



CONSERVATION COUNCIL

OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA INC.

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2004

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Inquiry into the impacts on agriculture of pest animals

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES
AND FORESTRY

Summary of the Main Points:

- ❑ Pest animals to be considered as 'pest animals' are only exotic or introduced species (such as rabbits, foxes, goats, pigs, horses, camels) and should not include locally endemic native fauna which can be considered to be a pest in some agricultural areas (eg kangaroos and emus). "Non-local" species such as Rainbow Lorikeets in South West Western Australia (these species being endemic to the eastern states) should be considered 'pest animals' as they have extended beyond their accepted normal distribution as a result of human activities and consequently have a huge impact on the horticultural industry and on habitat of native fauna through competition for nesting hollows and food resources.
- ❑ Prevention of introduction of potential pest animals before they become an eradication issue, there has been a long history of introductions of pest animals (and plants) that have been introduced for agricultural purposes, that with the benefits of hindsight are now seen to cause huge impacts on agricultural and natural systems and the subsequent costs that are then imposed in attempting to eradicate these pests ie prevention of cost shifting from one sector to another (eg not a problem in agricultural systems but may be a cost in natural systems).
- ❑ Better regional, state and federal processes to encourage co-operative approaches including cost and information sharing such as the creation of an Invasive Species Council and support for and development of similar schemes to the co-operative approach being adopted by the WA Department of Agriculture's APB section, CALM and the DAG's levy scheme for controlling wild dogs to be extended to other pest animals such as foxes, feral cats, rabbits, rainbow lorikeets, etc.

Background

Invasive species are those that occur beyond their accepted normal distribution as a result of human activities, and that threaten other human activities or the environment.

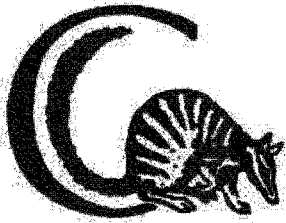
At least 73 introduced vertebrate pests have established wild populations on the mainland, with an additional seven bird pests having established on offshore islands.¹ It is also estimated that 500 species of introduced invertebrate have successfully colonized the country.

The large majority of exotic pest animal species entered Australia accidentally via international trade and travel. Invertebrates form the majority of such species. The most current vertebrate animal pest problem was the deliberate introduction of foxes into Tasmania some time between 1998 and 2001.

Pest animals also have significant economic impacts – at least \$420 million a year.² Attempts to control rabbits alone are estimated to cost at least \$90 million a year.³

¹ Hart, Q, 2002, Managing Pest Animals in Australia, Science for Decision Makers Series, Bureau of Rural Sciences, pp 2-3.

² Hart, Q, 2002, Managing Pest Animals in Australia, Science for Decision Makers Series, Bureau of Rural Sciences.



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1. Nationally significant pest animal issues and how existing Australian and State government processes can be better linked for more co-ordinated management of these issues across State boundaries.

Nationally Significant Pest Animal Issues

➤ **Control measures**

Further research is required into control techniques for control of pest animals to find more effective methods for a wider range of species. For example, baiting with 1080 is not effective against feral cats and has problems with fox baiting programs in the eastern states compared to Western Australia where significant numbers of native taxa appear to have a greater tolerance to the toxin than the eastern states species.

Associated Issues of Controlling Pest Animals includes the impacts on non-target species such as predatory birds and other native fauna through consumption of poisoned feral animals or direct consumption of the bait product. For example, rabbit control in Western Australia through the use of Pindone® can cause indirect impacts on Bandicoots as this chemical also kills these native species. What research has been conducted into the impacts on the wider native invertebrate fauna of aerial spraying control methods for locusts?

➤ **Cost of control**

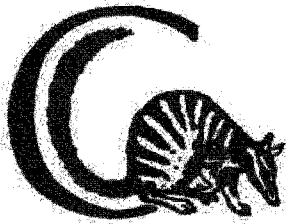
The costs of control of feral animals needs to be bourn across regions by all landowners, rather than the emphasis being placed on individual landholders, as control is ineffective and wastes money if not all landholders conduct concerted and targeted control programmes. For example if only a few landholders are conducting feral animal control programmes there will be on-going infestations from the surrounding areas/properties that have not been conducting control programmes.

The cost of controlling pests that impact on agriculture needs to include the wider community costs of the impacts on non-target species. There is also the potential for introduced species to either introduce or spread serious diseases (eg there has been some speculation that the origins of the introduction of the Chytrid frog fungus as being either from accidental importation of frogs in produce or from frogs for laboratory use). This potential is not just the actual dollar cost of control but how do you place a dollar value on species that may become extinct as a result of these actions?

2. Approaches to pest animals across all relevant jurisdictions including: How existing government processes can be better linked for more co-ordinated management of these issues across State boundaries.

- ❑ Stronger requirements for risk assessment before granting import permits;
- ❑ The strict banning of further imports of pasture grasses, ornamental plants and aquarium fish, etc;
- ❑ The creation of a National Invasive Species Advisory Committee with stakeholder representatives from relevant organisations and groups (federal, state, local government agencies as well as NGO's and community groups);

³ Joint Standing Committee on Conservation (SCC) / Standing Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (SCFA), 1999, Report of the National Taskforce on the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions.



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- The impacts of Public Liability insurance and regulations and the associated costs need to be addressed to alleviate the burden of the costs that this imposes on the rural sector to ensure on-going and effective management of pest animals.

a) Prevention of new pest animals becoming established;

The introduction of new animal species, for agricultural purposes (eg the Bumble Bee) or for 'ornamental' purposes (eg pets), needs to be considered from the public good perspective across the wider community, including inter-generational equity, not just from the perspective of the proponent. Decisions made today should be not become burdens for future generations to deal with such as the current suite of species including foxes, rabbits, goats, camels, pigs, etc.

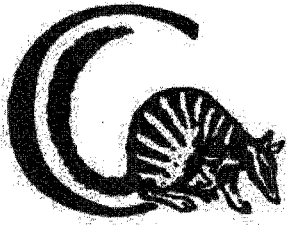
For example, a recent example of lobbying by the one group within the agricultural sector is the potential for the introduction of the large earth bumblebee *Bombus terrestris*. A large number of exotic ornamental plants grown in Australia are unable to produce viable seed as they were imported without their traditional pollinators. Bumblebees are common throughout the northern hemisphere and are efficient pollinators of many garden plants owing to their size, weight and long proboscis. They are not specific to agricultural crops such as tomatoes, lucerne and cereals. In New Zealand they are known to pollinate over 400 plant species. In Tasmania, the bumblebee has spread throughout the state, and 150 exotic plants including sleeper weeds such as *Agapanthus sp.*, *Digitalis sp.* (Foxgloves), *Polygala sp.* (Milkwort) and several Solanaceous species are visited by this introduced pest. The introduction of bumblebees into mainland Australia will inevitably see a large number of ornamental plants produce viable seed. This will enable these plants to invade natural ecosystems and threaten the habitat of our native flora and fauna. Bumblebees are also likely to compete and displace native bees that are already competing for resources with the feral honeybee, and are therefore likely to threaten the pollination and survival of many of our unique native plant species.

In March 2004, a report by the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Australian Weeds Management entitled "*The Economic Impact of Weeds in Australia*" has stated that it is estimated that "the costs of weeds in lost production and control programs to be around \$4 billion a year to agriculture, something that should be of concern to all Australians". This does not include a cost for the long-term effects of weeds on the vigor and resilience of the environment. The risk to the natural environment by an invasion of the large earth bumblebee is far greater than the anticipated benefit to a small section of Australian agriculture. There are several examples where species introduced to assist agriculture have damaged the environment and control costs have grossly outweigh any original intended benefit (for example, *Hymenachne* introduced for cattle growers is now a Weed of National Significance).

b) Detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals;

More effective quarantine measures need to be introduced in the following areas:

- i) Intra-state mail services need to have effective quarantine measures implemented (eg sniffer dogs going over the mail) to prevent postage of plants and plant propagule materials such as seeds/bulbs as this has the potential for introductions of weed species as well as potential pest species that the vegetative materials may be harbouring (eg ants, mites, rusts, etc).
- ii) Existing networks, such as the Natural Resource Management facilitators (eg. Landcare and Greening Australia facilitators) can be utilised to implement a national



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community-based (early warning) Pest Alert Network, and strategically focusing efforts on hotspot regions and sites of national environmental significance.

c) Eradication of infestations (particularly newly established species or 'sleeper' populations which are considered to be high risk) where feasible and appropriate;

The most effective policy response to invasive species is to prevent them from entering Australia or being introduced into States in which they are not native, a policy which should be supported by rapid detection and eradication of any newly introduced or naturalised harmful weed or animal pest.

d) Reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations

Government agencies that manage lands, but whose management of the flora and fauna are not considered core business of that department, must be coerced into participation. For example, in Western Australia this includes Water Corporation water catchment areas, Government Railway easements and Telecommunications lands. All such agencies must be involved in regularly co-ordinated community pest animal control programmes in conjunction with private landholder control programmes to prevent on-going infestation back into agricultural lands. Without this regionally co-ordinated approach the efforts of individual landholders are wasted.

3. 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.

In Western Australia the Department of Conservation and Land Management has an annual budget of \$460 000 to control Declared animals and pests throughout the entire state on CALM managed lands. Given that this department is continuing to take on more conservation lands under its management the sufficiency of this should perhaps be reviewed with clearer more transparent processes so that the wider community has the confidence that this money is being spent effectively. CALM stated in Farm Weekly 18 March 2004, that this funding is insufficient to support the costs of the departments aerial baiting program as well as supporting community groups such as Declared Animal Groups (DAG).

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

Stronger links between agricultural and community groups (eg Landcare Groups and Conservation organisations) and research organisations are required to ascertain the priorities and to disseminate the information back out to the community.

5. Ways to promote community understanding of, and involvement in, pest animals and their management.

Education and awareness-raising of all NRM issues needs to include a component on Pest Animal control to effectively disseminate the most up-to-date information on pest animal species and their control methods. NRM projects receiving funding through state and federal government processes need to include a component for pest animal control, particularly given that these projects are being driven by regional issues with a regional focus.