



19 March 2020

Mr Stephen Palethorpe
Committee Secretary
The Senate Committee On Environment and Communications References
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Members

Inquiry into the Impact of Feral Deer, Pigs and Goats in Australia

This submission has been prepared by the Australian Banana Growers' Council (ABGC) to provide the Committee with information regarding the impact of feral pigs in Australia, to inform national priorities to prevent the problems worsening for the national environment, community and farmers. This submission deals with issues pertaining to the impact of feral pigs only and does not seek to provide information of feral deer and goats.

ABGC is the national industry body representing banana growers. In relation to the inquiry terms of reference we will comment primarily on point:

(b) the likely and potential biosecurity risks and impacts of feral pigs on the environment, agriculture, community safety and other values

Submission

Feral pigs are a significant issue for national biosecurity, agriculture, community and the environment.

National Biosecurity and Agriculture

Four banana farms in Queensland have been found to be infested with the devastating fungal disease Panama Tropical Race 4 (TR4), to date. TR4 is a non-eradicable, fungal disease carried in soil and plant material, and it can easily be spread by boots, wheels, water and wild animals including pigs. There is no known cure. It is highly probable that feral pigs were responsible for moving the disease from the first index property to the other TR4 infested farms in the Tully area, north Queensland. All farms are in close proximity to each other.

As feral pigs are common in nearby national parks of the Tully Valley, and frequent banana farms to feed and wallow, their control is crucial to the successful containment of TR4. Consequently, the ABGC and local banana farmers are committed to the management of feral pigs through a robust campaign of aerial shooting, trapping and ground control. Through the Cassowary Coast Panama TR4 Feral Pig Program, the banana industry has eliminated more than 5,113 feral pigs from the Tully Valley to limit the spread of TR4. Of those, 2483 have been controlled using aerial platform and the remaining 2630 through ground-based methods such as baiting and trapping.

Community

The biosecurity risk of feral pigs is a much bigger issue than just for the Australian banana industry, worth over \$600 million per annum at the farm gate involving producers ranging from large multi-million dollar enterprises to smallholders. When total economic factors are taken into consideration, the estimated value is \$1.1 billion and generating more than 10,000 full time equivalent jobs. 94% of Australia's banana industry is in North Queensland, where it is a major contributor to the region in both economic activity and jobs. Its future and that of local communities includes the management of feral pigs as a vector in spreading TR4.

Environment

Banana growers, like others in the public also recognise the outstanding universal value of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. We want to see it being properly protected for current and future generations from the extensive damage feral pigs are doing to the natural environment. We are concerned that feral pigs destroy native plants and animals, including cassowaries, in and around National Parks. Feral pigs also create erosion and contribute to water quality issues. This is a matter of national and international importance.

Addressing the Problem

To reduce the likely and potential biosecurity risks and impacts of feral pigs on the banana industry, ABGC has committed \$75,000 of our membership funds to our aerial shooting project to date and successfully arranged 100% take-up of this initiative by local Tully farmers. It is the most efficient form of control with no non-target species impacts and no footprint or biosecurity issues in TR4-quarantined areas.

The Queensland Government has provided industry-support over three years for feral pig management in the Cassowary Coast region, and this is greatly appreciated. However, the core issue is only a small portion of funding is allocated to target feral pig control in the area of greatest risk. That is, the top of the Tully Valley where the infested farms are located.

To address this shortfall, the ABGC is seeking support of \$75,000 per year, over three years, for ABGC to manage aerial shooting. We have unsuccessfully asked the Australian Department of Agriculture to seriously consider assisting us in our fight against feral pigs and leveraging feral pig funding from various sources for this focus.

Furthermore, a well-coordinated and adequately funded national feral pig management program is essential to suppress feral pig populations Australia-wide, for both the environment and agriculture's benefit.

We trust the above is of assistance and we thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on this important matter.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0417 725 829.

Yours sincerely

Mr Leon Collins

ABGC Deputy Chair

Cassowary Coast Panama Disease Tropical Race 4 Feral Pig Executive Oversight Committee
representative