

Inquiry into the Impact on Agriculture of Pest Animals

Submission from David and Penny Shaw

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Background to local issues

With the relatively recent establishment of several deer farms in far north Queensland, the potential exists for escaped animals to establish feral populations on neighbouring private properties and State land (eg. National Parks and World Heritage Areas). Locally, there are already feral deer populations established on agricultural properties neighbouring deer farms. Currently, the problem is contained mainly to adjacent properties, however the potential for the animals to spread from here is considered very high.

Uncertainties in deer farming marketing and sales has meant that many operators are working on the deer farm on a part time basis and many are not profitable. The result is that limited funds are available for maintenance on the properties, including fencing.

The grazing potential of agricultural areas with feral deer populations is significantly reduced and affects the ability of those landholders to realise the full potential of their properties. The deer are also very destructive on their environment and their presence can increase problems with erosion and weeds.

The deer are very difficult to control once they have escaped. One of the most important points to be made through this submission is that strict controls need to be imposed on anyone farming animals with the potential to become agricultural pests to prevent the animals escaping, with contingency plans in place to manage outbreaks quickly.

1. To identify nationally significant pest animal issues and consider how existing Australian and State government processes can be better linked for more coordinated management of these issues across State boundaries.

Deer have been an ongoing pest problem in many parts of Australia. Until recently, far north Queensland has not experienced problems with pest deer. Since the establishment of several deer farms in the region and associated escapes, this issue is now much more relevant and their control needs to be considered as part of a coordinated national approach.

Mapping of existing infestations would enable recognition of problem areas and allow prioritisation of strategic control options.

2. *To consider the approaches to pest animal issues across all relevant jurisdictions including:*

- *prevention of new pest animals becoming established;*
- *detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals;*
- *eradication of infestations (particularly newly established species or 'sleeper' populations of species which are considered to be high risk) where feasible and appropriate; and*
- *reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations.*

The situation with feral deer in far north Queensland has recently emerged as a problem. Isolated feral populations have become established but are so far relatively contained. One of the major issues is the difficulty in eradicating the escaped deer. They are virtually impossible to muster or get close enough to destroy.

It is recommended quality assurance systems are established and maintained for anyone farming potential pest species to ensure risk of escapes is minimised and contingency plans are in place for animals which do escape. The system would require enforcement by appropriate government staff and clear guidelines would need to be in place outlining responsibilities for dealing with possible escapees.

Obviously the most appropriate time to control pest species is where small populations have established in a limited geographic range (as in north Queensland). It is essential for State government departments to have the resources to act quickly in these situations, even if the pests are on private land. With the support of landholders, it will be a much easier job to control such populations rather than once they have spread to National Parks or other State owned land.

3. Consider the adequacy of State Government expenditure on pest animal control in the context of other conservation and natural resource management priorities, with particular reference to National Parks.

Pest animal control should be an integral component of any land management program, including State land and National Parks. The level of expenditure should take into account the level of damage caused by the pest, the likelihood of success and community expectations.

One of the important priorities should be the prevention of new pest animals becoming established, as control options for established species are extremely expensive.

There is a perception within the community that pest management on government land is currently inadequate and results in a source of re-infestation of surrounding private land.

4. Consider the scope for industry groups and R&D Corporations to improve their response to landholder concerns about pest animals.

The majority of landholder concerns regarding pest animals typically require a relatively immediate response (eg. by conducting a removal program (baiting, shooting, trapping) as soon as possible).

Longer term pest management solutions should continue to be a priority for research and industry organisations.

5. Consider ways to promote community understanding of and involvement in pest animals and their management.

Standard educational processes (Pest Weeks, posters, stamps, TV/radio) can be used to involve the community in pest management, however there will always be landholders who can't, or won't, become involved. The true cost of pest management is often not fully realised and should be promoted (eg. disease transmission, reduced agricultural production). Integrated pest management should be promoted to encourage a range of pest management options to be implemented at a property level.