



**SUBMISSION FROM THE AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION
AND THE CATTLE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA TO THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE
OF PEST ANIMALS**

**This submission relates specifically to the concept of a nationally
coordinated approach to the issue to feral pigs**

Executive Summary

This submission addresses the effects of feral pigs on agriculture through disease, predation, crop losses and damage to infrastructure and details the concepts of a nationally coordinated approach to the issue.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) and Cattle Council of Australia (CCA) believe that a national strategy for the control and ultimate eradication of the threats from feral pigs is a realistic long term objective. AVA / CCA believe that while total eradication may not be achievable with current techniques and technology it is the appropriate goal on which to base strategic and business planning.

AVA / CCA support the outcomes of the Cairns Workshop of 3,4 and 5 June 2003 and the agreed statement and list of priorities and research needs. We recognise the efforts of some jurisdictions to develop strategies and plans.

AVA / CCA acknowledge the efforts of the states and territories directly and through the Vertebrate Pests Committee, which make occasional gains and carry out research. Gains tend to be temporary reductions in local populations rather than long term gains.

AVA / CCA believe that a national operational plan replacing and incorporating the current programs of the individual States and Territories is necessary to progress control and eradication efforts. This needs to have support from all stakeholders and be supervised by a representative and expert committee.

This submission suggests a way forward and outlines the basis for a national plan. We believe, with others, that the support of landholders will be lost unless credible efforts on control are made. Such an approach could serve as a model to address other significant pest species (particularly wild dogs and foxes)

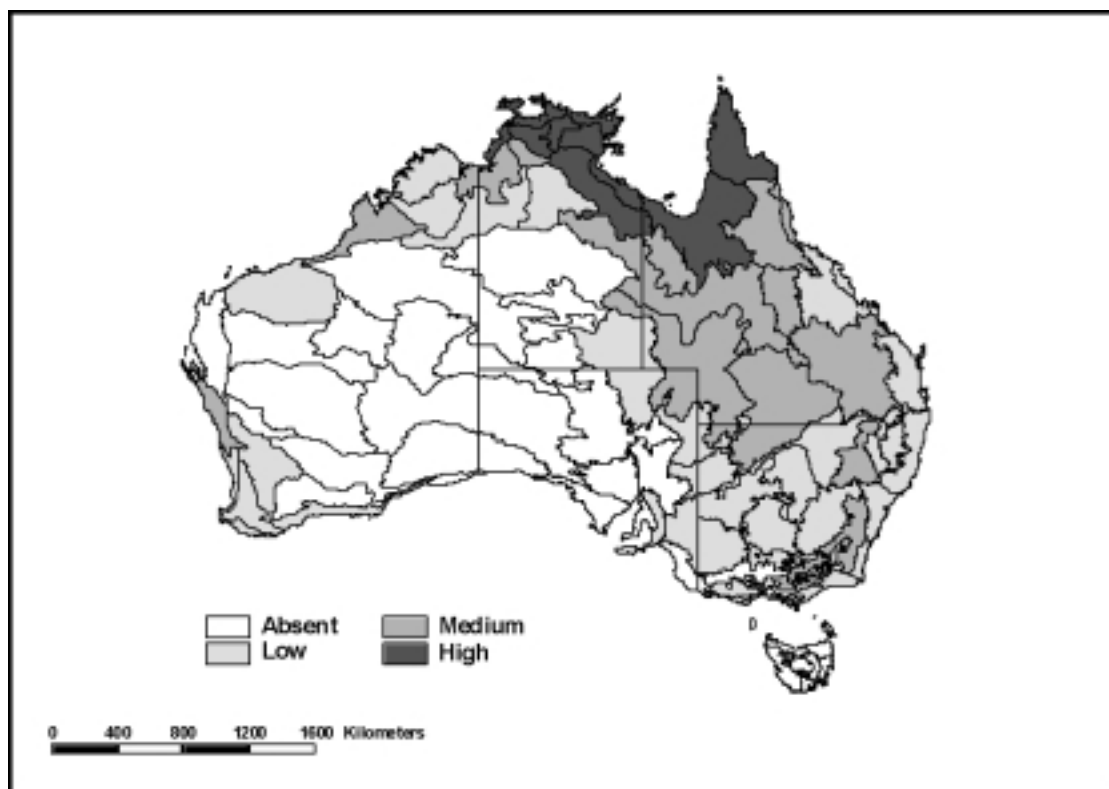
Introduction

It is generally accepted that feral pigs have been present in Australia since first European exploration and settlement. Feral pigs damage the environment, have serious welfare concerns for farm and other animals, cause production losses, carry disease and damage infrastructure. They threaten the survival of several species of native plants and animals either by physical damage or consumption of native plants or distribution of disease.

Efforts have been made for many years to control and in some cases eradicate pigs from some areas of Australia by vertebrate pest control authorities in the States and Territories. At the national level research and some operational elements have been coordinated by the Vertebrate Pest Committee of the Natural Resources Management Ministerial Council.

There have been no co-ordinated national programs for control or eradication.

Extensive research has been carried out on methods of control of feral pigs, their potential for carriage of disease, and their population dynamics. There is wide recognition across the country that their threat must be contained. The Department of the Environment and Heritage has prepared a Draft Threat Abatement Plan and several States have plans or strategies. Nevertheless it is fact that progress has been minimal and numbers of feral pigs are estimated to be to the order of 23 million across Australia.



Distribution of Feral Pigs in Australia

It is recognised that research must continue into methods of feral pig control such as aerial baiting and new baits and management strategies, trapping strategies, targeting bait systems and methods of monitoring numbers of feral pigs.

Background

The distribution and numbers of feral pigs are affected by seasonal factors such as access to water, food and protection. It is widely recognised that management of feral pigs requires an integrated approach involving a wide variety of disciplines and involvement by stakeholder groups.

It is also recognised that it is not possible to totally eradicate feral pigs with current technology, nevertheless current approaches appear to be defined only to minimise damage, try to control numbers and postpone migration to new areas.

Some, such as the indigenous community, regard feral pigs as a food source and others as an economic resource as in the export of feral pigs carcasses. Control is costly and pigs will return in numbers to areas reasonably quickly unless knock down in numbers has been very great.

Feral pigs carry many diseases including zoonoses and are potential reservoirs for disease, possibly complicating or preventing their eradication. They present an ongoing risk to the domestic pig industry with the potential to harbour such economically important diseases as:

- Anthrax
- Swine brucellosis
- Erysipelas
- Leptospirosis
- Pasteurellosis
- Salmonellosis
- Japanese encephalitis

Feral pigs are also potential to harbour other important disease that are currently exotic to Australia, including:

- Foot and mouth disease
- African swine fever
- Aujeszky's disease
- Classical swine fever
- Porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome
- Swine influenza
- Swine vesicular disease
- Transmissible gastroenteritis
- Trichinellosis

Statements Addressing the Inquiry Terms of Reference

- 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.*

This submission focuses on feral pigs as an issue in need of concerted attention, and a practical vehicle upon which to create, implement and test the concept of an approach managed nationally to coordinate the control efforts of all governments.

AVA / CCA believe that the current coordination through Vertebrate Pest Committee is making no progress with long term control. We believe that a national program based on State legislation and under the joint oversight of Primary Industries Ministerial Council oversight and the National Resources Management Ministerial Council is necessary if any permanent gains are to be made and stakeholder cooperation is to be achieved. Stakeholder input and oversight is vital.

A national program must be based on standard definitions and rules (**A National Plan**), with cooperative / shared funding and have an effective monitoring system. Successful animal disease eradication programs such as the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign (BTEC) provide excellent examples of properly structured programs. Eradication of emergency animal diseases, such as avian influenza, based on AUSVETPLAN show the benefit of planning and cooperation. Similarly programs established for the effective management of domestic and international trade problems associated with chemical residues in food have been based on standard definitions and rules. The National Organochlorine Residue Management Program and the National Antibiotic Residue Minimisation Program are two such programs that have operated this way very successfully since the late 1980s.

These programs are based on shared expertise and funding with a steering committee on which all stakeholders are represented. Programs may involve movement restrictions and other limitations and need community support. Planning is critical and cannot be done by individual jurisdictions. Gains made need to be maintained, eg. areas of low feral pig population and where topography or other features allow reintroduction of pigs to be prevented or managed, can allow development of area free or substantially free from feral pigs. Such areas can be used as models.

AVA / CCA recommend that the National Plan should be an operational action plan and would need to include:

- delineation of pig numbers and the geographical distribution
- utilisation of natural and regional boundaries
- establishment and protection of pig-free regions
- reduction in pig populations by a nationally coordinated program using all acceptable and practical destruction methods available
- long term research into new control methods such as biological control
- reduction of the advantages of maintaining populations of feral pigs (such as the wild pig-meat export trade, pig hunting and use for food)
- heavy penalties for releasing or illegally holding feral pigs
- stricter bans on swill waste feeding of pigs
- establishment of a national coordinating body to manage such a program

An important strategy of the National Plan would be the implementation of the internationally recognised "zoning" concept to differentiate areas requiring specific levels of attention. For example, a method of zone definition could be along the following lines –

Declaring Free or Protected Areas (that could be successfully monitored and protected) and

Eradication or Control Areas (in which co-ordinated action could be taken following risk analysis of the environment and demographics of the pig, susceptible animals and people, make it a high priority and possible to eliminate the pig and prevent its reintroduction) may be a useful first step. This commitment should lead to greater demand for scientific R&D support and hopefully some of the technological breakthroughs that would allow more effective threat and/or pig elimination where needed.

Protected Areas

Where the feral pig population is estimated to be less than 1000 pigs per 100,000 sq km. Environmental damage would be minimal and disease establishment unlikely. Protected from new pig introductions would be required. These areas could be enlarged by expanding their boundaries along with concurrent population reduction

Eradication Areas

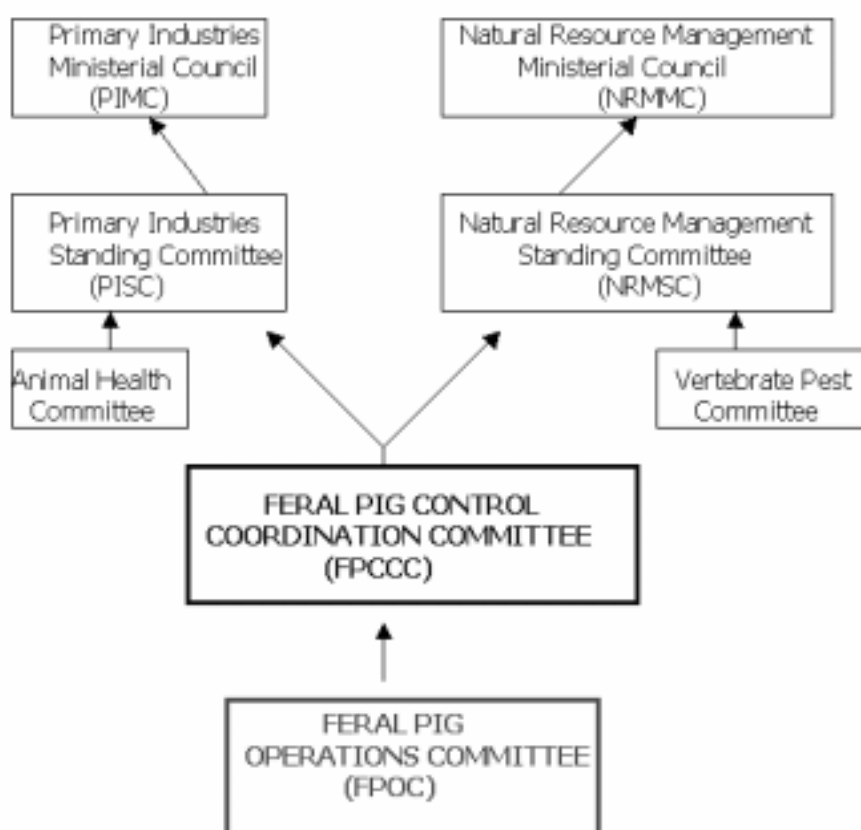
Where the feral pig population is estimated to be more than 1000 pigs per 100,000 sq km. There would be high prospects of environmental damage and disease establishment. Integrated control/eradication programs would form part of a nationally co-ordinated campaign.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Operational programs cannot be successful without monitoring and ongoing evaluation of progress in line with objectives and milestones. All stakeholders can be involved through appropriate reporting mechanisms. Regular reports

to stakeholders and interested parties are necessary and would be assisted by use of operational maps.

AVA / CCA propose the concept of a **"Feral Pig Control Coordination Committee"** to develop and manage the National Plan through a sub-committee, viz the **"Feral Pig Operations Committee"**. The actions of each committee would ultimately feed into the Primary Industries Ministerial Council and the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, as illustrated below:



Membership of the FPCCC would comprise (though not be limited to) :

- Secretary of Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry **(Chair)**
- A representative of the States / Territories
- Chair of the National Farmers' Federation "Quarantine and Animal Health Task Force"
- Chair of the National Farmers' Federation "Land and Native Vegetation Taskforce"
- Chair of Animal Health Committee
- Chair of Vertebrate Pest Committee
- Chair of the Feral Pig Operations Committee

- CEO of the Pest Animal Control CRC (or equivalent CRC)
- CEO of RSCPA

The role of the FPCCC would be to :

- Act as custodian of the "National Plan".
- Oversight the management of the national program for control and eradication of feral pigs.
- Report to the Primary Industries Standing Committee and the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee biannually on financial, technical and operational aspects of the program.

Membership of the FPOC would comprise (though not be limited to) :

- Delegate of the Office of the Commonwealth Chief Veterinary Officer **(Chair)**
- Delegate of Bureau of Rural Sciences
- Delegate of National Farmers' Federation
- State Feral Pig Control Coordinators

The role of the FPOC would be to :

- Manage the national program for control and eradication of feral pigs.
- Coordinate technical and field elements of the program in line with a strategic plan approved by the Feral Pig Coordinating Committee.
- Develop and maintain, with the States, a monitoring system on numbers and distribution of feral pigs.

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

- *prevention of new pest animals becoming established;*

In responding to this Term of Reference, AVA / CCA question if the focus is on the prevention of new pest animals becoming established in Australia, or in previously "free" areas within Australia. If the focus is on the former, then AVA / CCA believe this issue is being appropriately addressed through Australia's importation policies. With regard to the latter however, AVA / CCA believe that a national approach must concentrate not only on the removal of feral pigs from areas of low and high prevalence, but also on ensuring

(through establishment and support of surveillance systems) that areas free of feral pigs continue to enjoy that status. It is recognised that around 62% of mainland Australia is free from feral pigs. A national approach must work toward increasing this percentage.

- *detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals*

There is currently no national mapping and monitoring system and this is a barrier to eradication to judgement of priorities and assessment of risk and progress. Knowledge of distributions of animals and behaviour in particular environments are critical to control programs.

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

AVA / CCA believe that a paradigm shift is required with regard to the eradication of feral pig infestations. The normal practice is for State bodies to endeavour to gain maximum "bang for their buck" through concentrating their control efforts on areas within their jurisdiction of high feral pig prevalence. Experience shows however that while these programs reap results with the removal of large numbers of pigs, the benefits are merely short term. Through the removal of dominant boars and sows, the dynamics of the feral pig population is placed in disarray and the animal's natural response is to breed prolifically. Consequently, often in only a short period of time the feral pig population is actually at a higher number than it was before the control program commenced. AVA / CCA believe that through a nationally coordinated approach the reverse philosophy would apply with a concerted focus on areas where feral pigs exist in low numbers. Once the populations were deemed "removed", surveillance systems would be established (utilising producers, NPWS etc) and the program would close in on the more heavily populated areas.

- *reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations*

Concentrating initially on low prevalence areas does not however mean that areas of high prevalence are ignored or "put on hold". Individual (or groups of) producers would still be able to apply their control measures at strategic times and places as necessary, with the assistance of their State body as required. Meanwhile, education and communication programs would be undertaken to reduce the impact (or potential impact) of the feral pig population in a particular region. For example, the risk of feral pigs passing disease to domestic or grazing animals can be addressed through the promotion of biosecurity plans as developed by national livestock organisations.

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.

Through participation in the Cairns workshop, described in Appendix 1, and consultations since, AVA / CCA have formed the view that additional funds do not need to be sought and that rather existing funds and in kind measures should be redirected to the national effort. AVA / CCA wrote to Ministers to this effect last year.

Once a National Plan has been developed with realistic costings, operational priorities could be made. The research programs and priorities emerging from the Cairns workshop remain, in our view valid for these purposes.

AVA / CCA believe that funding should be shared by all who benefit from feral pig control. There are public and private benefits. Public benefits include:

- The environment
- Disease/public health
- Issues affecting trade

Private benefit may accrue to farmers and other landholders.

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

AVA / CCA have worked closely with the Pest Animal Control Cooperative Research Centre and are supporters of the proposal for an Australasian Invasive Species CRC (effectively a "rebirth" of the original). If successful in its bid, this CRC would be the lead agent in R&D concerning feral pigs in Australia, and an effective conduit between R&D and industry groups.

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

Our proposal for a structured program with an oversight committee of all stakeholders, rather than just governments as at present, will provide direct access to stakeholder groups from the community, landholders and conservation interests. Direct participation in the programs by rural communities and producers will foster understanding and ownership.

Regional gains will also provide good models for other regions / communities and stimulate interest. National programs inevitably include extension programs.

CONCLUSION

- Feral pigs are an enormous issue facing Australian agriculture due to their impact on animal welfare, environment and biodiversity, and potential as carriers of disease.
- State-based control programs undertaken to date have been unsuccessful in abating the threat caused by feral pigs. Numbers of feral pigs have been estimated to possibly be as high as 23 million.
- National coordination is required to maximise the impact of resources directed toward feral pig control.
- The concept proposed by this submission could serve as a model to address other pest animals affecting Australian agriculture (wild dogs and foxes in particular).



The Cairns Workshop of 3 and 4 June 2003 and Research Meeting of 5 June 2003.

The objective of these meetings was to reach agreement for a National Action Agenda for Feral Pigs that would bring together all disciplines and stakeholders.

The workshop was apparently the largest ever held on feral pigs and the objective of involving all stakeholder groups was met. The Queensland Department of National Resources and Mines was a sponsor along with AVA, CCA and the Rainforest and Pest Animal CRCs.

AVA and the CRC for Pest Animal Control and the CRC for Rainforests, AFFA, Environment Australia, State governments, Vertebrate Pests Committee, manufacturers of chemicals for control, livestock industry and other stakeholder groups were present.

The workshop reached agreement on the following statement.

"Eradication of the threat from feral pigs is the long-term goal. This will require the development of more effective control techniques and technologies. The immediate objective is to minimise economic, agricultural, public health and environmental impacts and risks through development and implementation of a National Strategy and Action Plan for the management of feral pigs through the use of currently available techniques."

It was agreed that in order to implement the decision of the Workshop to eradicate the threat of feral pigs it would be necessary to gain the support of the Federal Government for a nationally coordinated program.

A list of priorities was also agreed as follows:

1. Disease issues
2. An adequate suite of registered poisons
3. Effective management tools
4. Monitoring program to establish distribution and density of pigs/threat of pigs
5. Development of a "best practice" manual by bio-region
6. Delineation of animal rights and animal welfare
7. Develop culture within government departments of mopping up remaining animals
8. Linkages between catchment management plans and feral pig to lead to better community awareness
9. Map feral pigs in Australia to establish feral pig free areas

10. Legislative backing
11. Translocation
12. Swill feeding
13. Landholder obligations
14. Regionally coordinated campaigns (poison etc.)
15. Coordination at science level

A list of research projects was also made from the research meeting on the final day of the workshop. The list included

1. Baits and current and future strategy.
2. "Achilles Heel" approaches.
3. Disease agents.
4. Genetics
5. Environmental effects / impacts
6. Translocation
7. Research policy / on ground
8. Survey methods / monitoring
9. Commercial use
10. Risk analysis
11. Defence of existing technologies
12. Mopping up
13. Coordination and support for applications
14. Planning of control programs
15. Toxin residues
16. Animal welfare
17. Social research and extension