

Taking Control: a national approach to pest animals

Inquiry into the impact on agriculture of pest animals

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

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Photo of ewe after feral dog attack courtesy of Peter McPhie

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Foreword

Pest animals are one of the most serious issues currently facing Australian farmers. Wild dogs, feral pigs, foxes, rabbits and many other pest species have a tremendous impact on agricultural industries, both in lost production and control costs. Pest animals also impact on the environment, competing with native species, destroying native plants and causing land degradation.

The message from farmers and others in the community in relation to pest animals is clear. If urgent action is not taken to address these problems, the consequences for the economy and the environment will be dire. Pastoralists in areas of the country are already being forced out of sheep by wild dogs – if something is not done to rid the country of this dangerous predator, more and more families will be forced to leave their sheep-farming enterprises.

Approaches to managing pest animal problems currently vary across state and territory jurisdictions, making coordinated cross-border control difficult. A recurring theme of this inquiry has been the need for a national approach to the pest animal problem. The committee has addressed this national inequity by recommending the formation of a National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee, comprising state and territory government representatives.

The proposed National Committee would be supported by a National Pest Animals Advisory Committee, akin to the recently-formed National Weeds Advisory Group. This would include members of local and community pest animal control groups, conservation and landcare groups, animal welfare organisations, and representatives of agricultural and pastoral industries.

The need for research into new and improved pest animal control techniques was also a feature of the inquiry. The committee has recommended that the newly-formed Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre play a role in coordinating research priorities nationally, to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained from the myriad of uncoordinated initiatives occurring around the country.

In its report, the committee makes a number of recommendations as to ways of improving pest animal management. These include increased state and territory government expenditure directed at on-ground control and eradication, and better management of pest animal problems on government land. The committee has also recommended that people be able to harvest pest animals as a resource, where there is the potential to do so as part of an overall strategy for controlling pest populations.

This inquiry was commenced by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry of the 40th Parliament. The current committee recognised the need for an inquiry such as this one and continued it into the 41st Parliament. I would like to express, on behalf of the committee, our thanks to the previous committee for its contribution to this inquiry. In particular, thank you to the previous Chair, Mrs Kay Elson MP, Member for Forde.

I would also like to thank the many individuals and organisations who gave evidence in relation to this inquiry. In particular, the committee would like to acknowledge the warm hospitality spontaneously given by farmers and landholders in Tasmania and Western Australia. Their warmth and generosity were greatly appreciated.

Alby Schultz MP
Chair

Membership of the Committee

41st Parliament

Chair Mr Alby Schultz MP

Deputy Chair The Hon Dick Adams MP

Members	Mr Martin Ferguson MP	Mr Gavan O'Connor MP
	Mr Michael Ferguson MP	Mr Patrick Secker MP
	Mr John Forrest MP	The Hon Wilson Tuckey MP
	Mr Peter Lindsay MP	Mr Tony Windsor MP

40th Parliament

Chair Mrs Kay Elson MP

Deputy Chair The Hon Dick Adams MP

Members	Mr John Forrest MP	Mr Patrick Secker MP
	Mrs Sussan Ley MP	Mr Sid Sidebottom MP
	Mr Harry Quick MP	The Hon Wilson Tuckey MP
	Mr Alby Schultz MP	Mr Tony Windsor MP

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Mr Ian Dundas
Research Officer	Ms Kylie Weston-Scheuber
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Terms of reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is to inquire into the impact on agriculture of pest animals particularly:

1. To identify nationally significant pest animal issues and consider how existing Australian and State government processes can be better linked for more coordinated management of these issues across State boundaries.
2. To consider the approaches to pest animal issues across all relevant jurisdictions, including:
 - prevention of new pest animals becoming established;
 - detection and reporting systems for new and established pest animals;
 - eradication of infestations (particularly newly established species or 'sleeper' populations of species which are considered to be high risk) where feasible and appropriate; and
 - reduction of the impact of established pest animal populations.
3. Consider the adequacy of State Government expenditure on pest animal control in the context of other conservation and natural resource management priorities, with particular reference to National Parks.
4. Consider the scope for industry groups and R&D Corporations to improve their response to landholder concerns about pest animals.
5. Consider ways to promote community understanding of and involvement in pest animals and their management.



List of abbreviations

AFAS	Australian Fumigation Accreditation Scheme
AHA	Animal Health Australia
AIA CRC	Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre
APB	Agriculture Protection Board (Western Australia)
APCCSA	Animal and Plant Control Commission South Australia
APVMA	Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority
AQIS	Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service
AVA	Australian Veterinary Association
AWC	Animal Welfare Centre
BRS	Bureau of Rural Sciences
CALM	Conservation and Land Management Western Australia
CCA	Cattle Council of Australia
CCWA	Conservation Council of Western Australia
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CWA	Country Women's Association (New South Wales)
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre

DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Australian Government)
DAWA	Department of Agriculture Western Australia
DEC	Department of Environment and Conservation (New South Wales)
DEH	Department of Environment and Heritage (Australian Government)
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training (Australian Government)
DNRM	Department of Natural Resources and Mines (Qld Government)
DPIWE	Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment (Tasmanian Government)
DSE	Department of Sustainability and Environment (Victorian Government)
FFIC	Forests and Forest Industry Council
FGA	Field and Game Australia
NAQS	Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy
NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NIMTG	National Information Manager's Technical Group
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service (New South Wales)
NRM	Natural Resource Management (Australian Government)
NRMMC	Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council
NRMSC	Natural Resource Management Standing Committee
NSWFA	New South Wales Farmers' Association
NSWFACDC	New South Wales Farmers' Association Cooma District Council

PAC CRC	Pest Animal Control Cooperative Research Centre
PGA	Pastoralists and Graziers Association (Western Australia)
PHA	Plant Health Australia
PIAPH	Product Integrity/Animal and Plant Health
PISC	Primary Industries Standing Committee
QFF	Queensland Farmers' Federation
QPWS	Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
RCD/RHD	Rabbit Calicivirus Disease/Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease
RIFA	Red Imported Fire Ant
RLPB	Rural Lands Protection Board
SQCR	Surveillance, Quarantine, Control and Recovery System
SSAA	Sporting Shooters Association of Australia
TFAWG	Tumbarumba Feral Animal Working Group
TFGA	Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association
TGMSU	Tasmanian Game Management Services Unit
USEPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
VFF	Victorian Farmers Federation
VPC	Vertebrate Pests Committee
WAFF	Western Australia Farmers Federation
ZCA	Zone Control Authority (Western Australia)



List of recommendations

4 National coordination 65

Recommendation 1 65

The committee recommends that the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council amalgamate the Vertebrate Pests Committee and the Australian Weeds Committee to form one National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee, with representation from Australian Government and state and territory governments in the areas of weeds, vertebrate pests and invertebrate pests.

Recommendation 2 65

The committee recommends that the terms of reference for the new National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee refer to 'pest animals', including both vertebrate and invertebrate pests.

Recommendation 3 65

The committee recommends that the Vertebrate Pests Committee extend the terms of reference for development of a National Pest Animal Strategy to include invertebrate pests.

Recommendation 4 67

The committee recommends that the Australian Government negotiate with state and territory governments to agree on a suitable joint funding arrangement to expand the funding available to the Australian Pest Animals and Weeds Committee.

Recommendation 5..... 68

The committee recommends that the Australian Government match the current funding provided by states and territories towards the Australian Weeds Committee Secretariat, to establish a full-time secretariat servicing the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee.

Recommendation 6..... 70

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee:

- establish a national database to record exotic invertebrate breaches and incursions, and to map populations of vertebrate and invertebrate pests;
- develop a risk assessment process for pest species existing in Australia but not yet established; and
- develop national pest animal welfare standards.

Recommendation 7..... 71

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee discuss with state and territory representatives ways to improve consistency of pest animal legislation across jurisdictions, where appropriate.

Recommendation 8..... 73

The committee recommends that a Pest Animals Advisory Committee be established to provide advice and assistance to the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee and that it include representatives of agriculture and pastoral industries, conservation bodies, local and state government, industry groups, research organisations, landcare, animal welfare and pest animal management groups. Membership should also include the National Feral Animal Control Program, Animal Health Australia, Australian Wildlife Health Network, Product Integrity/ Animal and Plant Health, Plant Health Australia, Biosecurity Australia and the AIA CRC.

Recommendation 9..... 74

The committee recommends that cost-sharing arrangements be included in the National Invasive Species Framework, currently under development, and be extended to:

- vertebrate pests, as well as animal diseases and plant pests; and
- containment as well as eradication activities.

Recommendation 10..... 76

The committee recommends that the Australian Government encourage states and territories to appoint a single body responsible for coordinating pest animal management in each jurisdiction. This body would then contribute to a national pest animal effort through membership of the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee and the proposed National Pest Animals Advisory Committee.

5 Prevention and early detection of pest species

Recommendation 11..... 86

The committee recommends that the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry:

- provide the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee with access to appropriate Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy records to enable it to establish a central database of quarantine breaches and incursions;
- liaise with state and territory governments to agree on a clear delineation of responsibility for breaches and incursions between the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and state and territory governments, including responsibility for containment of potential incursions;
- investigate perceived deficiencies in the quarantine inspection process for wooden personal effects and make amendments if necessary to ensure that the risk of allowing entry of invertebrate pests is minimised;
- investigate the possibility of requiring wooden items to be affixed with a unique identifying code to enable tracing of companies responsible for ineffective fumigation practices; and
- investigate whether procedures for import risk analysis need to be made more rigorous.

Recommendation 12..... 88

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- encourage state and territory governments to implement minimum containment requirements for the control of animals that have the potential to become pests to ensure that they are properly confined and are not released to establish populations in the wild; and
- encourage state and territory governments that have not done so to enact provisions similar to section 55 of the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002* (NSW), making it an offence to deliberately release a potential pest animal for the purpose of hunting, and imposing comparable penalties.

Recommendation 13..... 89

The committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the *Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989* to allow state and territory governments to inspect interstate mail for quarantine purposes.

Recommendation 14..... 91

The committee recommends that the National Invasive Species Task Group create a 'List of Invasive Species of National Importance', including a National Quarantine List, a National Alert List and a National Control List.

Recommendation 15..... 95

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- encourage state and territory governments that do not currently do so to provide free species identification and advisory services to the public and industry, to enable early identification of potential pest animal species; and
- dispense with the policy of cost recovery by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service for the costs of treatment for pest infestations from those who report the presence of pest animals in imported goods.

Recommendation 16..... 95

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee establish a national reporting system for pest animals and consult with the National Information Manager's Technical Group in relation to possible application of the National Surveillance, Quarantine, Control and Recovery System for this purpose.

Recommendation 17 97

The committee recommends that the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry work with state and territory government agencies to examine the port surround monitoring system trialled by Forestry Tasmania with a view to implementing similar systems at strategic port entry sites throughout Australia.

Recommendation 18 99

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee compile a list of sleeper pest species.

Recommendation 19 103

The committee recommends that the National Pest Animal Strategy, currently under development, include an eradication protocol to be used where required for early eradication of newly-established pest animal infestations.

6 Methods for controlling pest animals**Recommendation 20 109**

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee work with state and territory governments to ensure that effective measures are available to control species classified as 'vulnerable' or 'threatened' where they constitute pests.

Recommendation 21 111

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Coalition of Australian Governments, encourage states and territories to amend legislation and to find solutions for insurance problems experienced by hunting and shooting organisations where legislation and insurance problems preclude the organisations from assisting landholders with pest control activities.

Recommendation 22..... 126

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- reconsider its commitment to phasing out the use of 1080 poison and facilitate discussions with state and territory governments to encourage the continued availability of 1080 poison and the removal of unnecessary restrictions and administrative red-tape where that is hindering access by landholders to 1080;
- encourage the New South Wales and Victorian Governments to remove prohibitions on aerial baiting; and
- encourage state and territory governments to make local pest animal control groups responsible for decisions about whether aerial baiting should be conducted.

Recommendation 23..... 127

The committee recommends that the Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre:

- consider ways to provide support to Nocturnal Wildlife Research and other companies investigating the use of anxiety-reducing agents in conjunction with 1080 and other poisons; and
- consolidate existing research and conduct further research if required to determine the comparative advantages and disadvantages of aerial baiting in remote areas where that is the only feasible alternative for feral animal control.

Recommendation 24..... 127

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee:

- take steps to ensure that the final recommendations of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority in relation to use of 1080, when released, are implemented and that best practice for 1080 use is followed in all 1080 baiting campaigns; and
- coordinate with state and territory representatives to achieve standardised baiting composition requirements across jurisdictions.

Recommendation 25..... 129

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee ensure that best practice is always followed in relation to the use of trapping to ensure that it is conducted as humanely as possible.

Recommendation 26..... 132

The committee recommends that the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry coordinate with state and territory governments to provide dollar for dollar funding to a special fund to be administered by the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee, to be used solely for the purposes of:

- employing doggers on a regular and ongoing basis in areas where wild dogs are a serious problem;
- providing programs for skilled doggers to train new doggers by means of an apprenticeship or other training scheme; and
- employing pest animal controllers on a contract basis where they are needed to carry out *ad hoc* pest animal control activities.

Recommendation 27..... 135

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee work with government representatives to agree on appropriate guidelines for the construction and maintenance of exclusion fencing and remove regulatory impediments to land clearing required specifically for fencing for the purposes of pest animal control.

Recommendation 28..... 137

The committee recommends that local governments and declared animal groups in areas requiring pest exclusion or barrier fencing upgrades or construction apply for funding under the Australian Government's Regional Partnerships Program.

Recommendation 29..... 137

The committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure that available tax concessions for landcare operations apply to pastoralists who contribute funds for pest animal exclusion fences.

Recommendation 30..... 138

The committee recommends that the Australian Government provide favourable taxation treatment to fruit farmers purchasing netting to exclude grey-headed flying foxes.

Recommendation 31..... 139

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee encourage the representative from Western Australia to arrange documentation of the Judas donkey program, so that the program can be considered for implementation with other animals, such as camels, in other states and territories.

Recommendation 32..... 144

The committee recommends that the Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre:

- coordinate research into the use of guard animals, such as llamas, alpacas and Maremma dogs, to protect livestock;
- give priority to research into biological controls, where that is believed to be a feasible control option for a species; and
- provide support for implementation of existing research work into the development of an alternative to chloropicrin for rabbit control.

Recommendation 33..... 145

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee investigate how pest animal control programs can be monitored for effectiveness, in particular by the development of standard protocols for estimating pest animal population reduction and overall benefit.

Recommendation 34..... 147

The committee recommends that the National Pest Animal Strategy, currently under development, address the issue of appropriate allocation of funding responsibility amongst stakeholders.

Recommendation 35..... 149

The committee recommends that the Australian Government strongly urge state and territory governments to substantially increase funding for pest animal control, in addition to providing funding for the employment of doggers and pest animal controllers, and that this funding be directed towards on-ground control operations.

Recommendation 36..... 149

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee liaise with state and territory representatives to determine how joint community and government-funded schemes can be utilised to facilitate pest animal control.

Recommendation 37 152

The committee recommends that state and territory representatives of the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee provide annual reports to the Committee indicating their state or territory's level and breakdown of funding for pest animal issues.

Recommendation 38 152

The committee recommends that, in addition to providing funding for the employment of doggers and pest animal controllers, the Australian Government make a significant investment towards on-ground control of wild dogs, feral pigs, rabbits and foxes, to be directed at local, regional and community groups responsible for pest animal control on the basis of established need.

7 Control across tenures**Recommendation 39 161**

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- ensure that state and territory governments amend legislation and policy where necessary to ensure that pest animal control obligations are the same for government land managers as for private landholders, and that these obligations are enforced against government land managers;
- encourage state and territory governments to commit adequate funds for management of government-owned and controlled land, including pest animal control;
- emphasise to state and territory governments that future declarations of national parks and wilderness areas should only be made once management needs for that land have been assessed and adequate funds have been set aside for that purpose; and
- make environment funding to states and territories conditional on them achieving agreed targets for control of pest animals on government land.

Recommendation 40 165

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee:

- seek advice from the National Pest Animals Advisory Committee as to how local governments can set up pest animal databases that can be searched by prospective purchasers of rural land;
- encourage state and territory representatives to investigate options for more rigorous enforcement of pest animal control obligations on private land;
- discuss with state and territory representatives how governments can develop and implement agreements with local governments and community groups and, where appropriate, develop good neighbour policies with adjoining landowners; and
- encourage the development of interstate cooperative pest animal control arrangements, involving people engaged in on-the-ground control.

8 Pests as resources**Recommendation 41 173**

The committee recommends that the Australian Government encourage state and territory governments to remove existing impediments to the commercial utilisation of native pest species, whether those impediments be economic, legal or administrative.

Recommendation 42 177

The committee recommends that the proposed National Pest Animals and Weeds Committee:

- coordinate the development and implementation of pest animal management programs modelled on the Tasmanian Property-based Game Management Plan program; and
- encourage commercial use of pest animals, but on the proviso that commercial use not be used as a reason to sustain populations of introduced pest animal species.

9 Research and development

Recommendation 43..... 185

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- provide certainty of funding to the Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre to enable it to undertake long-term research and to provide national leadership in pest animal research; and
- through the Natural Heritage Trust, immediately increase research funding to the National Feral Animal Control Program to \$1 million, and investigate possibilities for relocating the National Feral Animal Control Program to ensure its continued funding after 2007-2008.

Recommendation 44..... 187

The committee recommends that the Australian Government Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry:

- arrange for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to become a core participant of the Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre; and
- investigate ways to enhance the involvement of rural research and development corporations in pest animal research and development, in particular, by including pest animal research in the statement of government priorities for rural research and development.

Recommendation 45..... 194

The committee recommends that the Australasian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre:

- coordinate with all stakeholders to develop research priorities for national pest animal research;
- establish a national database recording all significant past and ongoing pest animal research;
- collaborate with research and development corporations and private sector research groups to ensure that the potential for involvement of these groups in pest animal research and development is maximised;

- be provided with funding from the Australian Government to employ a person to liaise with individuals, farmers and industry groups, private research groups, community groups and governments in relation to determining research priorities and funding allocations; and
- together with the National Feral Animal Control Program develop appropriate frameworks for balancing funding between research and development and implementation of existing research outcomes.

Recommendation 46..... 198

The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- direct the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority to review the process for registration of chemical pest animal control methods to ensure that procedures are as simple and as expeditious as possible; and
- amend the legislative criteria under which the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority operates to expressly include consideration of animal welfare at the time registration is first considered to avoid separate consideration at a later date.

10 Community education and awareness about pest animals

Recommendation 47..... 209

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.

