

For all creatures great and small.

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

14 May 2004

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to the Committee Inquiry into the Impact of Pest Animals on Agriculture

The management of vertebrate pests in Australia has obvious and significant implications for both agricultural production and wildlife conservation; however it also raises serious animal welfare concerns that are not widely appreciated in the general community. In fact, few animal welfare issues are comparable in both their scope and magnitude, given the number of animals affected each year and the potential suffering inflicted. It is an issue that has attracted significant attention in recent times and something that is vital to the considerations of the current Committee Inquiry.

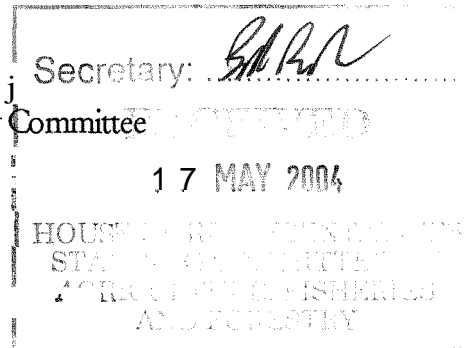
As a first step in considering how to address this challenging subject, RSPCA Australia held a national seminar in February 2003 entitled *Solutions to achieving humane vertebrate pest control*. The seminar was attended by over 130 people, with about half of these attendees representing government agencies involved with pest animal control, including State departments of agriculture and the environment, regional land protection agencies and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

It was clear from the seminar presentations and discussions that, while animal welfare is regarded as an extremely important issue in vertebrate pest management, the current practical commitment to addressing humane control is very limited. The overwhelming recommendation arising from the seminar was for the urgent development of a national strategy to improve the humaneness of vertebrate pest management.

In August 2003 a joint workshop was held in Melbourne to begin the process of developing such a strategy. The workshop was jointly organised by RSPCA Australia, the Animal Welfare Centre, and the National Vertebrate Pests Committee and sponsored by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Australasian Wildlife Management Society and the Pest Animal Control Cooperative Research Centre.

The aims of this workshop were threefold:

- » to develop a national and common approach towards humane vertebrate pest control
- » to identify the required research, development and education and legislative/regulatory actions required to overcome present deficiencies, and
- to identify a mechanism to deliver this approach.



RSPCA
Australia Inc
ABN 99 668 654 249

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Advisory Panel*

Professor Ivan W Caple
BVSc, PhD, MAVSc

Phone (02) 6282 8300
Fax (02) 6282 8311
Email rspca@rspca.org.au
Web www.rspca.org.au

Postal Address
PO Box 265
Deakin West ACT 2600
Australia

The workshop was attended by representatives of thirteen State, Territory and Federal government agencies with responsibilities in the area of vertebrate pest control, as well as relevant industry groups, non-government organisations, and key researchers in this field. The agenda included discussion of key principles underpinning humane vertebrate pest control, priority issues and crucially, the coordination and implementation of a national approach to humane vertebrate pest control.

A copy of the Communique that was released immediately following the workshop is attached. A discussion paper arising from the workshop is currently in the final stages of preparation. The discussion paper is intended to provide a framework for policy development in this area, to identify specific areas where action is needed, and to develop a national and common approach towards humane vertebrate pest control. Unfortunately the discussion paper is not yet at the stage where it can be released to the Committee to meet the deadline for submissions, however as soon as it is available, a copy will be forwarded to inform the Committee's deliberations.

The basis of the national approach proposed in the discussion paper includes the application of a number of key principles of humane vertebrate pest control. These provide a clear process through which animal welfare concerns can be addressed when making decisions about vertebrate pest control measures, whether for on-the-ground activities or are the policy-making level. A copy of these key principles, which were developed through the workshop process, is also attached.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring this important matter to the attention of the Committee. If we are able to provide any further information or assistance in the future deliberations of the Committee, please do not hesitate to contact the RSPCA Australia office.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'HJ Wirth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr HJ Wirth, AM
President, RSPCA Australia