

## Community education and awareness about pest animals

### Overview

- 10.1 Some submissions to the inquiry indicated that there is a general lack of public awareness about pest animal issues in the community. Various gaps in awareness, both general and specific, were identified.
- 10.2 Suggested target areas for public education and awareness campaigns are set out below. These include education about the general effects of pest animals, including the true costs of pest management, the impact of pest animals on agriculture and the environment, and the fact that pest animals are vectors of serious diseases.
- 10.3 The committee also received evidence that members of the broader community, and in particular new landholders in rural areas, need to be made aware of their responsibilities in terms of controlling pest animals on their own properties and ensuring that domestic animals do not escape and themselves contribute to pest animal problems.
- 10.4 A number of useful suggestions for educational strategies were made, including pest animal awareness days, newspaper and television promotions, and school education programs.

## General community awareness

- 10.5 Many submissions to the committee indicated that there needs to be more community awareness about pest animal issues.
- 10.6 In particular, it was suggested that the community needs to be educated about what species are pest animals, the damage they cause to agriculture and the environment, the steps people can take to monitor and report pest animals in their community, and public responsibilities in relation to pest animal control.<sup>1</sup>
- 10.7 The committee was told that the community also needs to be made aware of the true costs of pest management. This would include informing the public about the costs of disease transmission, reduced agricultural production, social impacts and other costs.<sup>2</sup> It is also important that the public is aware of the contribution that agricultural industries make to the Australian economy,<sup>3</sup> and the adverse consequences that will result from failing to properly manage pest animal problems.
- 10.8 The committee notes that there is a tendency in some areas to suppress information about the unattractive aspects of pest animal problems. A news item from June of this year reported that the Tenterfield Shire Council is considering stopping the practice of hanging dead wild dogs near main roads following complaints from tourists.<sup>4</sup> The committee also heard from pastoralists in the Western Australian town of Leonora that local newspapers refuse to publish pictures of livestock killed by wild dogs due to concerns about readers' squeamishness.<sup>5</sup>
- 10.9 The committee understands concerns about public exposure to unpleasant sights such as dead animals. The committee believes, however, that the reluctance to show evidence of pest animals and the damage that they cause contributes to the wider problem of a lack of public awareness about pest animal problems and the need for solutions. Hiding issues from the community will not help to make people more aware of the serious nature

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1 Submissions 15, 28, 34, 40, 44, p. 1, 52, p. 2, 71, 78, p. 5, 95.

2 Submissions 34, 40, 78, p. 5, 80, p. 5.

3 Monaro Merino Association, Submission 60, p. 3.

4 ABC News Online, *Tourists complain about dead dogs hung from trees*, ABC, 7 June 2005, viewed 17 October 2005, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200506/s1386007.htm>>.

5 Roundtable with Leonora pastoralists, 12 April 2005.

of the pest animal problem. Some of the photographs shown to the committee, for example, were images of living sheep with their insides exposed by wild dog attack; although graphic, these pictures brought home to the committee in a compelling way the significant damage that these animals do.

- 10.10 It is important that information provided to the community on pest animal issues be accurate, balanced and well-informed. It was pointed out to the committee that a lot of unnecessary time and money is involved in dispelling community misconceptions that arise from the spreading of “folklore evidence”.<sup>6</sup>
- 10.11 It was suggested that community hostility toward some forms of pest animal control is based on a lack of understanding about the nature of the pest animal problem and the impact that it has on farmers and rural communities generally.<sup>7</sup> It was felt that educating the general public about the need for humane, lethal control would address this issue.<sup>8</sup>
- 10.12 An example is the culling of feral horses in national parks in New South Wales. The committee received evidence that community education and consultation are vital in programs such as these so that the public understands the need for control to be carried out. Although culling can invoke an emotional response in many people, particularly when the animal involved is one like the wild horse, herds of unmanaged animals can cause tremendous environmental damage. Population build-ups can also result in starvation of the animals when numbers reach unsustainable levels.<sup>9</sup>
- 10.13 The committee believes it is vital that the community be properly informed about pest animals and their impact on agriculture and the environment. As well as facilitating an understanding of the need for pest animal control, this is also important to ensure that members of the public are able to fulfil their own responsibilities in terms of detecting and reporting pest species.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Animal Control Technologies, *Submission 84*, p. 11.

7 Animal Control Technologies, *Submission 84*, pp. 23-24, Professor AW English and Dr RS Chapple, *A Report on the Management of Feral Animals by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service*, NSW NPWS, 5 July 2002, viewed 27 September 2005, <[http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/PDFs/english\\_report\\_pest\\_animal\\_progs\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/PDFs/english_report_pest_animal_progs_fullreport.pdf)>, p. 47.

8 BRS, *Submission 76*, p. 17.

9 Associate Professor AW English, *Report on the Management of Feral Horses in National Parks in New South Wales*, New South Wales NPWS, 2001, viewed 21 September 2005, <[http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/PDFs/english\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/PDFs/english_report_final.pdf)>, pp. 19-20.

10 *Submissions 72*, p. 2, 80, p. 3.

- 10.14 The committee is aware that AQIS is currently engaged in providing information to the public to enable people to identify new pest animal species and about what to do in the event of a sighting through the 'Quarantine Matters' campaign featuring popular television figure Steve Irwin.<sup>11</sup> The committee was also provided with evidence in relation to current education and awareness programs being run by organisations such as Animal Control Technologies and the BRS,<sup>12</sup> regional pest animal coordination groups,<sup>13</sup> and state government departments.<sup>14</sup>
- 10.15 Some submissions recommended particular strategies for increasing community awareness about pest animal issues, including:
- standard educational processes, such as posters, stamps, television and radio advertising;<sup>15</sup>
  - national awareness programs, focusing on community involvement;<sup>16</sup>
  - national pest weeks,<sup>17</sup> which might include award ceremonies, clean-ups, field days and competitions;
  - establishment of experimental plots to record progressive damage caused by feral animals, and to chart recovery progress when animals are removed;<sup>18</sup>
  - circulation of illustrations of pest species and information on their biology, preferred habitat and behavioural patterns;<sup>19</sup>

11 DAFF, *Quarantine Matters! Public awareness campaign*, DAFF, Canberra, 27 August 2003, viewed 17 October 2005, <<http://www.daff.gov.au/content/output.cfm?ObjectID=DB25D064-9DC1-48A0-BA0422BDDDB86B0FE&contType=outputs>>.

12 *Submission 84*, p. 8, Lapidge, Bourne, Braysher, and Sarre (2004-present) feral.org.au [Online], <<http://www.feral.org.au>>.

13 *Exhibit 7*, TFAWG, *Co-operative Wild Dog/Fox Management Program*, Draft no. 5, March 2002, p. 18.

14 DAWA, *Submission 98*, p. 20, Queensland Government, *Queensland Pest Animal Strategy 2002-2006*, DNRM, viewed 5 October 2005, <[http://www.nrm.qld.gov.au/pests/management\\_plans/pdf/qld\\_animal\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.nrm.qld.gov.au/pests/management_plans/pdf/qld_animal_strategy.pdf)>, p. 27.

15 *Submissions 34, 80*, p. 4, 95.

16 *Submissions 59*, p. 18, 71.

17 David and Penny Shaw, *Submission 34*, Ms Anna-Marie Penna, CCWA, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 April 2005, p. 9, *Exhibit 1*, AEC Group, *Economic Impact of State and Local Government Expenditure on Weed and Pest Animal Management in Queensland*, Local Government Association of Queensland, October 2002, pp. 56-63.

18 Mr Rodney Chevis, *Submission 44*, p. 7.

19 Mr Pat Larkin, *Submission 48*.

- advertising in newspapers and on radio to build the knowledge of landholders about wild dogs and the need to report sightings and attacks;<sup>20</sup> and
  - balanced education about pest animal issues through schools and tertiary institutions.<sup>21</sup>
- 10.16 The BRS and the AIA CRC have a website called [feral.org.au](http://feral.org.au) that is a reference point for the public and for researchers and pest animal controllers.<sup>22</sup> Dr Jeanine Baker, of the SSAA, suggested that the AIA CRC should utilise its extension program to distribute information to the public about the need for pest animal control to counter the 'cute and furry' image that many people seem to have of pest animals.<sup>23</sup>
- 10.17 The committee agrees that there is a need to develop strategies for improving general community awareness about the issues raised in submissions. The committee believes that the proposed National Pest Animals Advisory Committee will be ideally positioned to investigate methods of educating the community about pest animal issues.

## Specific education and awareness issues

- 10.18 As well as general awareness of pest animal issues, the committee received submissions indicating that information campaigns need to be targeted at particular persons or about particular issues. These include education of non-farming landholders in rural areas, education about urban pests, increasing public awareness about commercial use of pest animals and providing information to the public about issues such as release of immunocontraceptive viruses.

## Non-farming landholders in rural areas

- 10.19 As indicated in Chapter 7, farmers frequently experience problems with neighbouring landholders who are not aware of their responsibilities in relation to pest animal management. The committee believes that education plays an important part in ensuring that all landholders fulfil their land management obligations.

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20 Cooloolool Shire Council, *Submission 95*.

21 Bombala RLPB, *Submission 80*, p. 4.

22 Dr Tony Peacock, PAC CRC, *Transcript of evidence*, 11 May 2005, p. 6.

23 *Transcript of evidence*, 25 May 2005, p. 5.

10.20 Some submitters pointed to the need for education of landholders who move to rural areas or live in regions where urban areas encroach on agricultural areas.<sup>24</sup> Landholders new to the area may be unfamiliar with issues common to rural areas, such as the importance of managing pest animal and plant issues on their properties.

10.21 Educating people about the problems pest animals cause is important in ensuring that they understand the need for pest animal control. Mr Pat Larkin, a member of the Wangaratta Branch of the VFF, stated:

Part of the education processes identifying pests is to educate people who come to the bush ... (f)rom the city, and even from some of the larger regional centres. I have seen estate agent ads — not recently, I must admit, but some years ago — in which rocks and rabbits were part of a feature to attract people to buy a nice, little piece of paradise: 'Rabbits are nice, cuddly, little things.' A lot of people have strong humane values and have great difficulty with poisoning rabbits and shooting kangaroos. That is to be respected. Part of the education process is (1) to identify the animal, (2) to identify the habitat it is most likely to be found in and (3) to show some illustration of what damage that animal can cause to other living things — not just predatory animals but animals such as the rabbit that outcompete sheep or native animals. Rabbits could probably be just as responsible as foxes for eradicating bandicoots by taking their food resource and by outcompeting them on harbour. That cycle is generally unknown not so much to long-term, full-time farm residents but to lifestyle people coming in now. There has not been much education.<sup>25</sup>

10.22 People also need to be made aware of the dangers of releasing animal species into the wrong habitat.<sup>26</sup> For example, it is important that people be cognisant of the need to properly restrain dogs in rural areas so that they do not escape and attack livestock or inter-breed with the wild dog population. The State Council for the RLPB reported that there had been more than 80 confirmed cases of livestock attacks by domestic dogs in the Goulburn RLPB District during 2002.<sup>27</sup>

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24 *Submissions 48, 71, 81*, p. 5, 82.

25 *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2004, pp. 21-22.

26 *Submissions 4, 15, 40, 80*, p. 2, 81, p. 9.

27 *Submission 81*, p. 10.

- 10.23 A particular incident of livestock destruction by domestic dogs was relayed to the committee by Mr Michael Hartmann of the CCA:

A really good example I can give is with wild dogs, which are an enormous problem for us. One of the issues we have is with domestic dogs that go walkabout at night time. They have savaged a whole bunch of sheep and the next day they have gone back to the front porch and nobody would believe that little fluffy would have done that. In our area I know of a sausage dog that was the leader of the pack. He was not killing any sheep; he was getting all his mates and they were all going and doing the killing. Once we got rid of the sausage dog we solved the sheep killing problem.<sup>28</sup>

- 10.24 Awareness promotion for local landholders could take a variety of forms. One possibility is field days for local landholders in which pest animal management is explained, like those run by the RLPB in New South Wales in some areas.<sup>29</sup>
- 10.25 The Carboor/Bobinawarrah Landcare Group suggested that landholders be provided with short training courses in administration of specific baits. This would remove the need for landholders to obtain a full Farm Chemical Users' Certificate prior to being able to lay baits on their lands.<sup>30</sup>
- 10.26 It was also suggested by Sandy Creek Catchment Landcare that landholder education could occur by means of councils distributing handbooks for new landowners, including pest animal control information and contacts.<sup>31</sup>
- 10.27 The committee notes the important role that education plays in ensuring that landholders, particularly those new to rural areas, are aware of and fulfil their responsibilities in relation to pest animal management. The committee believes that the proposed National Pest Animals Advisory Committee should investigate ways to promote pest animal issues to purchasers of land and new rural landholders.

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28 *Transcript of evidence*, 15 June 2005, pp. 8-9.

29 Braidwood RLPB, *Submission 71*.

30 *Submission 54*, p. 5.

31 *Submission 43*, p. 3.

## Urban pests

- 10.28 The QFF pointed to the need to raise public awareness about urban pests, such as birds, pigs, dogs and cats. They pointed out that these animals cause damage to the environment, and also affect small urban-fringe agricultural pursuits such as market gardens. They suggested that education campaigns focus on the effects that these pests have on the community, for example, increasing the cost of local produce.<sup>32</sup>
- 10.29 Other submissions discussed urban pests such as starlings, indian mynas and brush-tail possums, and pointed to the need to educate urban residents about the damage caused by these species.<sup>33</sup>
- 10.30 Education of urban communities is also important because ports of entry are often located in city areas, and the community plays an important part in helping to identify incursions of exotic insects.<sup>34</sup> Some exotic invertebrates, like the Asian gypsy moth, attack trees and plants in urban areas, and insects like RIFA can cause serious problems for urban landholders.<sup>35</sup> DAWA stated:
- Cities are transport endpoints – the portal through which most exotic pests enter a country.
  - Cities contain a great diversity of plant hosts (especially exotic species) capable of acting as hosts for exotic insects and diseases.
  - Cities contain a great diversity of habitats from natural ecosystems through to highly artificial irrigated and reticulated gardens.
  - High value vegetable and fruit crops are grown on the outskirts of major cities. If a pest is going to be a problem it is likely to be a problem first in someone's backyard in the city.
  - Cities also have one other feature – a high human population which we can engage in surveillance.<sup>36</sup>
- 10.31 The committee notes that it is important for urban residents to be involved in awareness campaigns about pest animals. Pest animal issues arise in urban as well as rural areas, particularly in relation to potential incursions of exotic insects.

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32 *Submission 59*, p. 18. Also see Ovens Landcare Network, *Submission 52*.

33 *Submissions 6*, Attachment, p. 4, 29, 48, 78, 84, pp. 18, 37.

34 DAWA, *Submission 98*, pp. 4, 21.

35 DAWA, *Submission 98*, pp. 11-12.

36 *Submission 98*, p. 21.

## Community perceptions of wildlife trade

- 10.32 The committee was told that the public needs more information about the impacts that native species have on agriculture and the environment.<sup>37</sup>
- 10.33 The committee was advised, in particular, that community perceptions about wildlife trade can be an impediment to the commercial utilisation of pest animal species.<sup>38</sup> This means that animals that might otherwise have been used for commercial benefit through sale of skins or meat may simply be killed and left to rot.
- 10.34 This passage from the submission made by FGA and the SSAA illustrates the point very well:

There have been scant resources dedicated to educating the community on the interaction between animal and human species. Killing of animals is something that some people may find abhorrent, even though it is necessary for food production and conservation and biodiversity management. There is also confusion about what constitutes pest animal management and what consists of unnecessary slaughter. This confusion is exploited by radical Animal Rights extremists. ...

[An example] relates to the damage caused by koalas on Kangaroo Island, South Australia. This damage has been acknowledged by ecologists and wildlife biologists for almost 50 years, yet we have avoided addressing the problem. The result is a management problem requiring the harvesting of overwhelming numbers of koalas in order to leave a sustainable population. The community is shocked by the scale of the planned culling but, at the same time has not been provided with the knowledge to appreciate that a healthy ecosystem or that the koala population itself will only survive into the future if a reduction in total koala numbers is undertaken.<sup>39</sup>

- 10.35 While the committee acknowledges the need for harvesting of native animals to be as humane as possible, it also notes that commercial wildlife enterprises may be adversely affected by incorrect perceptions about the 'cruelty' of killing native animals for profit.<sup>40</sup> This may mean that farmers who are struggling financially due to drought, pest animal and other

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37 QFF, *Submission 59*, p. 18.

38 FGA and SSAA, *Submission 90*.

39 *Submission 90*.

40 Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, *Commercial Utilisation of Australian Native Wildlife*, Commonwealth of Australia, June 1998, p. xxvii.

problems, are deprived of a supplementary source of income through the commercial use of pest animals.

- 10.36 Mr Rupert Gregg, President of the TFGA, spoke to the committee about the need for a community focus on the issue in the Tasmanian context:

Wildlife populations are universal and widely dispersed in Tasmania. They are a community problem, and we need a community focus on how those populations are managed, in the same way as we manage our livestock populations, the trout population, and so on. It is no longer satisfactory to regard the wallaby population problem as being a problem just for farmers. It is a problem for all of us.<sup>41</sup>

- 10.37 The committee believes there is a need for the community to be educated about the adverse effects that native wildlife can have for both agriculture and the environment. People should be provided with information necessary for them to understand the consequences if native populations are allowed to thrive unchecked, and the benefits that may arise from commercial utilisation.

## Informing the public about pest control measures

- 10.38 With so many diseases and viruses posing a threat to both humans and animals in modern society, the public is understandably wary about releasing new diseases and viruses, even where the rationale for that is a worthy objective such as controlling pest animal populations.<sup>42</sup>
- 10.39 It is, therefore, important the public receive as much information as possible prior to the undertaking of control programs that involve the release of substances such as biological agents for rabbit control. Community involvement and consultation is the key to success and acceptance of such programs.<sup>43</sup> Initiating community awareness campaigns now will enable public debate to occur prior to these kinds of measures being ready for implementation.

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41 *Transcript of evidence*, 29 March 2005, p. 10.

42 *Animal Control Technologies, Submission 84*, p. 17.

43 BRS, *Submission 76*, Attachment H, CK Williams, I Parer, BJ Coman, J Burley and ML Braysher, *Managing Vertebrate Pests: Rabbits*, Bureau of Resource Sciences/CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1995, pp. 9, 98, Foundation for a Rabbit-Free Australia, *Submission 97*, p. 6.

**Recommendation 47**

10.40 The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals Advisory Committee:

- develop a national strategy for improving and promoting community awareness about pest animal issues;
  - investigate ways to promote pest animal issues to purchasers of land and new rural landholders;
  - investigate ways to educate urban residents about pest animal issues;
  - examine ways to promote the benefits of sustainable commercial use of native wildlife to the community; and
  - investigate the need for community awareness about controversial measures of controlling pest animals,
- and report to the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee.

Alby Schultz MP

Committee Chair

2 November 2005

