

Senate Environment and Communications References Committee

Inquiry into the impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia

Written questions on notice from Senator Urquhart

Responses from the Department of the Environment and Energy
December 2019

1. Please update the committee on funding information provided in your submission, particularly around funding for Landcare and any updated examples of projects. Please also include updated information on funding for new control methods, and an update on funding for CISS.

The table at [Attachment A](#) shows new projects funded by the Regional Land Partnerships under the National Landcare Program Phase Two that are contributing to feral deer, pig or goat control. These projects also include components of work that are not addressing directly the impacts of deer, pigs or goats. A number of additional projects contain an element of addressing the impacts of deer, pigs or goats but these are minor components of the projects and have not been included in this table.

Projects from 2011-2018 are contained within the Department's submission.

Two further case studies are provided, one on a completed National Landcare Program project on feral pigs and a second project that is in its early stages under the National Landcare Program Regional Land Partnerships controlling sambar deer to protect a Ramsar listed wetland.

Case Study: Queensland Channel Country feral pig control, monitoring and community empowerment.

This project managed feral pigs within the Channel Country. Building on previous work conducted by Desert Channels Queensland since 2011, the project integrated monitoring and aerial shooting programs for feral pigs, demonstrating to Land Managers the value of control in the Lake Eyre Basin. The monitoring also allowed Desert Channels Queensland and Station Managers to understand the rates at which pigs re-invade or breed and how regular control can be effective to maintain low numbers. The project also built a community feral pig plan to ensure ongoing control.

Immediate outcomes of the project were 3,555 feral pigs shot across 96,300 hectares on 14 properties of Channel Country between July 2013 and June 2018.

The feral pig control work provided a complementary outcome of reducing the number of feral pigs moving downstream into Ramsar listed wetlands and contributed to the recovery of threatened species such as the Australian Painted Snipe (*Rostralluta australis*) and the Grey Grasswren (*Amytornis barbatus*), species listed as endangered under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The project has enabled the Channel Country Landcare Group to conduct its own monitoring for feral pigs with cameras on the lower Diamantina River and Cooper Creek at permanent waterholes.

Aerial surveys carried out in March and June 2018 captured changes between periods of inundation with the results of the ongoing reduced feral pig numbers showing up with a very healthy lignum habitat and examples of very healthy bird populations, with numerous nesting sites.

Case study: Commencement of a project to reduce the impacts of deer in a Ramsar wetland.

Sambar deer are known to be impacting on a Ramsar-listed wetland in the Australian Capital Territory. The Australian Government is funding a project from 2018 to 2022 to develop best practice Sambar deer monitoring and control in the Ginini Flats Wetlands Complex. This project will set the foundation to maintain or improve the ecological character of the Wetlands Complex.

Learnings from the project will guide land management across the full mosaic of Alpine Sphagnum Bogs and Associated Fens in ACT and to other similar areas in Australia. The project managers are bringing together subject matter experts in environmental management and deer ecology and control to develop a best practice monitoring and pilot control plan. By the end of the project, monitoring and control is expected to be implemented across 8,000 hectares of the Namadgi National Park in the ACT.

Please refer to the response to written questions on notice from the Department of Agriculture with respect to any update on information on funding for new control methods, and an update on funding for the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS).

2. The RSPCA has raised concerns in its submission (p.7) that listing feral deer as a pest species would effectively remove any protection under animal welfare legislation. What is the departmental response to that?

The RSPCA submission refers to state legislation for listing deer as a game species or a pest animal. It is not appropriate for the Australian Government to comment on how states and territories link their relevant legislation together.

3. Page 25 of your submission mentions the development of Model Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures for a range of pest animal species.

a. How are Model Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) created and maintained or reviewed? Who owns them?

The Model Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures were developed by the New South Wales Government with input from other governments. The Codes of Practice have been endorsed by the inter-governmental National Biosecurity Committee and are guiding documents. The Standard Operating Procedures are guiding documents only and can be modified by jurisdictions to suit their particular needs and legislation.

b. Why is there no Model Code of Practice for deer?

The New South Wales Government is updating Model Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures for many species and has agreed to bring these to the National Biosecurity Committee for consideration. This will include a Model Code of Practice for deer.

c. Why have many of the Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures not been updated since 2012?

The New South Wales Government is updating Model Codes of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures for many species and has agreed to bring these to the National Biosecurity Committee for consideration.

- 4. On 23 August 2019, the NSW Government announced that from 6 September deer could be shot on private property without needing a game licence. Is there any role or work for the Commonwealth as a result of this announcement e.g. in terms of addressing animal welfare concerns or ensuring there is a model code of practice in relation to deer?**

The regulation of species on non-Commonwealth lands is the responsibility of the relevant state or territory government. This includes animal welfare issues.

Commonwealth funding programs such as the National Landcare Program can stipulate the use of a model code of practice in a control program for a particular species as part of a funding agreement.

- 5. Submissions spoke about the need for coordination of control programs, including the federal government, to achieve successful programs. In practical terms, how are you usually engaged?**

The Commonwealth is engaged where there is Commonwealth land that has the pest animal requiring control. In this situation the Commonwealth participates in the same way as other land managers.

The Commonwealth can provide an avenue for collaboration at a national scale through the sharing of best practice approaches. The Feral Cat Taskforce and Phytophthora Teleconference Group provide examples of such collaboration.

Please note the response to question 10 regarding the role of the Feral Pig Coordinator.

- 6. The department's submission notes that the impacts of six deer species have been recognised under the EPBC Act under the overarching key threatening process of *Novel biota and their impact on biodiversity*.**

- a. Does this recognition under the novel biota KTP preclude the impacts of feral deer being listed as a separate, standalone Key Threatening Process under the EPBC Act?**

The listing of Novel biota and their impact on biodiversity as a Key Threatening Process (KTP) under the EPBC Act does not prevent species from being listed separately as a Key Threatening Process.

- b. Has any consideration been given to listing feral deer impacts as a KTP under the EPBC Act?**

Any person can nominate a threatening process for listing as a KTP under the EPBC Act. Nominations are considered by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee and prioritised against other KTP nominations and nominations for listing a native species or ecological community as threatened. The Committee prepares a proposed priority assessment list of nominations for consideration by the Minister and the Minister decides which nominations will be assessed by the Committee.

A nomination for herbivory and habitat degradation by feral deer was considered by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee for inclusion on the proposed priority assessment list of nominations in 2011 and 2012. This threatening process was not prioritised for the proposed priority assessment list because the nomination fell fully within the assessment of the broader novel biota KTP.

- c. In practical terms, how would a specific KTP listing for feral deer impacts (and the development of a specific threat abatement plan) affect research activities and on-the-ground programs addressing feral deer impacts?**

A listing of a Key Threatening Process under the EPBC Act can provide additional incentive or emphasis of importance to research activities or on-ground programs through the Commonwealth acknowledgement of the problem. A KTP listing does not create legislative requirements for research activities or on-ground programs.

- 7. What role does the department play in the Environment and Invasives Committee that sits within the National Biosecurity Committee? Has the department been involved in any work classifying species under the National Framework for the Management of Established Pests and Diseases of National Significance?**

The Department is a member of the Environment and Invasives Committee.

The Department participated in the development of the National Framework for the Management of Established Pests and Diseases of National Significance via the National Biosecurity Committee and its subordinate committees.

- 8. The Invasive Species Council submitted (*Submission 10, pp. 10-12*) that the KTP and TAP processes under the EPBC Act are subject to a range of inadequacies, both specifically in relation to feral deer, pigs and goats, and more broadly. What is the department's response to the concerns raised in the Invasive Species Council's submission?**

The Minister, Threatened Species Scientific Committee and Department operate in accordance with the EPBC Act. Professor Graeme Samuel AC, supported by an expert panel, is conducting an independent statutory review of the Act that commenced on 29 October 2019. As per the Terms of Reference (parts 1a & 1b <https://epbcactreview.environment.gov.au/resources/terms-reference>), the review will examine the operation of the Act and the extent to which the objects of the Act have been achieved.

- 9. The National Farmers' Federation has recently stated (as part of its drought policy) that: "As a result of consultation with its members, the NFF has proposed the following immediate measures, for consideration by Government: ... 5. An increased federal-state focus on the eradication of feral pigs which are a biosecurity risk and a highly destructive pest, particularly in drought."**

Does the department support the NFF's recent call for an increased federal-state focus on the eradication of feral pigs? What actions can be taken by the department in support of these eradication objectives?

Please refer to the response to written questions on notice from the Department of Agriculture.

- 10. On 8 November 2019 the Minister for Agriculture announced the establishment of a National Feral Pig Coordinator, with Commonwealth funding of \$1.4 million over the next three and a half years to support this role.**

Please refer to the response to written questions on notice from the Department of Agriculture.

- a. How will the activities of this new coordinator interact with the existing Threat Abatement Plan for feral pigs?**

The Department will liaise with the new coordinator to identify how the Threat Abatement Plan for predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*) can support the activities of the coordinator.

- b. Is it envisaged that the coordinator will develop a new national plan for feral pig control, as suggested by the NFF in its response to this announcement? If so, how will this affect the status of the feral pig TAP?**

The new coordinator will work closely with the Department to ensure the national feral pig action/management plan is consistent with the TAP. The extent to which the national feral pig action/management plan incorporates the necessary actions contained within the Threat Abatement Plan will be determined over time. An example of a similar process that has resulted in a combined

plan is the National Invasive Ant Biosecurity Plan that addresses invasive ants including the two key threatening processes for:

- Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity following invasion by the Yellow Crazy Ant (*Anoplolepis gracilipes*) on Christmas Island, Indian Ocean and
- The reduction in the biodiversity of Australian native fauna and flora due to the red imported fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta* (fire ant).

11. Please provide information on any other relevant developments you believe the committee should be aware of since providing your submission.

The Department has no further information to provide.

Attachment A: Additional funding under the National Landcare Program Phase Two: Regional Land Partnerships

State	Service Provider	Project title	Pest(s)	Project description	Project duration	Total project value * (ex GST)
ACT	Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate	Reducing the impacts of Sambar Deer in the ACT's Ramsar site - the Ginini Flats Wetlands Complex	Deer	Improve the ecological character of the Ginini Flats Wetlands Complex, Ramsar site over the short, mid and long-term as well as positive conservation management implications beyond the Ramsar site into the greater Upper Cotter Catchment.	2018-22	\$609,500
NSW	Local Land Services (Murray)	Enhancement of NSW Central Murray Forests Ramsar Site	Pig Deer	Directly address the key threat of invasive pest animal species (pigs, deer, rabbits and foxes) and exotic weeds that impact on native plants and animal, and natural waterways.	2018-23	\$2,986,584
VIC	West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority	Cross Regional Victorian Alpine Peatland Protection Project – West Gippsland	Deer	Improve the condition of, and reduce threats to, the EPBC listed Alpine Sphagnum Bog and Fens ecological community across the Victorian Alpine area. Includes surveillance and treatment activities to manage the impacts of pest plants and pest animals on alpine peatlands. Project delivered across three Victorian regions: North East, West Gippsland and East Gippsland.	2018-23	\$1,457,244
VIC	North East Catchment Management Authority	Cross Regional Victorian Alpine Peatland Protection Project – North East	Deer	Improve the condition of, and reduce threats to, the EPBC listed Alpine Sphagnum Bog and Fens ecological community across the Victorian Alpine area. Includes surveillance and treatment activities to manage the impacts of pest plants and pest animals on alpine peatlands. Project delivered across three Victorian regions: North East, West Gippsland and East Gippsland.	2018-23	\$1,210,858
VIC	East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority	Cross Regional Victorian Alpine Peatland Protection Project – East Gippsland	Pig Deer	Improve the condition of, and reduce threats to, the EPBC listed Alpine Sphagnum Bog and Fens ecological community across the Victorian Alpine area. Includes surveillance and treatment activities to manage the impacts of pest plants and pest animals on alpine peatlands. Project delivered across three Victorian regions: North East, West Gippsland and East Gippsland.	2018-23	\$854,678
VIC	Mallee Catchment Management Authority	1B: Mallee Ramsar Services (Stage 2)	Pig	This project will further secure the ecological benefits being delivered under The Living Murray (TLM) initiative by addressing key invasive species threats (rabbits, feral goats, feral pigs, foxes, terrestrial weeds, and invasive river red gum) that represent a major risk to specific components (fringing woody vegetation/lake bed herb-land) and services (biodiversity/waterbird breeding habitat) critical to the Hattah-Kulkyne Lakes Ramsar site's ecological character, and their ability to respond to the favourable conditions that watering provides. Targeted engagement and community capacity building activities will include a citizen science based black box assisted regeneration trial/demonstration site, and field trips to increase local stakeholder and community awareness of the risks posed to Hattah Ramsar site values by invasive species.	2019-23	\$1,665,000
SA	South Australian Arid Lands Natural	Coongie Wetland Wonders - maintaining the values and	Pig	This project takes a cooperative approach to the management of key threats to maintain the Coongie Ramsar values, namely, feral animal impacts and priority	2018-23	\$2,609,094

	Resources Management Board	improving the ecological function of the Coongie Lakes Ramsar Wetlands		weed incursions (especially after flood). It also aims to fill knowledge gaps in past and existing monitoring of these values. On-ground management actions are informed by a Strategic Adaptive Management process and will be implemented in collaboration with relevant land managers. The monitoring of threatening processes and their impacts on Ramsar biodiversity values will also involve traditional owners and community volunteers.		
SA	South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board	Bounceback and Beyond – landscape scale protection for threatened semi-arid species and their habitat	Goat	This project will use cost effective methods to address key threats to the Yellow-Footed Rock-wallaby, TSS priorities, Malleefowl and Western Quoll, and other EPBC-listed species and habitat. Activities will reduce threats of predation by foxes and cats, and habitat damage/resource competition from goats. The project will coordinate landscape-scale goat and fox control across 460,000 ha, complementing existing management programs. New activities include: establishing new insurance populations of the recently reintroduced Western Quoll and the highly restricted, endemic Flinders Ranges Purple-spotted Gudgeon through support for ex-situ breeding programs and translocations to suitable sites; a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of fox control for Malleefowl population response in non-fragmented semi-arid mallee country; and evaluating effectiveness of goat management on condition and extent of threatened plants including the EPBC listed Slender Bell-fruit and <i>Xerothamnella parvifolia</i> .	2018-23	\$3,855,734
SA	South East Natural Resources Management Board	Our Coorong Our Coast	Deer	Improve the ecological character of the Ramsar-listed Coorong, and enhance habitat for threatened species along the Limestone Coast, including through threat abatement (landscape scale weed, fox and feral deer control programs), community engagement, incorporating Aboriginal cultural values into planning and management, and monitoring to determine trends in shorebird populations.	2018-23	\$3,296,995

* **Note:** This is the total value of the project. It is not possible to identify the specific amount of funds that has / will be invested in managing feral deer, pigs and goats.