

Submission to the Inquiry

**Senate Inquiry into the regulation, control and management of invasive species and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Invasive Species) Bill 2002.
April 2004**

Background

AgForce Queensland is the major broad acre industry organisation in this State. The organisation with some 9,000 members represents cattle, grain and sheep and wool producers.

AgForce's Mission is "To promote and protect the social fabric and economic prosperity of its members and rural communities in Queensland."

AgForce is a member of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and as well are members of the Commodity Councils Cattle Council of Australia (CCA), Grains Council of Australia (GCA), Wool Producers and Sheepmeats Council of Australia. AgForce has a designated Pest Animal and Plant Committee and is well represented on the Rural Lands Protection Council in Queensland.

CCA has been designated by NFF as the body to take forward industry's concern in the area of invasive species but in particular, feral pigs and wild dogs and foxes. AgForce has a major input into action by CCA. It is noted that in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, wild dogs have not been listed as a pest.

Concerns to be raised

AgForce's concerns are first and foremost Animal Welfare in its broadest sense, followed by the Economic Consequences of invasive species, and finally, the Environmental Impact caused by these species.

The best proponents of Animal Welfare in this country are those that raise and produce animals as part of their livelihood. While these people are very concerned with the economic consequences and environmental impacts of invasive species, the animal welfare aspect of the species is virtually as high as if they were their own animals.

The economic consequences as a result of particularly wild dogs, foxes and feral pigs can be extremely high with substantial losses of lambs, calves and even grown animals. Lamb losses can be as high as 30%.

Feral pigs, in areas where they are in numbers, cause substantial environmental impact to the landscape. Rabbits, of course, also do much damage.

AgForce wants to put the issue of feral pigs and wild dogs to your Inquiry as a major concern.

The management of feral pigs in this country has been very high on the agenda over the past two years. A well attended workshop in Cairns nearly two years ago agreed that the aim with feral pigs is eradication, not control, although control would be the initial process.

The workshop agreed that it is essential to have a National Management Program for Feral Pigs. Currently, the Commonwealth and the States tend to do their own thing.

CCA and AgForce, along with the Australian Veterinary Association and the Pest Animal CRC are driving this National approach. This group accepts that there are currently sufficient funds within the system to address the program it just needs to be done Nationally.

On 16 February 2004, the House of Representatives agreed on the need for a National approach to the issue of feral pigs in Australia.

AgForce has approached the Hon. Henry Palaszczuk to raise this issue of a National Program at the next meeting of The Natural Resource Management Council which will take place on 16 April 2004.

AgForce seeks a recommendation from this Inquiry supporting a National Management Program for Feral Pigs.

Wild Dogs and Foxes

Similarly, we also need a National Control/Eradication Program. Sheep industry numbers in Queensland have been decimated because of wild dog damage that in some areas has made it uneconomical to run sheep.

Unpublished data indicates that wild dog predation in Queensland is estimated to the cost sheep and cattle industries \$18.3 million annually in production losses.

Wild dogs can have a significant impact on survival of remnant populations of endangered fauna such as small macropods. Bilbies, bandicoots and smaller wallabies are all within the target range for wild dog food. In Central Queensland, the last remaining population of the northern hairy nosed wombats has had to be fenced to protect them from predation of wild dogs.

Neospora Caninum, a microscopic parasite was first discovered a little over a decade ago, has since been shown to be a significant cause of bovine abortion, lower milk production and reduced weight gain in cattle. The parasite is contracted by a cow eating parasite oocysts "eggs" defecated by a carnivore such as a dog.

There is a need to co-ordinate the many State and Commonwealth control projects that currently exist and incorporate a new program to build an efficient and economic National Program.

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