework will extend to invertebrate pests, and it is apt, therefore, that the National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee also coordinate invertebrate pest issues. The committee considers it appropriate that additional representation be provided from each state and territory to ensure that the committee has the benefit of relevant expertise on invertebrate pest issues.
- 4.58 The committee notes that the National Pest Animal Strategy, currently under development, will not cover invertebrate pests, as this is not part of the terms of reference for development of the strategy. The Australian Biosecurity Group, a collection of Australia's leading invasive species scientists and policy specialists, has stated:
- Australia has no database of introduced insects, spiders, snails, nematodes and other invertebrate pests, much less a proper understanding of their impacts, nor a coherent strategy for their detection and eradication. Given the enormous drain on the economy attributed to such pests, this is a foolish oversight.<sup>44</sup>
- 4.59 Although the National Pest Animal Strategy is already in the process of development, the committee believes it would be appropriate to expand the scope of the strategy to include invertebrate pests, although this may delay the submission of the strategy to the NRMCC.

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44 Australian Biosecurity Group, p. 14.



**Recommendation 1**

- 4.60 **The committee recommends that the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council amalgamate the Vertebrate Pests Committee and the Australian Weeds Committee to form one National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee, with representation from Australian Government and state and territory governments in the areas of weeds, vertebrate pests and invertebrate pests.**
- 4.61 Possible terms of reference for the committee are set out in Appendix F to this report.

**Recommendation 2**

- 4.62 **The committee recommends that the terms of reference for the new National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee refer to 'pest animals', including both vertebrate and invertebrate pests.**
- 4.63 As noted in paragraph 4.59, the committee takes the view that the terms of reference for the National Pest Animal Strategy should be extended to include invertebrate pests. As the terms of reference have already been prepared by the VPC, and the National Strategy is due to be released in the first half of 2006, it is recommended that the VPC take steps to amend the strategy as soon as possible.

**Recommendation 3**

- 4.64 **The committee recommends that the Vertebrate Pests Committee extend the terms of reference for development of a National Pest Animal Strategy to include invertebrate pests.**

- 4.65 Problems with the VPC in its current form were discussed in evidence provided to the committee.<sup>45</sup> A number of changes to current arrangements were suggested to ensure that the national committee responsible for pest animal management is adequately equipped to perform this role:
- increase in the budget of the joint committee;
  - the provision of secretariat support;
  - expanded representation.<sup>46</sup>

### Budgetary considerations

- 4.66 It was suggested that the VPC in its current form requires increased funding in order to perform effectively as a national pest coordinating body.<sup>47</sup>
- 4.67 Animal Control Technologies called for an expanded budget for the VPC in two major respects. The first was to enable the Committee to call for expert reports on particular issues where that is necessary. The second was to enable the Committee to run the Vertebrate Pest Conference, and to do so on a bi-annual basis.<sup>48</sup>
- 4.68 The committee notes that the amalgamation of the VPC with the Australian Weeds Committee will not alleviate the need for further funding. Pest animal issues, as indicated in Chapter 3, have a significant impact on the Australian economy, and it is necessary that appropriate funds be set aside for dealing with these issues.
- 4.69 The committee considers that the Australian Government should negotiate with state and territory governments to work out a suitable joint funding arrangement to expand the combined budgets of the VPC and Australian Weeds Committee. An appropriate amount of this funding must be set aside specifically for the purpose of pest animal coordination.
- 4.70 The committee wishes to emphasise that any funding provided to the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee must be used for practical pest animal control operations and research. The committee is concerned by evidence that funding for pest animal operations is too

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45 *Submissions 70*, p. 6, 81, p. 6, Dr Kevin Doyle, AVA, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 11.

46 Animal Control Technologies, *Submission 84*, p. 41, Dr Linton Staples, Animal Control Technologies, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 13.

47 Western Australian Government, *Submission 70*, p. 6.

48 *Submission 84*, p. 41.

frequently siphoned off for various bureaucratic and administrative purposes, rather than being directed to people on the ground, where the funding is most urgently needed. These concerns are dealt with more fully in Chapter 6. The committee recommends that any funding to be administered by the proposed National Committee be placed in a separate account and managed in such a way as to avoid the diversion of funds to which the committee has referred.

#### **Recommendation 4**

- 4.71 **The committee recommends that the Australian Government negotiate with state and territory governments to agree on a suitable joint funding arrangement to expand the funding available to the Australian Pest Animals and Weeds Committee.**

#### **Secretariat support**

- 4.72 The committee notes that the VPC, unlike the National Weeds Committee, does not have a permanent secretariat. Permanent secretariat support was seen as being crucial for the fulfilment of a national coordination role by the VPC.<sup>49</sup> The existence of secretariat support was perceived by one submitter as being a critical component of the success of the National Weeds Committee.<sup>50</sup>
- 4.73 The committee is aware that the National Weeds Committee is currently serviced by a part-time secretariat funded by member states. The committee believes that the Australian Government should match current state and territory government funding to establish a full-time secretariat capable of servicing the new amalgamated body. This would help to ensure that the current imbalance in attention given to pest animals as opposed to weeds is addressed.

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49 PAC CRC, *Submission 33, Animal Control Technologies, Submission 84*, p. 41.

50 Dr Tony Peacock, PAC CRC, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 May 2005, p. 15.

## **Recommendation 5**

- 4.74 **The committee recommends that the Australian Government match the current funding provided by states and territories towards the Australian Weeds Committee Secretariat, to establish a full-time secretariat servicing the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee.**

### **Representation**

- 4.75 It was suggested to the committee that the representation of the VPC should be expanded.<sup>51</sup>
- 4.76 The committee emphasises the importance of utilising the expertise and experience of local and community groups involved in pest animal management. In particular, the committee has noted the contributions of local pest management groups, such as the landcare and wild dog management groups that gave evidence in relation to this inquiry.
- 4.77 The committee considers, however, that the involvement of such groups, along with industry, conservation, land management and animal welfare groups, would be more appropriate through a national advisory committee, rather than membership of the national coordinating committee itself. The function and constitution of such an advisory group is considered below.

### **Tasks for the National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee**

- 4.78 DAWA called for a national centralised database to record breach incursions by exotic invertebrates. The submission states that there is currently an unacceptable level of breaches of exotic wood-boring insects via the regulated timber trade routes. A national database would enable the cause of each breach to be determined and recorded, and acted upon.<sup>52</sup>

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51 Dr Linton Staples, Animal Control Technologies, *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 13.

52 DAWA, *Submission 98*, p. 3.

- 4.79 The Western Australian Government also noted the absence of a national reporting system for new and established pest animals.<sup>53</sup> A national Pest Animal Database incorporating both invertebrate and vertebrate pests would be useful in assisting landholders and organisations to determine where pest animal populations are located and assist in coordinating control measures across jurisdictional boundaries.<sup>54</sup>
- 4.80 A need was identified for national coordination of a risk assessment process for all exotic species currently existing in Australia but not yet established.<sup>55</sup> This would enable identification of species that pose the greatest threats of establishing populations in Australia. This need was also identified in the Agtrans Report prepared for the National Invasive Species Task Group.<sup>56</sup>
- 4.81 Animal Control Technologies suggested that removal of inconsistencies in pest animal management between states and territories would be an important function of the VPC. This would facilitate coordination of control across state and territory borders, and would also increase economies of scale for industry, for example for bait manufacturers who currently have to comply with different requirements in different jurisdictions.<sup>57</sup>
- 4.82 The Western Australian Government called for a national body to play a role in standardising control techniques across jurisdictions and formulating national pest animal policy and strategy. This would also include national standards in relation to animal welfare.<sup>58</sup>
- 4.83 A function of the national body would also be the coordination of a national pest animal awareness campaign. This would highlight to the community the benefits of pest animal control, including increased productivity and benefits to the environment.<sup>59</sup>

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53 *Submission 70*, pp. 8-9.

54 State Council for RLPB, *Submission 81*, p. 6, Mr John King, Monaro Merino Association, *Transcript of evidence*, 9 September 2005, p. 16.

55 BRS, *Submission 76*, p. 12.

56 Agtrans Report, p. 77.

57 *Submission 84*, pp. 41, 60.

58 *Submission 70*, pp. 4-5, 10.

59 Braidwood RLPB, *Submission 71*.

4.84 Some of the suggestions referred to are already included in the existing terms of reference for the VPC. The committee notes, however, that in order to implement these recommendations, the terms of reference will need to be amended to include:

- the establishment of a national database to record exotic invertebrate breaches and incursions, and to map populations of vertebrate and invertebrate pests;
- development of risk assessment processes for pest species existing in Australia but not yet established; and
- development of national pest animal welfare standards.

The proposed terms of reference, as amended to include the above, are set out at Appendix F.

4.85 The committee emphasises that it would not be the role of the Australian Pest Animal and Weeds Committee to coordinate research; rather the committee recommends in Chapter 9 that this will be the role of the new Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (AIA CRC). It is important, however, that the Committee be kept informed of developments in research and improvements into control methods across the country. Accordingly, the committee considers that the AIA CRC should have membership of the national advisory body discussed below to ensure that the Committee is kept informed of latest developments in the field of pest animal control.

## **Recommendation 6**

4.86 **The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee:**

- **establish a national database to record exotic invertebrate breaches and incursions, and to map populations of vertebrate and invertebrate pests;**
- **develop a risk assessment process for pest species existing in Australia but not yet established; and**
- **develop national pest animal welfare standards.**

- 4.87 Some submissions noted inconsistencies between states and territories in legislation dealing with pest animal management.<sup>60</sup> A summary of key pest animal legislation in each jurisdiction is set out in Appendix E. These inconsistencies can lead to fragmentation of the approach to pest animal management and hinder efforts to coordinate management efforts across borders.
- 4.88 The committee considers that an important role of the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee will be to examine where important inconsistencies in legislation arise and to negotiate with state and territory representatives to achieve, as far as possible, uniformity in relation to pest animal control and management.

### Recommendation 7

- 4.89 **The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee discuss with state and territory representatives ways to improve consistency of pest animal legislation across jurisdictions, where appropriate.**

## National Pest Animals Advisory Committee

- 4.90 The committee is aware of the recent establishment of the National Weeds Advisory Group. This was announced on 7 June 2005 jointly by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage and the Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation. The group comprises representatives of agriculture, conservation bodies, local and state governments, landcare and the plant nursery industry. Its function is to advise the ministers on the management and direction of the government's new \$40 million Defeating the Weed Menace Program.<sup>61</sup>

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60 *Submissions 41, 70, p. 6, 80, p. 1, 98, pp. 10-12, Mr Robert Delane, DAWA, Transcript of evidence, 20 July 2005, p. 27, Dr Ashley Mercy, DAWA, Transcript of evidence, 11 April 2005, p. 14, Australian Biosecurity Group, p. 35.*

61 *Joint Statement, Australian Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage, National Weeds Advisory Group Announced, 7 June 2005, viewed 23 September 2005, <<http://www.mffc.gov.au/releases/2005/05109mj.html>>.*

- 4.91 The establishment of a national invasive species advisory group for pest animals, comprising representatives of federal, state and local governments, as well as non-government organisations and community groups, was suggested by the CCWA.<sup>62</sup> Membership of the pest animals advisory body should include representation from private sector companies researching, developing and distributing pest animal products. Animal Control Technologies, a company responsible for producing many well-known pest animal products such as FOXOFF and RABBAIT, suggested that it could provide support in a consultative role.<sup>63</sup> It was recommended that industry groups, such as the CCA, also have a role to play in a coordinating pest animals body.<sup>64</sup>
- 4.92 The committee believes that the establishment of a National Pest Animals Advisory Group would be of benefit to the management of pest animal issues. Although the economic impact of weeds in Australia is greater than that caused by pest animals, the economic impact of pest animals, as demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this report, is significant. It is, therefore, fitting that there be a pest animals counterpart to the newly-established National Weeds Advisory Committee.
- 4.93 Modelled on the National Weeds Advisory Group, the National Pest Animals Advisory Committee would utilise the expertise of local and state government bodies experienced in the management of pest animal issues. It would consist of representatives of local and state governments, representatives of agricultural and pastoral industries, landcare and conservation groups, industry groups, research organisations, animal welfare groups and local pest animal groups such as the Victorian and New South Wales Wild Dog Coordinating Committee.
- 4.94 The Advisory Group should also include member representatives from the national initiatives for pest animals considered above, including the NFACP, AHA, Australian Wildlife Health Network, PHA and Biosecurity Australia. As noted above, membership should also extend to the AIA CRC.

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62 *Submission 37*, p. 2.

63 *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 16.

64 *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, p. 16.



## Recommendation 8

- 4.95 **The committee recommends that a Pest Animals Advisory Committee be established to provide advice and assistance to the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee and that it include representatives of agriculture and pastoral industries, conservation bodies, local and state government, industry groups, research organisations, landcare, animal welfare and pest animal management groups. Membership should also include the National Feral Animal Control Program, Animal Health Australia, Australian Wildlife Health Network, Product Integrity/Animal and Plant Health, Plant Health Australia, Biosecurity Australia and the AIA CRC.**

## Inter-state cost-sharing arrangements

- 4.96 There are currently national cost-sharing arrangements in place for eradication programs that are conducted in only one state or territory, but are considered to have benefits for other jurisdictions. The Agrans Report notes that these arrangements are in place for animal diseases, and under development for plant pests, but do not apply to weeds, vertebrate or aquatic pests.<sup>65</sup>
- 4.97 The committee was informed that the National Invasive Species Task Group has recognised the need for national cost-sharing arrangements for eradication programs as a priority.<sup>66</sup>
- 4.98 DAWA points out that these arrangements only apply to programs for eradication and not for containment, despite the fact that other states and territories may benefit greatly from containment operations conducted in one jurisdiction.<sup>67</sup>
- 4.99 The committee considers that a containment or eradication program conducted in one state or territory may be the most cost-effective means of controlling or removing a pest species at a national level. Cost-sharing arrangements should therefore be extended to containment operations as well as eradication programs. The committee also considers that cost-

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65 Agrans Report, p. 83.

66 DAWA, *Submission 98*, p. 12.

67 *Submission 98*, pp. 17-18.

sharing arrangements should be extended to vertebrate pests, to enable sharing of costs between governments in relation to pests of national distribution.

### **Recommendation 9**

**4.100 The committee recommends that cost-sharing arrangements be included in the National Invasive Species Framework, currently under development, and be extended to:**

- vertebrate pests, as well as animal diseases and plant pests; and
- containment as well as eradication activities.

## **State and territory coordination of pest animal issues**

4.101 Pest animal control is coordinated at the state or territory level through a range of different approaches and agencies. While the committee acknowledges that it is the responsibility of each state or territory to coordinate pest animal management as it sees fit, it notes with concern that a lack of consistency across jurisdictions creates difficulties in terms of a coordinated approach to pest animal control.<sup>68</sup>

4.102 Each state and territory has at least one government body the responsibility of which is to control pest animal management in that state or territory's jurisdiction. The responsible body will usually administer relevant legislation, carry out pest animal control functions, liaise with other government agencies, local government and community organisations, and undertake extension and public education activities.

4.103 In some jurisdictions, it appears that responsibility for the control of feral animals vests in a number of different government bodies and agencies without any effective means of coordinating control efforts across these various agencies.<sup>69</sup> Evidence given by WAFF (quoted above) indicates that the agencies responsible for pest animal management in that state have competing agendas and that duplication of resources occurs.<sup>70</sup>

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68 Western Australian Government, *Submission 70*, p. 6, Animal Control Technologies, *Submission 84*, p. 59.

69 *Submissions 6, 28, 36, 43, 54*, p. 2, 80, p. 2.

70 *Transcript of evidence*, 20 July 2005, pp. 38-39.

- 4.104 The committee believes that inconsistencies in management of pest animal issues within individual states and territories should be resolved by the appointment of a single body to oversee pest animal management in each jurisdiction. In Queensland, the committee was told that an Interdepartmental Pest Management Committee, with representatives from state agencies including the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland Treasury and the Department of Local Government, Planning and Sport and Recreation, was formed in 2002. Its role is to improve the coordination of management of pest animals and weeds.<sup>71</sup>
- 4.105 In New South Wales, the Pest Animal Council is an *ad hoc* committee that serves as an advisory body to the New South Wales Government. The role of the council is to identify pest animal species, encourage the development and application of best practice techniques, disseminate knowledge about pest control and advise ministers and non-government organisations on pest animal issues.
- 4.106 The Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee that conducted an inquiry into feral animals in New South Wales recommended that the Pest Animal Council be made a statutory body responsible for coordinating feral animal control across the state and that it administer a fund for feral animal control.<sup>72</sup> To the committee's knowledge, however, the Pest Animal Council remains an *ad hoc* committee with no statutory basis and the absence of coordination across government agencies continues in New South Wales.
- 4.107 If the problems identified by the New South Wales General Purpose Standing Committee were addressed, the committee believes that the Pest Animal Council would provide a useful model for pest animal coordination at the state level in other states and territories, as would the Queensland Interdepartmental Pest Management Committee. Although a number of state government departments and agencies would still have responsibility for pest animal control on their lands, coordination through one central body would enable consistency to be achieved across tenures in each state and territory. The responsible body would then be able to contribute effectively on behalf of its host state or territory to both the National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee and the National Pest Animals Advisory Committee.

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71 QFF, *Submission 59*, p. 6.

72 General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 (NSW Legislative Council), *Feral Animals*, Parliamentary Paper No. 158, New South Wales Government, October 2002, p. xvii.

**Recommendation 10**

- 4.108 **The committee recommends that the Australian Government encourage states and territories to appoint a single body responsible for coordinating pest animal management in each jurisdiction. This body would then contribute to a national pest animal effort through membership of the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee and the proposed National Pest Animals Advisory Committee.**