

CHAPTER 2

RESPONSIBILITY FOR MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL OF FERAL ANIMALS

Introduction

2.1 Under the federal system of government in Australia, State and Territory Governments have legislative and administrative responsibility for the prevention of cruelty to animals. The States and Territories are primarily responsible for the control of feral animals and associated animal welfare matters.

2.2 Because of this constitutional separation of powers, the role of the Commonwealth Government in animal welfare and in particular feral animal control is limited. The Commonwealth Government is concerned with international aspects of animal welfare and can take action under its legislation to protect the welfare of animals being exported or imported and livestock within export slaughter facilities. It also facilitates the development of a national perspective on animal welfare issues.

2.3 The Commonwealth Government, through the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS) also has specific responsibilities for the control of feral animals in national parks, including Kakadu National Park and Uluru (Ayers Rock-Mount Olga) National Park in the Northern Territory.

2.4 In this chapter of the report, the Committee reviews the role of the Commonwealth Government and relevant legislative and administrative arrangements of the Northern Territory Government for the control and management of feral animals in the Territory.

Role of the Commonwealth Government

2.5 As indicated above, the Department of Primary Industries and Energy and ANPWS do have specific responsibilities in relation to the control of feral animals in Australia.

Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE)

2.6 Several sections of the Department have responsibilities relating to animal welfare and in particular feral animal management.

2.7 The Livestock and Pastoral Division of the Department provides policy advice to the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy.¹ It also is represented on, and provides secretariat services to, several consultative committees on animal welfare including the National Consultative Committee on Animal Welfare (NCCAW). Currently, NCCAW, whose membership includes representatives of

Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and other interested organisations, is considering the issue of feral animal management. As part of this review, the consultative committee convened a conference on alternative methods of controlling feral animals in February 1991.²

2.8 The Livestock and Pastoral Division of the Department is also responsible for disease control in livestock. This includes co-ordination of the national Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign (BTEC).³ Although individual States and Territories are responsible for the operation of the campaign, a national BTEC Committee establishes national policies and monitors progress and expenditure.⁴ The operation of the campaign in the Northern Territory is considered in a later section of this chapter.

2.9 The Division is also involved in exotic disease preparedness. A national strategy, entitled AUSVETPLAN, has been developed to provide a systematic and integrated planning approach to effective management of exotic animal disease emergencies in Australia.⁵

2.10 Another section of DPIE, the Bureau of Rural Resources, provides scientific and technical support to the Minister and other areas of the Department. The Bureau has recently published a bulletin on the management of feral animals entitled **A Role for Fertility Control In Wildlife Management?** In 1990, the Bureau also published a working paper on **Welfare of Horses Being Transported**. Amongst other things, this paper addresses issues relating to the transport of feral animals to abattoirs.

2.11 The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service is responsible for animal welfare in relation to animal imports and exports and at abattoirs.⁶

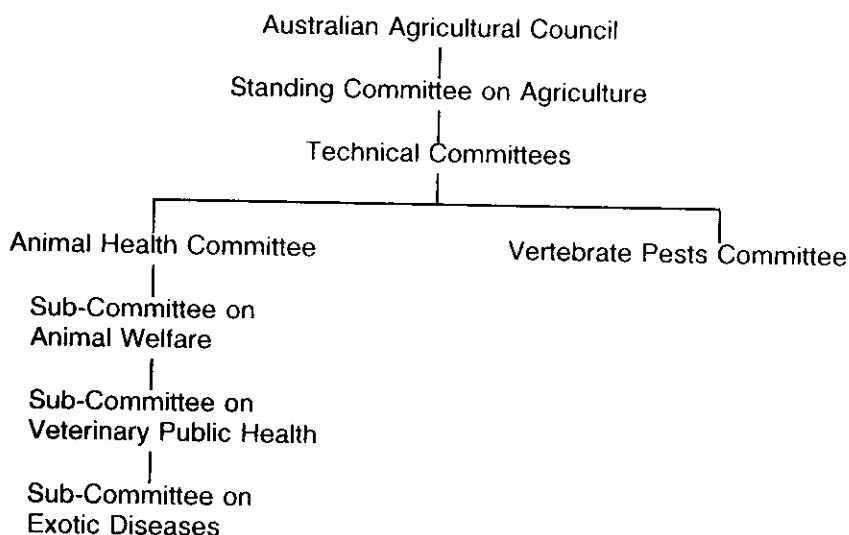
Commonwealth-State Co-ordination

2.12 As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the Commonwealth Government is also concerned with the development of a national perspective on animal welfare issues. This is achieved through the auspices of the Australian Agricultural Council (AAC), comprising the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers for Agriculture.⁷ The Council co-ordinates national interests in agriculture and also considers matters relating to animal welfare. The structure of the AAC and its committees that address animal welfare matters is shown in Figure 2.1.

2.13 The Council, through its Standing Committee, has established a Sub-Committee on Animal Welfare (SCAW) and a Vertebrate Pests Committee (VPC).

2.14 SCAW develops and reviews model codes of practices for the welfare of animals. The Sub-Committee developed, and in July 1989 the Australian Agricultural Council endorsed, the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Destruction, or Capture, Handling and Marketing of Feral Livestock Animals*. This is one of several codes on aspects of animal welfare adopted and published by the AAC.⁸

Figure 2.1: Australian Agricultural Council and Relevant Committees



Source: Handbook to Australian Agricultural Council.

2.15 Mr James Jenkins, Assistant Secretary, Animal Welfare Branch, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, explained the role of these Codes. He stated:

Wide consultation with industry and interested parties, including animal welfare groups, takes place during the drafting and revision of codes. The codes endorsed by the AAC are intended as models to enable the States to develop codes of practice to meet their individual needs. The extent to which the codes are modified before being implemented at State level varies.⁹

2.16 The Committee welcomes the development of codes of practice on animal welfare and, in particular, the recent adoption by the Australian Agricultural Council of the code of practice relating to feral livestock animals. Nevertheless, during the inquiry, the Committee was concerned to hear evidence about the availability of this and other codes of practice.

2.17 The Committee pursued this matter and understands that the code of practice relating to feral animals and other animal welfare codes have not been distributed widely. In particular, the Committee was advised that these codes are not available from Australian Government Publishing Service Bookshops. It also notes that these codes have not been printed and presented in a professional format. In the Committee's view, this diminishes the impact and authority of the

important information contained within these Codes. The Committee also considers that it would be beneficial to publish the Codes as compact and durable manuals.

2.18 *The Committee recommends that the Department of Primary Industries and Energy publish Model Codes of Practice on Animal Welfare in a more compact, durable and professional format. The Committee further recommends that the Department, in conjunction with State and Territory Governments, ensure that these Codes are readily available to interested parties, including government and non-government personnel.*

2.19 As shown in Figure 2.1, the AAC has also established a Vertebrate Pests Committee. This Committee co-ordinates and reviews matters relating to vertebrate pests, with particular reference to their control or eradication. It also examines arrangements for research, training, administration and control.¹⁰ In the final chapter of this report, the Committee discusses in detail existing and proposed mechanisms for national co-ordination of problems associated with feral animals.

Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service

2.20 The Commonwealth Government, through the National Parks and Wildlife Service, exercises control over feral animals located in Kakadu and Uluru National Parks. ANPWS is responsible for the management of Kakadu National Park in the Top End and Uluru (Ayres Rock-Mount Olga) National Park in central Australia. These Parks are managed in accordance with the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975*. Uluru National Park and Stages I and II of Kakadu National Park are included in the World Heritage list under the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*.¹¹

2.21 Uluru and parts of Kakadu are Aboriginal freehold land which is leased to the Director of ANPWS. As the management authority responsible for Kakadu and Uluru, ANPWS is obliged to protect the cultural and natural assets of these areas.

2.22 Water buffalo, cattle, pigs and horses are found in Kakadu, while camels occur within Uluru. In its submission, ANPWS stated that it "actively fosters feral animal control programs" in these National Parks and throughout Australia. It also regulates the importation of live animals and plants in accordance with the *Wildlife Protection [Regulation of Imports and Exports] Act 1982*.¹²

2.23 Both national parks in the Northern Territory are managed in accordance with Plans of Management which are approved by the Commonwealth Parliament.¹³

2.24 The current plan of management for Kakadu, which expires on 31 December 1991, specifically addresses the control of feral animals in the Park. The plan incorporates a long-term objective of eradication of all feral

animals as humanely as possible. ANPWS advised the Committee that it fully supports the BTEC program and has taken steps to comply with all destocking notices for Kakadu served by the Northern Territory Government.¹⁴



Members of the Committee inspecting art sites in Kakadu National Park. The sites are considered to be amongst the oldest known art sites in the world.

"Buffalo seeking shelter during the heat of the day and the wet season trample shelter deposits and smear mud over, or scrape away the pigment and loose rock from painted surfaces as they rub their bodies against the rock". Evidence, ANPWS, p. 521.

2.25 The plan of management for Uluru National Park does not contain specific prescriptions for the management of large feral animals. It states, however, that "camels will be controlled".¹⁵

Responsibilities of the Northern Territory Government

2.26 As indicated previously, the Northern Territory Government is primarily responsible for the management and control of feral animals found within its borders.

Legislative Position

2.27 In its submission, the Northern Territory Government stated that the legal responsibility for the management of feral animals in the Northern Territory is complex.¹⁶ Mr Graeme Davis, an officer of the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory, explained:

There is no feral animal legislation as such in the Territory. Responsibilities are somewhat confused ... Feral animal management has basically been delegated to the [Conservation] Commission [of the Northern Territory] as a co-ordinating authority only by ministerial direction in the Territory and by administrative direction ... The Commission is charged with co-ordinating the applications and development of policy regarding what species should be concentrated on for control programs.¹⁷

2.28 In the Northern Territory, ownership of feral animals is vested in the owner or lessee of the land on which they occur. Accordingly, the Conservation Commission is responsible for feral animals on lands under its control. It also encourages pastoralists, Aborigines and other landholders to undertake control programs. The Government provides advice on property management and stocking rates and has assisted property owners to control excessive populations.¹⁸

2.29 Unless specific pest or disease problems are identified, there is no general requirement for landowners to control feral animals. The Northern Territory Government's submission added that, unless feral animals are either an economic resource or a significant problem, landowners apply minimal effort towards their management.¹⁹

2.30 Three Acts of the Northern Territory legislature, relating to the management and control of feral animals, were drawn to the attention of the Committee. These are:

- *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, under which the Government can order a property owner to take action to control feral animals, provided the animal has been declared a pest and the land in question has been declared a pest control area. The Northern Territory Government advised the Committee that no action under the Act has been undertaken in respect of private property.²⁰ Officers told the Committee that the Northern Territory Government preferred a "co-operative" approach²¹ with landowners, based on "persuasion, encouragement and inducement".²²
- *Stock Diseases Act*, under which the Government can order the control of feral animals for the purposes of disease control. This legislation is the basis of controls on cattle and buffalo under the national Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign. BTEC is discussed in detail later in this chapter.²³
- *Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act*, under which the Government may require the removal of excess stock, including feral animals, if stocking rates result in soil degradation.²⁴

2.31 The Northern Territory Government has recognised that the legislative basis for the control of feral animals may need to be clarified. In evidence to the Committee, Mr Davis stated:

Something that the Territory is addressing now is that perhaps there should be some legislative base ... the disease aspects [of feral animal control] are quite clearly catered for, but the need to control feral animals for economic and environmental reasons and who is responsible for that, are not clearly established.²⁵

2.32 The Committee was told that the principal legislation on animal welfare in the Northern Territory, the *Prevention of Cruelty Act*, is being revised. This revision is likely to incorporate into legislation the Code of Practice relating to the welfare of feral animals. According to Mr Bryce, this will "give more teeth to the code of practice, particularly when we are talking about enforcing it with members of the public rather than with government officials".²⁶ The Committee was advised that legal responsibility for the management of feral animals in the Northern Territory is currently being reviewed by Dr Goff Letts, the chairman of an inquiry into feral animals, conducted in 1979.²⁷

2.33 The Committee welcomes the initiatives of the Northern Territory Government to clarify and consolidate the legislative position relating to the control of feral animals.

Programs for Control

2.34 Currently the Northern Territory Government has four programs relating to the control of large feral animals. These are:

- Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign;
- Exotic Disease Preparedness;
- Feral Animal Management; and
- Commercial Harvesting Industry.

2.35 These programs are discussed in the following sections of the chapter.

Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign

2.36 BTEC is a major national program aimed at the eradication of brucellosis and tuberculosis (TB) from Australia's cattle and buffalo populations. The campaign, which is the largest animal disease eradication program conducted in Australia, is scheduled for completion in 1992 at a cost of \$706 million. The program is funded by the cattle industry (50 per cent), with contributions from the Commonwealth (30 per cent) and State and Territory Governments (20 per cent).²⁸ The national program was designed initially to protect human health and reduce production losses. The need to protect Australia's export markets has also become an important reason for the program.²⁹

2.37 In July 1989, Australia was declared free of bovine brucellosis after a 19-year program costing \$350 million.³⁰ Programs in the Northern Territory were concentrated in the south and on the Barkly Tablelands. Mr Allen Bryce, Acting

Director, Veterinary Technical Services, Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries explained the reasons behind the success of the brucellosis program. He stated:

Part of the reasons that we have managed to eradicate brucellosis from Australia, and particularly from the Territory, while we are still struggling with TB, is the fact that brucellosis was not a large problem in the northern part of the Territory. It is a cattle disease [and not a buffalo disease]. ... we did not have feral animal population control as being a major part of the brucellosis program. As a result, brucellosis was eradicated much more readily than TB.³¹

2.38 TB eradication commenced in the Northern Territory in the early 1980s and has been complicated by the incidence of TB in feral buffalo and cattle. A three-pronged approach for the eradication of TB in cattle and buffalo has been adopted in the Territory.

2.39 Firstly, herds are tested, reactors removed and then re-tested until free from infection. Infected herds are traced by checking stock for infection after slaughter at abattoirs. Further information on herds may be gained by testing stock or carrying out autopsies on properties. This approach also involves the placing of animals free from infection into controlled herds. Secondly, if testing and associated controls do not eliminate infection, the infected herd is “destocked” and sent to abattoirs for slaughter. Thirdly, if it is impractical to destock an infected herd to abattoirs, stock are destroyed on the property.³²

2.40 Where there is evidence that TB is not present in a feral livestock population, destocking of animals to abattoirs for slaughter or destruction is unnecessary. Mr Derek Wells, Senior Veterinary Officer, Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, told the Committee that the aim of the BTEC program is to eradicate disease in stock and that, in relation to feral livestock, “we are not removing all uncontrolled populations, we are only removing those populations that have disease”.³³

2.41 In 1989, 49,000 head were removed to abattoirs, 11,000 were tested into controlled herds and 73,000 were destroyed in aerial destocking operations.³⁴

Exotic Disease Preparedness

2.42 The second program of control of feral animals in the Northern Territory relates to exotic disease preparedness. This involves the capacity to detect and, if necessary, deal with outbreaks of animal diseases that do not normally occur in Australia.

2.43 The Northern Territory Government’s submission stated that it is essential to have in place contingency plans and procedures to eradicate or control diseases in feral animals. In evidence to the Committee, Mr Bryce observed that there are large populations of feral cattle, buffalo and pigs in the coastal areas of the Northern Territory which provide “potential entry points for exotic diseases

such as foot-and-mouth disease, screw-wormfly and swine fever". Feral populations of horses and donkeys also provide potential reservoirs for major exotic diseases.³⁵

Feral Animal Management

2.44 The Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory co-ordinates and implements programs aimed at controlling the environmental impact of feral animals on pastoral and reserved lands.

2.45 While most controls in recent years have been associated with culling of feral cattle and buffalo for BTEC purposes, the Northern Territory Government advised the Committee that, under this program, the Commission has removed significant numbers of horses from parks and reserves as well as pastoral leases in central Australia, near Alice Springs.³⁶

Commercial Harvesting Industry

2.46 Feral animals are also harvested for commercial purposes. For example, the buffalo industry in the Northern Territory is based on harvesting feral livestock from remote, undeveloped areas of the Top End, particularly in Arnhem Land.

2.47 In 1988-89, the buffalo industry generated \$8.2 million in revenue from sales to abattoirs. With declining numbers of feral animals owing to destocking under BTEC, some stockowners are developing domesticated buffalo enterprises. The Northern Territory Government is promoting the development of a domesticated disease-free industry through a Buffalo Development Scheme.³⁷

2.48 Feral horses from central Australia are also harvested for commercial purposes. Horses are mustered, trapped and transported to Peterborough in South Australia for slaughter and export.

2.49 Thirty thousand horses are processed through the abattoir at Peterborough, 20 to 25 per cent of which are feral horses.³⁸ The Committee was told that export earnings from the Peterborough abattoir amount to \$30 million per annum.³⁹

ENDNOTES

1. *Evidence*, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, pp. 475-476.
2. *ibid.*, p. 478.
3. *ibid.*, p. 479.
4. *Submission*, Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Campaign Committee, p. 1.
5. *Evidence*, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, p. 479.
6. *ibid.*, p. 475.
7. *ibid.*, p. 476.
8. *ibid.*, pp. 476-477.
9. *ibid.*, p. 477.
10. *ibid.*, p. 496.
11. *Evidence*, Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, pp. 513-514.
12. *ibid.*, p. 514
13. *ibid.*
14. *ibid.*, p. 521.
15. *ibid.*, p. 515.
16. *Evidence*, Northern Territory Government, p. 53.
17. *ibid.*, p. 6.
18. *ibid.*, p. 54.
19. *ibid.*
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*, p. 7.
22. *ibid.*, p. 37.
23. *ibid.*, p. 54.
24. *ibid.*
25. *ibid.*, p. 37.
26. *ibid.*, p. 16.
27. *ibid.*, p. 53.
28. *ibid.*, p. 56.
29. *Committee Document*, Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign National Strategic Plan, pp. 1-2.

30. *Evidence*, Northern Territory Government, p. 56.
31. *ibid.*, p. 35.
32. *ibid.*, p. 58.
33. *ibid.*, p. 17.
34. *ibid.*, p. 58.
35. *ibid.*, p. 13; p. 55; p. 61.
36. *ibid.*, p. 63.
37. *ibid.*, p. 57.
38. *Hansard*, Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare, Transport of Livestock in Australia, 24 April 1991, Metro Meats Limited, p. 687.
39. *ibid.*, pp. 678-679.