

## 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

#### Department of Agriculture response

- 1 DAWR advised in its submission that as part of the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, \$50 million over four years to 2018-19 was allocated to invest in improving the tools strategies, information and skills for farmers to tackle pest animals and weeds. Please provide a full breakdown of how this \$50 million in funding was allocated and delivered over the four years to 2018-19.

A breakdown of the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper – Managing Established Pest Animals and Weeds measure is detailed in Table 1. The measure provided funding between 2015-16 and 2018-19 to a range of organisations, state and territory governments and research bodies to develop tools, strategies, information and capacity to better manage established pest animals and weeds.

Table 1: Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper – Managing Established Pest Animals and Weeds measure funding expenditure and breakdown

Activity	\$ million
New or improved control tools and technologies project grants	12.00
Grant extensions for seven project grants to 2019-20	0.79
Pest animal and weeds surveys (2) - awareness amongst landholders, the community and industry (ABARES) 2016 and 2019	0.40
Project agreement with state and territory governments 2015-16 to 2018-19	19.20
Serology testing for Rabbit Haemorrhage Disease Virus 2	0.12
National Wild Dog Action Plan Stage 3	0.26
National Environment and Community Biosecurity Research, Development and Extension Strategy Implementation	0.22
Indigenous rangers pilot program	0.02
Response to Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome	0.79
Pest and disease preparedness and response program - Red Imported Fire Ants	6.30
Project and grants administration	1.70
<b>Budget measures</b>	
Budget savings reprioritised by Government 2018-19	5.00
Funding returned to Consolidated Revenue 2017-18 and 2018-19	3.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>

2. *The White Paper also announced \$25.8 million in funding over four years to help State and Territory governments manage pest animals and weeds in drought-affected areas (see p. 18 and p. 90 of the White Paper). Please outline how this funding was allocated and delivered.*

State and territory allocations through the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper - Pest animal and weed control for drought affected areas (Project Agreement) measure are detailed in Table 2. The funding was allocated based on the prolonged dry conditions each jurisdiction was experiencing from year to year.

Table 2: State and territory funding allocations through the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper - Pest animal and weed control for drought affected areas

	Queensland	New South Wales	South Australia	Victoria	Western Australia	Total
<b>\$ million</b>						
2015–16	10	3	1	0.5	0.5	15
2016–17	2	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	4
2017–18	1	1.5	0.5	0	1	4
2018–19	1	0.5	0.25	0	0.25	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2.25</b>	<b>25</b>

The Australian Government funding was delivered through a multilateral Project Agreement, in accordance with the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, for pest animal and weed management in drought-affected areas of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. The funding supplemented state based programs and activities; states are primarily responsible for pest animal and weed management and best placed to decide how the funds are spent. The Department of Agriculture was allocated \$0.8 million in total to administer the assistance in 2015–16 and the forward years.

Further information on the Project Agreement for Pest Animal and Weed Management in Drought-Affected Areas is at [www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/environment\\_past.aspx](http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/environment_past.aspx)

3. *In relation to control methods, the DAWR submission (p.9) mentioned 16 projects with total funding of over \$8 million that will contribute to feral deer, pig and /or goat management. Please list these projects and provide any relevant funding and project updates.*

Through the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper – Managing Established Pest Animals and Weeds measure, \$8.2 million was provided for 15 projects involving management of feral deer, feral pigs and/or feral goats (refer Table 3). The department’s original submission advised of 16 projects, however one project has subsequently proceeded with different target species.

Table 3: Agriculture Competitive White Paper Managing Established Pest Animals and Weeds measure – projects involving management of feral deer, feral pigs and/or feral goats

Project name	Target species	Funding period	Funding (GST excl)
Improved detection methods of multiple pest animals and weeds through the use of thermal and 4K imaging technologies	Rabbits, feral goats, feral deer	2016-17 to 2019-20	\$306,874
e-Technology Hub – Utilising Technology to Improve Pest Management Effectiveness and Enhance Welfare Outcomes	Wild dogs, foxes, feral cats, feral goats, feral pigs, feral deer	2016-17 to 2018-19	\$1,185,061
Reducing the costs and complexity of establishing 'Judas' animals	Feral donkeys, feral pigs	2016-17 to 2018-19	\$381,085
Quantifying feral pig populations using aerially deployed thermal sensors	Feral pigs	2016-17 to 2018-19	\$360,478
Enhanced landscape scale management of feral pigs and buffalo in large remote landscapes with new technologies enabling real-time data, modelling and analytics	Feral pigs, buffalo	2016-17 to 2019-20	\$1,070,138
HOGGONE Australia—next generation feral pig bait	Feral pigs	2016-17 to 2017-18	\$200,000
Boosting state-wide community-led control of feral pigs.	Feral pigs	2015-16 to 2018-19	\$690,000
Increasing capacity for control of large feral herbivores	Feral horses, feral donkeys, feral camels	2015-16 to 2018-19	\$360,000
Facilitating effective and efficient biosecurity management	European starling, feral goats, sulphur-crested cockatoo, northern palm squirrel, wild dogs, rainbow lorikeet, feral deer, feral pigs, foxes, feral donkeys, western corella, feral horses, rabbits, Weeds of National Significance	2015-16 to 2016-17	\$351,000
Training in best practice pest management	Wild dogs, foxes, feral cats, feral pigs, rabbits, rodents	2015-16 to 2016-17	\$1,309,000
Coordinated pest control (feral pigs and rabbits) across tenures; and capacity building to support best practice feral animal control (feral pigs and rabbits)	Rabbits, feral pigs, feral deer, foxes, various weeds	2015-16 to 2018-19	\$95,000
Building landholder capability in pest animal management	Rabbits, feral pigs, wild dogs	2015-16 to 2018-19	\$1,389,000
Back to the basics – training in the fundamentals of pest management for South Australian land holders	Rabbits, foxes, feral goats, feral pigs. Multiple pest plant species focusing on state relevant Weeds of National Significance and Alert species.	2015-16 to 2016-17	\$314,200
A better approach to managing feral deer	Feral deer	2015-16 to 2016-17	\$87,300
Landscape scale control of feral deer	Feral deer	2017-18 to 2018-19	\$135,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$8,234,136</b>

4. DAWR's submission (p. 9) reports on the funding commitment to Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) and stated that \$3.2 million is being invested into feral deer research but projects for feral pig and goat management are still being finalised. Along with updating the funding to CISS, please provide an update on all projects for feral deer, pigs and goats.

The current status and funding to the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) for its projects involving feral deer and pigs is at Table 4. The total of Commonwealth funding invested, through CISS, in feral deer and pig projects is \$4.6 million.

Table 4: CISS projects including feral deer, feral pigs and/or feral goats

Project name	Status	Project update	Commonwealth funding to CISS
Cost-effective management of feral deer.	On track for completion 2022	Negotiations are underway assessing effectiveness of shooting in NSW and QLD with welfare assessments also being conducted in the ACT and NSW. Negotiations are also underway with stakeholders in Tasmania and Victoria on the possibility of collaborating on future control programs.	\$1,068,000
The role of feral deer in the transmission of diseases in livestock.	On track for completion 2022	Testing of deer species has identified possible viral sequences that require confirmation and further analysis. Analysis of samples is ongoing.	\$1,071,306
Feral deer aggregator.	On track for completion 2021	Deer aggregator prototype has been designed with newly integrated features that have been fine tuned for field testing with trials to commence soon.	\$300,000
Best practices for the management of wild dogs and feral deer in peri-urban landscapes.	On track for completion 2021	Interviews have been conducted in QLD regarding wild dogs with a working group formed to progress invasive animal management at a community level. Feral deer transects in NSW and QLD are being monitored to observe feral deer population dynamics and abundance to determine control effectiveness at the localities.	\$800,000
HOGGONE feral pig bait*	Completed	Project is complete and an application for registration has been logged with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority.	\$200,000
e-Technology Hub – Intelli-Traps' for pest animals including feral deer*	Complete	Testing has been finalised and commercialisation of products commenced.	\$1,185,061
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$4,624,367</b>

\*Project also included in Table 3.

5. *More generally, please update the funding information contained in your submission to reflect any changes or additions since it was written.*

In May 2019, the Australian Government committed an additional \$10 million for a second round of funding under the Communities Combating Pests and Weed Impacts During Drought Program - Biosecurity Management of Pests and Weeds Program, with \$3 million in 2019-20 and \$7 million in 2020-21.

This program aims to assist drought-affected communities and farmers to manage pest animals and weeds, at a time when they are least able to do so. The program opened on 19 December 2019.

6. *Following the department's submission, a revised Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB) was signed by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in January 2019. Please summarise for the committee what changes have been made in the revised IGAB, compared with the initial IGAB signed in 2012. Does the introduction of the revised IGAB have any impact on how established pest species will be classified and managed under the Australian Pest Animal Strategy 2017-2027?*

### **Key differences of the revised Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity (IGAB2)**

The introduction of a revised Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity followed a review of the capacity of the national biosecurity system, including its underpinning intergovernmental agreement, as requested by Australian agriculture ministers. An independent panel comprising Dr Wendy Craik AM (Chair), Mr David Palmer, and Dr Richard Sheldrake AM conducted the review, with extensive stakeholder consultation across all relevant sectors throughout 2016 and 2017.

The independent panel published a final report - *Priorities for Australia's biosecurity system: an independent review of the capacity of the national biosecurity system and its underpinning intergovernmental agreement* on 26 July 2017. This report included a 'draft' IGAB2.

The IGAB2 represents an evolution from the first IGAB, recognising the increasing sophistication of national biosecurity arrangements while also simplifying, clarifying and strengthening the foundations of the initial agreement. IGAB2 highlights the benefits of improving biosecurity within Australia, which includes improving international trade through safe and healthy produce as well as protecting our native flora and fauna and the environmental values they provide, protecting tourism assets and greater consideration of market access priorities.

IGAB2 establishes the core commitments of all jurisdictions, which are those things the Commonwealth, states and territories acknowledge they are, or should be, doing at a minimum to support an effective biosecurity system over the life of the agreement. This was not included in the first IGAB and all jurisdictions are jointly responsible for delivering each core commitment. One of these core commitments is managing national priority pests and diseases (aquatic and terrestrial).

IGAB2 also articulates more specific roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth, and those of the states and territories. These were agreed by jurisdictions as part of the national response to the independent review.

The responsibilities included in the first IGAB were relatively narrow, focused on delineating the role of Commonwealth, and state and territory governments in the biosecurity system in the context of international responsibilities and Australia's Appropriate Level of Protection. These are still included in IGAB2, alongside a broader range of responsibilities that reflect the full scope of the national biosecurity system. Relevant to this includes the specific responsibility of the Commonwealth in providing a national leadership role for strategic biosecurity issues (including management of national significantly established pests and diseases) as well as providing capacity and capability support to state and territories. The major responsibilities for states and territories including managing biosecurity risks within their borders and supporting landholders and the community to manage established pests and diseases.

In IGAB2 the expectation of a whole-of-government approach has been strengthened to ensure that each party defines lead and supporting agencies and ministers, with appropriate arrangements in place between lead and supporting agencies to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of each are clearly defined (for example between agriculture and environment agencies).

There is a greater focus on performance and accountability. Under IGAB2, the Agricultural Senior Officials Committee (AGSOC) will establish and oversee an independent IGAB Evaluation Program to assess and report on implementation of each jurisdiction's core commitments under the revised agreement.

The interstate trade dispute resolution clause has been varied, with the removal of the option for a state or territory minister to request that the Commonwealth intervene with the application of Commonwealth legislation to facilitate harmonised biosecurity measures for interstate trade. Tasmania was not a signatory to the first IGAB given concerns with this clause, but has signed IGAB2.

There are no schedules to the agreement. Instead, Agricultural Ministers have agreed to priority reform areas that will be progressed over the next five years.

The introduction of the revised IGAB does not have any impact on how established pest species will be classified and managed as part of the *Australian Pest Animal Strategy 2017-2027*.

7. *The department's submission notes that the National Framework for the Management of Established Pests and Diseases of National Significance (EPDNS), endorsed by the National Biosecurity Committee in 2016, sets out the policy approach for managing and identifying established pests and diseases of national significance. The submission states (at p. 2) that the Environment and Invasives Committee 'is currently in the process of classifying pest animals under the EPDNS'. Please provide an update on the work of the EIC in relation to classifying pest animals under the EPDNS. In particular:*

- a) How regularly does the EIC meet to progress work on these classifications? If there is a forward work plan for this process, please provide it to the committee.*
- b) Which species are under consideration for listing as established pests of national significance?*
- c) Have any species been definitively listed as established pests of national significance under the EPDNS? If so, please provide details. If not, why not?*

- a) The Environment and Invasives Committee (EIC) meets face-to-face twice a year, usually in February and August, to discuss invasive animals and weeds affecting the environment, economy and community, including progressing work on identifying and managing established pest animals of national significance. There is no specific workplan for the EPDNS process – it is part of the EIC's ongoing business under its broader workplan. The committee last discussed possible priorities under the EPDNS framework at its February 2019 workshop. The next meeting is scheduled for 24-25 February 2020—an agenda for this meeting has not yet been agreed.
- b) The EIC has not, as yet, considered any species for listing under the EPDNS framework.
- c) While no species have been listed under the EPDNS framework, the National Feral Camel Action Plan (NFCAP) is generally consistent with the principles of the framework. In 2010, the NFCAP was endorsed as a national plan for an Established Pest Animal of National Significance (EPANS) in accordance with the inaugural *Australian Pest Animal Strategy* (see Question 9).

8. *The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions recommended in its submission (Submission 1, p. 20) that the EIC 'consider the pros and cons of listing feral deer as an Established Pest of National Significance (EPDNS) to foster stronger national coordination and strategic action'.*

*Has any consideration been given to listing feral deer as an Established Pest of National Significance? What are the pros and cons of such a listing for feral deer?*

Currently no consideration has been given by the EIC to list feral deer under the EPDNS framework.

Listing feral deer under the EPDNS could enhance national coordination and streamline management processes, strategies and communication across state and territory borders. Of note, however, Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales have state regulatory provisions in place that currently list deer as a game species, under which feral deer are provided varying degrees of protection. In New South Wales, legislation was amended in September 2019 removing the requirement to hold a game hunting licence when hunting feral deer on private land. If feral deer were to be listed under the EPDNS framework, this could conflict with these state regulations.

9. *Please explain how the National Feral Camel Action Plan was developed and implemented under the precursor to the EPDNS system. Has this plan been reviewed or updated since its introduction in 2010?*

On 4 November 2010, the then Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (now the Agricultural Ministers Forum) endorsed the National Feral Camel Action Plan (NFCAP) as a national plan for an Established Pest Animal of National Significance (EPANS) in accordance with the inaugural *Australian Pest Animal Strategy*.

The NFCAP pre-dates the EPDNS framework which was endorsed by the National Biosecurity Committee in July 2016.

In line with the inaugural *Australian Pest Animal Strategy*, and in accordance with its principles, the NFCAP was developed by the then Vertebrate Pest Committee (now the EIC) to deliver on Goal 3, Objective 3.3 to coordinate the management of establishing pest animals across Australia.

The NFCAP has not been reviewed or updated since its introduction in 2010.

The responsibility for the delivery of many objectives of the NFCAP were shared between affected jurisdictions and a national Caring for Country funded project, the Australian Feral Camel Management Project (AFCMP). There were no mechanisms for ongoing government support for camel removal operations when the AFCMP ceased in 2013.

10. *Page 10 of the department's submission lists the 'priority research priorities'. Are these listed in a particular document or were they compiled for the submission?*

The research priorities referred to in the submission are those identified in the department's publication *The National RD&E Priorities for Invasive Plants and Animals 2016-2020*. Endorsed in February 2017 by the National Biosecurity Committee, this aims to align funding and resources to priority investment areas for research into improving management of invasive plants and animals. For further information see: [www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/sitecollectiondocuments/national-rde-priorities-invasive-plants-animals.pdf](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/sitecollectiondocuments/national-rde-priorities-invasive-plants-animals.pdf).

11. *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 listing of invasive species, including feral deer, does not override any animal welfare legislation. Of note, this legislation is the responsibility of state and territory governments.

12. 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.

- a) 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?
- b) The Minister's announcement stated that the new Coordinator role will be based within Australian Pork Limited (APL). Please outline how this arrangement will work in practical terms. Why was this arrangement chosen (as opposed to basing the role within the Department of Agriculture or another government agency)?
- c) 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? How will any new national plan interact with the Threat Abatement Plan for feral pigs currently in place under the EPBC Act?
- d) What reporting and accountability arrangements will be in place for the new Coordinator position? How will the government assess the success of this position?

- a) The specific role and function, and activities to be undertaken by the national feral pig management coordinator (coordinator), and how this role will interact with existing programs, is being negotiated between the Department of Agriculture and Australian Pork Limited (APL), in collaboration with state and territory governments and other industry bodies.

The role of the coordinator will be to develop and implement a national feral pig action/management plan to support the coordinated management and control of feral pigs and reduce their impact, by bringing together industry, governments, natural resource management (NRM) groups and the wider community to deliver a national approach to feral pig management, including reducing the risk feral pigs can pose to disease transmission, such as with African swine fever. This includes to support, guide and mentor the delivery of feral pig management approaches on a national, regional and local scale, also involving communication and engagement activities. The coordinator will help to ensure that reliable feral pig control methods are understood and used, and strengthen the on-ground work carried out by state and territory governments and landholders.

- b) The coordinator will be established through a grant agreement between the Department of Agriculture and APL. APL will be responsible for the role in line with the objectives and terms of the grant agreement.

APL is the peak industry body for the Australian pork industry and has a good understanding of pigs and close relationships with pork producers across all states and territories. APL is well placed to advocate the need for action and engage directly with pork producers and farmers more broadly, along with landholders and NRM groups and will be able to tap directly into, and bring to bear, the expertise and capabilities of industry to help manage feral pigs.

Collaborative approaches across all governments, industry and other stakeholders in the management of established pest animals, including feral pigs, ensures that the most effective pest management outcome can be achieved. The approach being used is similar to the successful National Wild Dog Action Plan and national wild dog management coordinator.

- c) The national feral pig action/management plan will focus on national coordination of feral pig management. The plan will be developed in consultation with industry, state and territory governments and other stakeholders. The coordinator will work closely with jurisdictions to ensure the work they lead aligns with relevant state and territory legislation and regulations. Consistency with the threat abatement plan for predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs will also be important.



d) Reporting and accountability arrangements will be considered as the role and function of the National Feral Pig Coordinator is developed.

13. *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."*

*What is the government's response to the NFF's recent call for an increased federal-state focus on the eradication of feral pigs? In particular, does the Commonwealth Government support the establishment of a nation-wide culling program for feral pigs, as the NFF has called for?*

The management of established pest animals, including feral pigs, is primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments and landholders. The Australian Government, through the Department of Agriculture, is involved in national coordination and invests strategically in research, development and extension, where it is in the national interest, to support improved management of established pest animals and weeds. Specific feral pig management programs are a matter for state and territory governments, industry and landholders to determine. The national feral pig management coordinator will help to ensure that programs undertaken in each state and territory provide the most effective outcome in reducing feral pig populations nationally.

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

The department has nothing further to add.