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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

***Inquiry into the impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia –
Response to Questions on Notice***

Australian Pork Limited (“APL”) provided a submission to the inquiry into the impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia (“the Inquiry”) in November 2018. On 15 November 2019, APL received several written questions on notice by Senator Urquhart as part of the Inquiry’s ongoing work. These questions were in relation to the establishment of a National Feral Pig Coordinator and APL’s responses are set out below.

- 1. Please outline in more detail what activities the new National Feral Pig Coordinator will undertake. In particular, how will this role interact with existing programs at the Commonwealth, state and local level relating to feral pig management?*

The establishment of a national feral pig coordinator was recently announced by the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, with the position to be located at APL. At the time of responding to the question on notice, the Department of Agriculture and APL are yet to finalise the contractual arrangements for the appointment, including the agreed responsibilities and activities of the Feral Pig Coordinator.

That said, it is APL’s view that the Feral Pig Coordinator should collaborate with all agricultural and environmental industries and government to ensure that all existing programs are coordinated, to identify gaps in feral pig management, research, control and eradication, and to reduce opportunities for duplication.

- 2. The NFF stated in its response to this announcement that it looks forward to ‘working with the Coordinator to develop a national plan for feral pig control’. What form will a new national plan for feral pig control take?*

Recognising that the Feral Pig Coordinator will be tasked with developing this plan, as stated above, it is APL’s view that a national plan should facilitate and implement national coordination, identify gaps and reduce duplication of resources.

3. *How will any new national plan for feral pig control interact with the Threat Abatement Plan for feral pigs currently in place under the EPBC Act?*

The goals stated in the Threat Abatement Plan, are to “prevent further species and ecological communities from becoming threatened or extinct due to predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs, and to improve protection for EPBC-listed species and ecological communities currently threatened by feral pigs.” Whilst ecological protection is clearly important, it is one factor of a robust feral pig action plan. The national action plan needs to encapsulate the outcomes of the Threat Abatement Plan, any state and territory government feral pig action plans, and the objectives of the agriculture and hunting communities.

4. *What reporting and accountability arrangements will be in place for the new Coordinator position? How will the government and industry assess the success of this position?*

Negotiations are still underway as to how the position will be managed. The success of the position will be assessed against the effectiveness of an action plan to improve Australia’s management and control of feral pig populations. The action plan will need to incorporate an effective monitoring and evaluation plan.

5. *What other actions does APL consider are necessary to address the potential threat of feral pigs in Australia becoming infected with African swine fever? In particular, do governments need to commit funds towards immediate population culling of feral pigs?*

Feral pigs provide a threat to the Australian pork industry because of the diseases they can carry. Australia is fortunate to be free from devastating livestock diseases such as ASF and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and as long as these diseases can be kept out of Australia, the disease risk feral pigs pose to the pork industry remains very low. The Commonwealth Government plays a vital role in disease prevention through pre-border and at-border biosecurity activities. A strong biosecurity presence at Australia’s ports, airports and mail rooms is the most effective way to ensure the Australian pig herd is protected from ASF, FMD and other exotic diseases. The two key risks at the border are unregulated pathways of incoming mail and passengers (and their luggage). If ASF does arrive in Australia, the next key risk is that the virus is transferred to feral pigs via swill feeding of infected meat and/or fomites.

Post border, state and territory governments are responsible for compliance activities for swill feeding and other high-risk activities such as translocation of feral pigs between regions. An active compliance and enforcement regime by state and territory governments will ensure that disease transmission is minimised between potentially infected product and live pigs.

State governments already provide funding towards culling of feral pigs, and APL does not support major changes to these programs until a coordinated response has been developed through the action plan. The immediate culling of feral pigs without a coordinated plan may not assist in a long-term strategy of reduction, and it is imperative that all programs, research and policies are considered holistically before new programs are implemented. Moreover, culling may have adverse consequences that need to be considered and managed such as dispersion of the feral pig herd to new areas.

Yours sincerely

Deb Kerr
General Manager Policy