Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 282

Hearing: Additional Estimates

Outcome: Outcome 1

Programme: Biodiversity Conservation Division (BCD)

Topic: Feral cat bait

Hansard Page: 21

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Senator Reynolds asked:

Mr Andrews: The good news is that Curiosity feral cat bait, which we are developing—which is humane, because it just puts the cats to sleep—will really help farmers with dogs. It can be thrown—under a licence, of course—off the backs of Toyota LandCruisers or even distributed out of aeroplanes. It is cat specific so bilbies, bandicoots, quolls and quokkas have been tested not to be affected but dogs and pigs are affected by this bait. So farmers will be able to distribute this bait and it will reduce feral cat, dog and pig numbers, if used appropriately.

CHAIR: So when is that going to be available?

Mr Andrews: That application for its approval is currently sitting—the science has all been done. Mr Murphy's branch—that is, Paul Murphy—looks after all of those issues and they are working and doing their best to have that approved as soon as possible. The APVMA is currently assessing it, and I have written to them and asked them if they can expedite that process without cutting any corners, because of course we need to ensure human, agricultural and environmental safety and the safety of our wildlife.

CHAIR: So that will be fantastic news for WA farmers in particular. If it is expedited, as you have requested, how long will that take, do you think?

Mr Andrews: I hope it will be available next winter, and winter is the best time for baiting, because that is when the feral predators are hungry and they are more likely to take the most baits and then the baits are most likely to be effective.

CHAIR: So what is it called?

Mr Andrews: It is called Curiosity. It is a bait that the Australian government has put over $4 million into, and the beauty of the bait is that its design and distribution mechanism make it humane. It has a compound called PAPP, which used to be an antidote for strychnine poisoning and it has been used on humans. It just makes the feral cats go to sleep, and the dogs and foxes. The fox baiters will not have to bury their bait and do all of those much more expensive things that farmers need to do with the 1080 baits, which need to be buried for foxes. So it is humane.

The tests have shown that 80 per cent of feral cats that eat it die, and it is cat specific because the design of the delivery mechanism ensures that there is what the scientists call an acceptable level of non-target impact. I find that a bit hard to describe on Facebook, but it basically means it is a net benefit to our wildlife and it does not harm non-targeted animals to an extent that should concern us.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. If you have some more information that sits behind that program that we could distribute more widely in Western Australia, I think that would be very welcomed, particularly by the Western Australian senators.

Mr Andrews: Sure. I should say that the Western Australian government has just invested $1.75 million in the rollout of Eradicat, which is a similar bait that has 1080 compound in it, because your animals are immune to 1080—

Senator BACK: Sodium monofluoroacetate.

Mr Andrews: yes, because it is naturally occurring in the plants in Western Australia. I can follow up for you and see if that has a benefit.

CHAIR: If you could take both of those on notice and provide some more information that we could then use more widely, that would be much appreciated.

Answer:

Further information on Curiosity® feral cat bait can be found at http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats.

Further information on the *Western Shield* programme, which is utilising Eradicat® feral cat bait in Western Australia, is available at https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/pests-diseases/westernshield.