



# ‘Taking Stock of Taking Control’

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*A Review of the impact of the 2005 House of  
Representatives Standing Committee on  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Report  
‘Taking Control: a national approach to pest  
animals’*

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# Executive Summary

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*Keys words: wild dogs, agriculture, Parliament, Australia*

In November 2005, the 'Taking Control: a national approach to pest animals' Report was tabled in the 41<sup>st</sup> Australian Parliament by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The Recommendations of the Report sought to draw national attention to the impacts pests were having on the agricultural industry and to expedite and ameliorate these impacts through improved Commonwealth State arrangements. To date, successive Parliaments have not responded formally to this Report. This research paper revisits this Report as it relates specifically and only to wild dog management and control in Australia and, asks, 'What has been the impact of this Report?' To answer this question twelve semi structured qualitative interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of Members and Senators of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament and with a group of ministerial advisers. The findings of these interviews were then compared with a sample of Reports that have been published since 2005. Based on these interviews, four main findings emerged. It appears that the majority of participants believe: that the impact of the Report while well intentioned has been minimal; that there is not a national approach to wild dog management and control in Australia; that the effect of wild dog predation on agricultural stock has been underestimated and poses a threat to the future of agricultural industries; and, that there is a significant urban rural divide in the understanding and communication of the issue.

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

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APVMA	Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority
AWI	Australian Wool Innovation Ltd
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GIS	geographic information system
IACRC	Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre
NSW NPWS	New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service
PACRC	Cooperative Research Centre for Biological Control of Pest Animals
PAPP	para-aminopropiophenone
SEWPC	Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
Taking Control	The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Report 'Taking Control: a national approach to pest animals'
TSCA	Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995
wdmc	wild dog management and control
1080	sodium fluoroacetate

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## **Introduction**

In 2005, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry tabled its Report: 'Taking Control: a national approach to pest animals.' It found:

The committee considers that feral dogs are the most serious pest animal currently facing Australian sheep and cattle farmers. They are also one of the most significant pest animal problems for Australian agriculture generally (Commonwealth of Australia 2005: 17).

This finding focused a national spotlight onto the issue of wild dog management and control (wdmc) in Australia. At the time, the 'Taking Control' Report was the broadest ranging Inquiry into the impacts of pests on agriculture in Australia. While the Terms of Reference technically precluded examination of the social and environmental impacts of wild dogs the Committee noted that a large amount of information submitted to it pertained to the devastating impact that wild dog predation on agricultural stock was having on the lives of farm families as well as on the environment. The Committee concluded that wild dogs posed not only a real threat to the livelihoods of Australian farmers but also to an 'iconic Australian way of life' (Commonwealth of Australia 2005: 14).

This paper revisits the Report specifically and only as it relates to the management and control of wild dogs in Australia. It asks the question: 'What has been the impact of the Report?' It provides an overview of the issue of wdmc. It then presents the findings of twelve semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted as part of the Inaugural Parliamentary Library Summer Scholarship. It then compares the findings of these interviews with published Reports that have emerged since the tabling of the 'Taking Control' Report.

## **Background**

From the time of white settlement of Australia, wdmc occurred with the full imprimatur of the State (Clendinnen 2003; Rolls 1969, 1981). Individual State Governments worked in tandem with State Agricultural Departments, Dingo Destruction Boards, Wild Dog Associations and farm families to eradicate wild dogs and dingoes. This is evidenced by a wealth of correspondence and literatures preserved since the 1820s (Anon 1824 - 1848, 1837 1 December, 1913 8 October; Anon. 1927 8 March; Armidale Pastures Protection Board 1937 - 1941; Barnard River Wild Dog Association 1956-1968; Franklin 2001 March; Lower North Coast & Tablelands Dingo Destruction Board 1947-1983).

These substantial literatures bear collective witness to a common task: the management of the 'risk' of wild dog predation on agricultural stock through the proactive and reactive eradication of wild

dogs cum dingoes. Any threats to the nascent State's 'golden fleece' were dealt with punitively and harshly, and, legislation was enacted progressively to control any perceived threat (Colony of New South Wales 1832 31 August; The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser 1864 23 February).

Intrinsic to the prevailing ethos of land management was a robust and well developed belief: To be a 'good' farmer and a 'good neighbour' meant fulfilling the obligation of active wild dog control. This was fully sanctioned by the State. Dingoes were declared a 'noxious' species. Though the hybridisation of dingoes was acknowledged across Australia during this time, the distinction between 'dingo,' 'feral,' 'hybrid,' 'native' and 'mongrel' was immaterial. The terms were used largely interchangeably in common parlance until the second half of the Twentieth Century.

This cultural understanding gained increasing currency in Australian literary contributions and the 'Merino' emerged as part of the nation's iconography (Bean 1945; Brett 2011; Grattan 2004), immortalised in songs such as 'Click goes the Shears' and in the painting of Tom Roberts, 'The Shearing of the Ram.' In this sense, wild dogs and dingoes posed a threat to the nascent Australian identity. The eradication and exclusion of the dingo as '*Canis lupus dingo*' was not material when compared to the greater calls of nation building. The survival and future prosperity of the nation literally depended on the success of the agricultural industry. This pervasive representation entered into the wider Australian cultural psyche. Famous Australian bush storytellers and poets, Henry Lawson and 'Banjo' Patterson immortalised 'the dingo,' the 'drover's dog,' the 'mongrel' or the 'native' dog in short stories such as 'Joe Wilson and his Mates at Dead Dingo' and poems like 'The Dying Stockman' and 'High Explosive.' Henry Kendall's poetry in the 1850s and 1860s mirrors the contradictions inherent in the binary of dingo/wild dog in the Australian imaginary in poems such as 'The Warrigal' (1839) - his ode to the concept of 'The Noble Savage.' In contrast, in his poem 'The Hut by the Black Swamp' Kendall describes the wild dog's behaviour as outcast avoiding both Aboriginal and Settler:

No sign of grace – no hope of green,  
Cool-blossomed seasons marks the spot;  
But chained to iron doom, I ween,  
'Tis left, like skeleton, to rot  
Where ruth is not (Kendall 2006).

Kendall's lament, albeit about the 'native dog,' serves as an allegory to civilisation. The 'wild dog,' because of its innate wildness, is anathema to civilised 'Man' - and ipso facto the emerging

Australian nation - and must be conquered. This representation however did not allay any fears that wild dogs posed to the physical safety of early settlers (Mileham 1824). By the late Nineteenth Century, the notion of the settler state was firmly entrenched. Australia, as most Australian school children learn by rote, was a pastoral nation which 'rode on the sheep's back.' The wool and sheep industry formed the backdrop of a national identity and the fledgling nation's national accounts in which graziers and farmers were mythologised for their stoicism, conservatism and fierce independence in the face of adversity and hardship and were attributed with providing Australians with one of the highest living standards in the world.

However, it is also apparent throughout these diverse literatures that from the time of Australian Federation that a national policy on wild dog management and control did not exist. This was perhaps more a function of the difficulties States faced in achieving uniformity on many issues. Conversely, and speculatively, it could also reflect the acculturation of the discourse so completely into the national consciousness that it did not warrant attention: wdmc was being effectively handled by the States and its agents: farmers and graziers and their respective organisations.

The acceptance of the dingo's status as 'noxious' and the creation of the iconic 'dingo fence' – which was first established in 1914 and ran originally for 8,650 kilometres – as a tool of exclusion, not only entered the Australian lexicon, but also became a representation of farmers' and settlers' lived experiences in the Australian 'Bush.'

From time to time the Commonwealth intervened. From 1929 until 1974, the Grazier's Association of the Australia fearful of the effect of the hybridisation of 'large' dogs with dingoes successfully lobbied the Commonwealth Government to ban the importation of 'German wolfhounds,' commonly known as Alsatians; forcing the sterilisation of those remaining while enacting punitive measures for any owner(s) found to have intact animals in contravention of the law (Armidale Pastures Protection Board 1937).

Throughout this period, farm families and the State worked collaboratively. In 1929, in South East NSW, the newly formed Brindabella Dingo Association held a Conference in Canberra. The then, NSW Minister for Lands presided over the meeting and the then Federal Minister of Home Affairs was one of the delegates attending. Discussions revolved around the means of instituting '...a united and vigorous campaign of dingo destruction in the Monaro and Southern Tableland' region prompted by increased wild dog predation on sheep (Green 2006: 3).

Wild Dog Destruction Boards, Native Dog Destruction Boards and Wild Dog Associations and Wild Dog Groups existed across Australia and pivotal to many of these community-based organisations

were 'doggers.' In South East NSW, 'doggers,' 'trappers' and 'dogmen' were and are considered valuable assets to local rural communities and highly valued for their 'Bush' skills and cunning and because they 'knew' the dog innately.

However, from the 1950s onwards, across Australian society fewer and fewer Australians swore allegiance to 'Queen, Country and the Merino.' It appears that several intervening variables contributed to this: The world wide rise of 'new' environmentalism; the decline of the 'power' of the wool discourse to the Australian economy; the global rise of 'synthetics; the minerals' 'boom;' Australia's growing acceptance of the policy of multiculturalism and the consequential decline in the explanatory purchase of an Anglo Saxon discourse in defining Australian culture (Bolton G. 1999: 159 - 170; Carson 2012). In 1989, the collapse of the Australian Reserve Price Scheme (RPS) for wool furthered challenged the social and economic dominance of the 'wool' discourse in Australian society (Massey 1990, 2011).

Together, these factors hollowed out a space for the entry of four powerful and competing discourses to take hold, most notably, 'new' environmentalism; science and technology; animal welfare; and, biosecurity. The cumulative effect of these intrusions was that an increased emphasis was placed on the scientific distinction between wild dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) and dingoes (*Canis lupus dingo*), and, animal welfare. By virtue of the distinction, significant changes occurred in wdmc policy across Australia.

For example, in 2001, pressure from an increasingly politicised ecological actors re the extensive, if not irreversible, hybridisation of the 'native dog' (Australian Native Dog Conservation Society 1993: 1; Colong Foundation nd) fuelled attempts to 'list' dingoes as 'endangered populations' under the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act (TSCA) 1995*. Under this Act, the NSW Scientific Committee subsequently 'listed' the predation and hybridisation by feral dogs as a 'key threatening process' but the attempts to 'list' the dingo as 'endangered populations' failed (Colong Foundation nd; Department of Environment and Climate Change 2008 29 August; Dickman and Lunney 2001). At the same time, this period was marked by an increase in the gazettal of National Parks, wilderness areas and public reserves. In the period from 1995 until 2010, successive NSW Labor Governments added 472 reserves, totalling 2.7 million hectares to the NSW National Parks and Reserve system (Park 2010 July).

Successive Commonwealth and State Governments were now presented with an administrative conundrum: the management and control of wild dogs, and, at the same time, the conservation of the dingo. As part of the solution to this conundrum, increased interpretative powers were given to

public land managers at the local level. This was most evident in the disparity between the sizes of 'buffer' zones around National Parks. To many farm families this period marked the point at which 'everything went to hell in a hand basket' because the question of 'dingo or hybrid?' was in large part immaterial: 'dingo or wild dog? They are killing our stock and in large numbers' (Franklin 2007). To farm families, the discursive shift represented much more than an administrative sleight of hand, academic conjecture or a reliance on a Cartesian classification system. There was a material reality to wild dog predation on agricultural stock and the effect of farming families which was being ignored by the State.

Many farming families believed they had not been given a 'fair go' (Brett 2011 citing Hirst, J.: 6) – that the State had not kept to the rules; had not treated farming families equally with their urban counterparts in putting the case forward for wdmc; and, they had not been given a 'fair go' to earn their living free of wild dogs. This Australian notion of 'fair go' was further linked to the notion of 'fair play.' Farming families felt alienated by the State which from the beginning of white colonisation of Australia had venerated agriculture and agriculturalists. Farming families felt that there was a selective reliance on ecological studies: For example, studies regarding the extensive hybridisation of the dingo with the wild dog; the origin of the dingo (Low 2003; Savolainen 2004; Savolainen 2002), the biosecurity threats that wild dogs posed to industry (AgForce Queensland 2004) and, the effects of increasing wild dog predation on farming families, their communities and the environment (Parliament of New South Wales 2002) were being sublimated.

Cumulatively, specific meanings of 'wild dog' and 'dingo' were promoted from both within government departments and agencies and from scientific organisations closely allied to government. Hence wild dogs became known as 'wild,' 'feral,' 'pest,' 'commensal,' 'alien,' 'hybrid' and, more recently, 'free-ranging' (Fleming et al. 2001; The Conversation Media Trust 2013 18 February: 12).

From the 1970s, the public policy of wdmc increasingly relied on 'science' and 'experts.' The personal experiences and in many cases, generational knowledges that farm families had acquired of wild dogs and dingoes through their 'shoe leather' were relegated to 'anecdote' and subject to scientific validation and ecological research.

From the 1990s, there was a palpable shift in wdmc towards 'new' technological innovations. This 'turn' was accelerated by the pervasive intertwining of the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (IACRC) – a cooperative research centre established in 2002, whose predecessor, established

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in July 1991, was the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Biological Control of Pest Animals, known more familiarly as the Pest Animals CRC (PACRC) – with that of government agencies both State and Federal (Peacock 2006 August). The strategic aims of the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre were:

to counteract the impact of invasive animals through the application of new technologies and by integrating approaches across agencies and jurisdictions’ (Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre 2005/2011: 1).

Inherent within these ‘new technologies’ and ‘approaches across agencies and jurisdictions’ is the privileging of ‘scientific expertise,’ measurement and quantification in wdmc (Ballard 2012; Braysher 1993; Fleming et al. 2001). The ‘coupling’ of some parts of industry and government through commercial partnerships fostered an exponential rise in and commitment to technological ‘innovations’ in wdmc. In 2003, Australian Wool Innovation Ltd (AWI) signed a commercial agreement with:

the ‘Pest Animal Control Cooperative Research Centre (now Invasive Animals CRC)...to evaluate and develop a new toxic agent for control of wild dogs and foxes (canids) (Lapidge et al. 2006: 259).

It would appear that this was in response to the 2005 APVMA inquiry into the chemical toxin ‘1080’ (Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority 2007) amidst wide concerns that it may be withdrawn from use in wdmc (Lapidge et al. 2006: 259).

This further consolidated the privileging of a ‘science and technology’ discourse in wdmc which the IACRC itself promoted as a ‘growth industry’(Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre 2010). To date, these ‘tools’ have included: synthetic lures (Hunt et al. 2007), Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping (Robley et al. 2010), ‘sand plot’ monitoring (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service 2006a, b, c, 2010), the ‘satellite tracking of wild dogs (Claridge and Hunt 2008 August; Claridge et al. 2009; Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre 2007), the development and trial of ‘M-44’ injectors (Hooke et al. 2006), the development of the as yet unregistered, chemical toxin, para-aminopropiophenone as Dogabate, commonly known as ‘PAPP’ and its antidote, Methylene Blue ‘Blue-Heeler’ (Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre 2012; Lapidge et al. 2006) and the promotion of the dingo as ‘trophic regulators’ (Glen and Dickman 2005; Glen et al. 2007).

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From 2000, this approach focused on a 'technical rationality' (Fischer 2003: 13) which was promoted by research scientists mostly emanating from within Government, particularly NSW NPWS, the Vertebrate Pest Research Unit of NSW DPI, the IACRC and from within the ecological science disciplines of a number of Australian universities (Dickman et al. 2009; Purcell 2010).

However, despite this focus, in 2002, the NSW Parliament General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 found:

Feral animals cause extensive damage to Australia's natural resources and agricultural production and cost the nation hundreds of millions of dollars in lost agricultural production and conservation expenses. The major environmental impacts of feral animals involve predation of and competition with native animals and the destruction of native plants. Feral animals also cause land degradation, and are a potential threat for the spread and distribution of exotic diseases...As well as the financial impact, feral animals can have a debilitating social impact on farming families and communities that have to deal with the consequences of feral animal attacks on farming stock (General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 2002: xii).

By 2005, the anguish of farm families was almost palpable. Submissions to the 'Taking Control' Report occurred amidst increasing and vocal concerns by farm families and farm organisations about the increase in wild dog predation on agricultural stock and the direct effects this was having on the lives and material wellbeing of Australian farm families, rural communities and the environment (AgForce Queensland 2004; General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 2002; Parliament of New South Wales 2002; Tallangatta Branch Victorian Farmers Federation 2001).

A number of national wild dog meetings were held at the instigation of farm families and farm organisations demanding that the increase in wild dogs be addressed. The motions of these meetings in part reflected the often strained and frequently vitriolic relationship that existed between farm families and public land managers over what was perceived to be the lack of wdmc on public lands and the increasing restrictions on the methods of wdmc, particularly the chemical toxin known as 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) (National Wild Dog Summit 2002 22nd February; Tallangatta Branch Victorian Farmers Federation 2001).

In 2000, for example, a National Wild Dog Summit occurred in Albury/Wodonga where over four hundred representatives of farm families and farm organisations attended. For all intents and

purposes, this represented a desperate attempt by farm families and farm organisations to arrest the increase in wild dog numbers across Australia by enlisting the support of State and Commonwealth Governments. By 2005, the Cooperative Brindabella Wee Jasper Wild Dog and Fox Cooperative Control Plan and the so-called 'strategic approach' had been promulgated by the Commonwealth and the State throughout Australia as the models of 'best practice' in wdmc. However, their uptake has been, at best, partial.

### **Method**

Members and Senators of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament were selected as potential participants for interview based on information on the Australian Parliamentary website about their electorates. The original search items used as the initial 'unit of analyses' were the words: 'rural,' 'agriculture,' 'sheep,' 'cattle,' and, 'farming.' Thirty four potential participants were then disaggregated by State and by political affiliation to achieve the best representative sample of Members and Senators possible. The initial purposive sample of participants also included all currently serving Members and Senators of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament who were former members of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry during the 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament which tabled the original Report. Invitations were also sent to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), the Parliamentary Secretary for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPC).

In total, eighteen invitations were sent by the Parliamentary Librarian. One participant self-nominated after hearing from a colleague about the research. Of those invited to participate, sixteen Members or Senators agreed to participate and three apologized due to prior engagements or reasons of insufficient knowledge. Two participants agreed to participate and then were unable due to sudden commitments. Due to the limited availability of Members and Senators during the sitting period and the limited time available in which to complete the interviews, the final purposive sample comprised eleven Members and Senators and one group interview with a number of ministerial advisers.

The final purposive sample represented each State of Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The political affiliations of the participants were as follows:

- Australian Labor Party: (3)
- Liberal Party of Australia: (4)

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- The Nationals: (4) and,
- The Greens: (1).

Due to the small sample size the results are not generalisable and further research is required to establish any trend. All interviews were conducted 'In Confidence' and any identifying material deleted. An observer from the Parliamentary Library also attended most interviews. Most interviews lasted approximately between thirty and forty minutes.

The interviews were semi structured. Question One was intended as a conversation starter and to ascertain the participant's knowledge of the Report and of wdmc in Australia generally. Questions Two to Seven were intended to broadly overlap the Recommendations of the original Report. Question Eight was intended to give participants the opportunity to add any further detail.

Each participant was sent the proposed questions in writing prior to the interview. Each participant while covering all of the questions approached the interviews very differently. For example, some participants initially dispensed with any set questions, provided a great deal of information about wild dog management and control and referred to maps of their electorates. Some participants wanted the opportunity to talk about the issue in their respective electorate or State. In this sense the interviews were self-directed by the participant, free flowing and many of the answers to questions overlapped.

## Results

### *Question (1)*

*How would you describe your involvement with wdmc to date?*

Nine participants indicated that they had a 'personal' involvement in wdmc. One participant indicated that they had minimal to nil involvement; one indicated they had no personal involvement but a long term administrative involvement; and, one participant indicated they had no involvement at all.

### *Question (2)*

*How would you describe the current state of wdmc in your State or electorate?*

Eight participants believed there was a lack of wdmc in their State. Of these, two participants believed that there had been some turn around in their respective States in the previous two years;

and, one believed that the sheep industry would never recover and that the infrastructure was permanently gone. One participant believed that there was not a wild dog problem in his State; one participant indicated that the issue had never been raised and hence the participant had 'no idea'; one participant viewed the issue only as it intersected with the EPBCA 1995; and, one participant indicated they had not had any concerns raised recently through their Parliamentary or electorate office.

### *Question (3)*

*What are the current obstacles that face wdmc in your electorate/State?*

All participants saw the implementation of wdmc as a responsibility of the individual State or Territory. Most participants (9) believed that the issue of wdmc was not a priority for the Commonwealth Government. All but two participants saw the issue as the result of an urban/rural divide mainly because the magnitude of the issue was not understood by urban residents because they simply had no experience of it. Three participants indicated they could not answer this question. Most participants (8) focused on the lack of wdmc in their respective State or electorate, and, offered reasons for these obstacles.

Overall, the current obstacles to wdmc fell in to three broad categories: diverse community attitudes; the administrative response to wdmc; and, the 'tools' of wdmc.

#### *Obstacle 1: Diverse community attitudes*

These were cited as: a change in the public perception of wdmc; the emotive response to wdmc; the lack of positive differentiation between the 'problem' of wild dog predation and the conservation of the dingo; the belief that wdmc was part of an 'old' psyche; that 'big' dogs were allowed into Australia; the rise of the 'anti-gun' lobby; the rise of the 'pro dog' and the 'anti stock' lobby; the belief that academic science was right and pastoralists were wrong; and, the 'erroneous' belief that the wild dog was 'native.' Two participants felt that a more sophisticated approach was needed in wdmc; that 1080, the 'dog fence' and 'cut up and bait' days were not the answer to wdmc.

#### *Obstacle 2: The administrative obstacles*

These were cited as: the lack of political will; the lack of Commonwealth leadership on the issue; the failure of the Commonwealth to assist the States to actually control the problem of wild dogs; the lack of Commonwealth education about the issue; the lack of continuity, agreement and coverage across individual States; farmers' hatred of the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPC) and its State counterparts; the change in

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the Australian demographic; the failure to recognize the animal welfare of agricultural stock in wdmc codes of practice; the cost of wdmc; the demise of local agricultural boards; the expansion and lack of management of public lands; the extensive hybridization of the dingo across Australia; the promotion of ad hoc programs; the lack of funding; the lack of flexibility and funding available to public land managers; the pursuit of scientific research without end; the large increase in the numbers of domestic dogs; an unwillingness to prosecute owners of domestic dogs that roam; and the allocation of funding to the IACRC research rather than to ground programs and trapping.

### *Obstacle 3: The 'tools' of wdmc*

These were cited as: the restrictions placed on 1080; the promotion of PAPP as the answer to wdmc; the lack of doggers; the implications of animal welfare legislation on wdmc; the absurdity of some animal welfare rules; the collapse of the kangaroo industry; the lack of bounties as a signal to the general public of the issue; the restrictions on the use of strychnine; the unwillingness to look at alternatives to the 'dog fence;' the cost of fencing; the failure of the IACRC to deliver PAPP; and, the investment in and promotion of PAPP was considered a backwards step.

### *Question (4)*

To what extent do you believe community involvement and empowerment has occurred in wdmc since 2000?

Six participants (6) indicated that many farm families had already 'gone out' of sheep so that there was no 'community' left to empower or involve. One participant stated that consultation 'was a joke;' another saw no evidence of either. One participant commented that the Federal Department thinks that the term 'community' means the Minister and the Department.

Two participants indicated that 'community' had always existed and was 'good' in rural areas and around the borders of National Parks because these communities needed to be ever vigilant. However, the broader community had no understanding of the problem and was not involved.

Three participants indicated they had received representations from delegations of incensed farmers over the involvement of the IACRC and the amount of money spent on the development of PAPP arguing that this funding would have been more effectively directed to on ground programs and trapping. One participant indicated they were 'disappointed with the IACRC' and it 'would not get a ringing endorsement.'

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One participant commented that wdmc was delivered 'top down' and that the role of Government was to help communities make decisions but not control the decision. One participant stated that unless community involvement was supported through State laws and COAG it was pointless.

However, one participant indicated that proactive and prolonged community involvement working as a bloc through public meetings, lobbying and letter writing had forced the issue on to political agenda but that this community found it had to work around Commonwealth intervention. One participant felt that that the issue of wdmc needed to be seen as a joint issue between environmental groups and farmers.

In contrast to all participants, one participant felt satisfied that there had been widespread community involvement under natural resource management programs under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and that there was a role for the community and engagement in wdmc.

One participant did not know.

### *Question (5)*

*What role does research play in wdmc?*

All participants believed research was required.

However, four participants were not aware of where this had occurred. One participant commented that when scientific research emerged in the public arena many stakeholders disputed the findings and that this did not assist stakeholders in achieving consensus. Three participants expressed the concern that scientific research was highly politicised; that research funding must be tied to the actual purpose of the eradication of wild dogs; that 'there was a limit with what you can do with science;' that the appropriate bodies charged with wdmc were 'hamstrung' by dubious scientific research and the length of time involved; and that any method of control should be available, cost effective, efficacious and safe.

One participant felt that research was required to affect attitudinal changes in National Parks staff; to affect a change in irresponsible domestic dog ownership behavior; and, to inform bureaucrats of problems in the community.

Two participants felt that the AVPMA had a large role to play especially in any scientific trial of bait timing and availability but understood that this could be a lengthy process. Two participants expressed their disappointment with the IACRC. Three participants expressed their frustration with

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the time involved in the development of PAPP; that it was not the answer in wdmc; and that 1080 was the appropriate tool.

Two participants believed research was required to prioritise activities; when wdmc intersected with EPBC Act; over different methods of control, where a census of animals was needed; where scientific assessments are necessary; where measurement of the problem is required, and, for the development of effective, appropriate and humane control methods.

### *Question (6)*

*To what extent is there a national approach to wdmc in Australia?*

Three participants indicated that they did not know if there was a national approach.

Nine participants stated that there was not a national approach to wdmc in Australia.

Of this group, one participant indicated that other than the development of PAPP there was not a national approach. Four participants believed the Commonwealth has role to play in education but this has not happened; that because COAG is not 'talking about' the issue it was not going to happen; and that because the service delivery of wdmc is a State issue the Commonwealth is not going to hear about the problem. One participant indicated that the problem of wdmc reflected the tensions apparent in the Federalist model and that there is a need to develop protocols to overcome the 'turf' wars between various jurisdictions.

### *Question (7)*

*What has been the impact of the 2005 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Taking Control Report?*

Four participants were not aware of the Report.

One participant felt that most of the Recommendations of the Report had been mostly implemented through legislation.

Seven believed that while the Report was well-intentioned there had been no national impact other than that in the intervening period farmers had 'voted with their feet' and left the industry. One participant believed that the Report had raised expectations but nothing was done and that the Report 'sits on the shelf and gathers dust.' One believed that the actual numbers of people charged with wdmc in State Departments had actually declined.

*Question (8)*

*Do you have any further comments that you would like to add?*

All participants commented that wild dogs have a significant impact on biodiversity.

Nine participants commented that wdmc was a management issue that a required a whole of government approach but that this had not happened; and, that Government Departments were not on the same trajectory. Of this group, one participant believed that there is a need to develop protocols to overcome the 'turf' wars between various jurisdictions.

Eight participants stated that the whole of Government needs to understand that wild dogs were affecting the viability of the industry. One participant indicated that it was too late; that the sheep industry would never recover. One participant commented that Government has an enormous power over farmers and that there were already too many burdens on individual farmers. This had serious flow-on effects on rural communities and individual farmers which manifested itself in the loss of infrastructure, mental health issues, school closures, and the closure of local businesses.

One participant saw the solution in the introduction of 'game management' through a Game Council model as a way of bringing all of the players together through a 'three legs of a stool' approach to encompass all of the interests in wdmc.

Two participants saw the unchecked rise of domestic dogs as a significant issue. One participant believed that niche alternatives such as alpacas were not a solution and were hardly humane solutions. One participant believed that new technologies may be a solution.

Four participants commented that fewer resources are now available to do a much bigger job.

One participant felt that regions must be dealt with individually and proactively; one participant felt that the Caring For our Country had addressed some of the concerns.

Two participants commented that while the Committee had asked Government to respond to the Recommendations of the Report this had not happened. One participant believed the Government will not respond because it refuses to establish key performance indicators in wdmc.

**Reports Since 2005**

Successive State and Federal Governments cite the figures provided in what has become known as the 'McLeod Report' (McLeod 2004) as representative of the indicative costs of wdmc. Overall, McLeod guesstimated conservatively in a 'desk top' review, using a 'triple bottom line' approach,

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that wild dogs in Australia cause financial losses of \$66 million nationally to agricultural production per annum (McLeod 2004). This guesstimate has been repeatedly challenged by other studies (Kenny 2008) – that the real cost of wild dogs on the agricultural industry is far higher and wider.

For example, Kenny (2008) found:

The sheep industry in Queensland appears to be on the verge of collapse with the impacts not confined solely to wool producers... The decline in the Queensland sheep flock is measureable and cannot be solely attributed to the decline in wool prices and drought. Many wool producers who attended the public meetings stated they were leaving the industry as a direct result of wild dog attacks. Despite diversifying, by producing both wool and meat, they were still unable to mitigate the financial impact of wild dogs on their enterprise. Although current wool prices are low, an economic analysis of the sheep industry by agribusiness consultant 'Grazing Best Prac' has shown that at current market prices sheep production (particularly fat lamb) is still highly profitable, provided that wild dog impacts are significantly reduced (Kenny 2008np)

In 2009, AgForce, against one indicator, estimated the major economic costs associated with wild dogs in the Queensland grazing industry at \$67,016,575. Agforce found that:

The social costs, opportunity losses associated with lost or damaged stock and in-kind contributions of producers toward wild dog management were not encapsulated by the study, and it is expected that these factors would have a substantial upwards impact on the total economic cost of wild dogs (Agforce Queensland 2009: ii).

These more recent Reports suggest that the effects of wild dog predation on particularly the sheep and cattle industries were significantly underestimated (Agforce Queensland 2009). However, in contrast, Purcell (2010) controversially contradicted the findings of many industry and Government Reports. He wrote:

The considerable resources devoted to dingo control, the number of dingoes controlled, and the assertion that controlling predators is necessary to maintain the viability of the Australian livestock industry appears to be a façade (Purcell 2010: 127).

However, noticeably absent from this analysis was any substantive evidence.

Equally concerning however, in 2011, Fulton and Vanclay (2011) reported that across Australia reported levels of trust in agricultural extension has waned significantly (Fulton and Vanclay 2011). Vanclay argues that the emphasis on models of traditional top-down agricultural extension, the positioning of farmers as 'passive recipients,' of 'education,' the 'push' for the 'uptake' of 'new' products through commercial partnerships and the implicit assumption of trust in 'Science' by farming families has proved to be misplaced. Vanclay (2011) writes: 'It is inappropriate to believe that only 'Science' (as a social institution) can create knowledge that is then transferred to the public via extension' (Vanclay 2011: 57).

Notably, in 2012, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that the national flock has declined further to just over 73 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012); even below that reported in 2009 wherein it was described as '...the lowest it has been since 1916' (Curtis 2009: 15).

### **Findings:**

The Recommendations of the 'Taking Control' Report fell under six broad headings: national coordination; methods for controlling pest animals; control across tenures; pests as resources; research and development; and, community education and awareness about pest animals.

Based on this small purposive sample, it appears that among the majority of those interviewed there is a strong belief that these areas of concern have not been addressed nationally. No attempt has been made to cross tabulate these findings by party political affiliation. This would require further research and a much larger cohort of participants. It is salutary nevertheless, that the majority of participants spoke of the decline of agriculture, and particularly, the sheep and wool industry in their respective States and that the majority of participants believe there is a lack of political will to address the issue nationally.

Overall, the majority of those interviewed believed: that the impact of the Report while well intentioned has been minimal; that there is not a national approach to wild dog management and control in Australia; that the effect of wild dog predation on agricultural stock has been underestimated and the ramifications of these effects on farm families pose significant challenges for a profitable and viable agricultural sector in Australia into the future; and, that there is a significant urban rural divide in the understanding and communication of the issue.

A brief comparison to more recent Reports regarding the extent of the problem is of particular concern. Overall, if these findings are substantiated by further research, this augurs poorly for the

management and control of wild dogs and for the future of the viability of Australian agriculture, and, in particular, the sheep and wool industry in Australia.

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