



**THE CABINET OFFICE
NEW SOUTH WALES**

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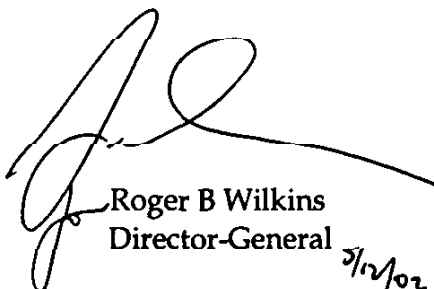
The Hon M R Egan MLC
Treasurer
Minister for State Development
Vice President of the Executive Council

Dear Mr Egan

I refer to your letter of 3 December 2002 seeking advice on the Government response to the final report of the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 - Report on Feral Animals.

In accordance with the resolution of Legislative Council on 30 October 2002, the Government has carefully considered the report of the Standing Committee and the attached response to the recommendations of the Inquiry Report provided for the purpose of tabling in the Legislative Council.

Yours sincerely


Roger B Wilkins
Director-General
5/12/02

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5
REPORT NO. 15 ON FERAL ANIMALS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the State Council of Rural Lands Protection Boards develop a standard protocol for landholders to formally report stock losses due to feral animal predation.

The Government recognises the need for information on stock losses due to feral animal predation. NSW Agriculture and the State Council of Rural Land Protection Boards have developed a form for completion by landholders to identify where major stock losses are occurring, and are working with Rural Land Protection Boards to ensure this form is used consistently.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that Rural Lands Protection Boards develop with the National Park and Wildlife Service collaborative surveys of native fauna, feral animals and stock losses from feral animal predation, based on the model of the Kempsey Rural Lands Protection Board survey.

State Forests and the National Parks and Wildlife Service are already collecting information on losses of native fauna due to feral animal predation, which will allow better targeting of control programs and minimisation of the impact of such programs on native animals. The Government will consider the extension of this approach to other land management agencies.

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that NSW Agriculture, as a matter of priority, in conjunction with the appropriate agencies and landholders conduct a State-wide program of simulation exercises to develop and refine effective systems for countering outbreaks of exotic diseases in feral animals.

The Government considers that minimising the impact of outbreaks of exotic diseases in feral animals is best dealt with by providing appropriate training for relevant staff using computer simulations such as GenWED (Generic Models for Wildlife and Exotic Diseases). NSW Agriculture is currently addressing this, and will report to the Pest Animal Council.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the Minister for Land and Water Conservation review funding for feral animal control programs within the Department with the view to increase funding to a level commensurate with landholder responsibilities of that Department.

Recommendation 5: While the Committee notes the significant funding provided by the National Parks and Wildlife Service for feral animal management, the Committee recommends that the National Parks and Wildlife Service receive increased funding and further review its funding commitment to feral animal management so that it has the capacity to better target major problem areas where feral animals are affecting neighbouring communities.

Recommendation 6: The Committee recommends that the Government increase its Community Service Obligation funding to State Forests so that State Forest's feral animal control budget is maintained at a level that is at least equal to that of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Recommendation 7: The Committee recommends that the Government develop and implement a calculation formula that will set the minimum feral animal control budget for each of the government agencies with responsibility for management of public land.

The Government already allocates significant funding to feral animal control in NSW. Funding is allocated by the Government in accordance with priorities established by agencies' statutory responsibilities and community expectations. The Government considers it important to retain flexibility to target available resources toward areas of highest need.

Recommendation 8: As a principle, the Committee recommends that before any feral animal control program commences, the most humane method of control appropriate to the management objectives for the identified species, the specifics of the situation and to the animal concerned is determined and applied.

The principle that feral animal control is conducted by the most effective and humane techniques that are available already informs feral animal control activities and these principles are clearly reflected in the Pest Animal Council policy.

Recommendation 9: The Committee recommends that the over-riding aim of all feral animal control programs should be to minimise feral animal impact on the environment and agriculture.

The Government's feral animal control programs focus strongly on environmental sustainability and the protection of agricultural lands. The programs aim to deliver safe and humane pest animal control strategies that are environmentally, economically and socially acceptable and that target areas identified by the Government as being of high priority.

Recommendation 10: *The Committee recommends that, in the absence of conclusive evidence that 1080 does not cause significant pain, that (sic) consideration be given to conducting a trial on the feasibility of incorporating an analgesic into 1080 poisoned baits.*

This matter will be covered by a National Registration Authority review of the use of 1080, and will be considered at future Pest Animal Council meetings. Should the incorporation of an analgesic into 1080 poisoned baits prove feasible, and a suitable product become available, the relevant government agencies will carefully consider incorporating such an approach into existing feral animal control programs.

Recommendation 11: *The Committee recommends that research on the effect of aerial baiting of wild dogs on threatened species continue as a matter of priority.*

The Committee recommends that until conclusive evidence demonstrates that threatened species are not affected by aerial baiting, the precautionary approach of restricting the use of aerial baiting should prevail.

The Committee recommends that the Pest Animal Council arrange for the development of a code of conduct for all aspects of mound baiting.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is conducting such research. NPWS and State Forests currently restrict aerial baiting to areas that are identified as safe through Environmental Impact Statements. The development of a code of conduct for mound baiting will be considered by the Pest Animal Council.

Recommendation 12: *The Committee recommends that the National Parks and Wildlife Service regularly monitor the impact of horses in National Parks and develop an effective and humane management system to control numbers when necessary.*

The National Parks and Wildlife Service already undertakes such monitoring, and is currently developing a management system to control numbers.

Recommendation 13: *The Committee recommends that, as an exotic disease preventative measure and in the interests of effective and humane feral animal control, the Minister for Agriculture take action to enforce a total ban on the practice of pig-dogging and the illegal movement of pigs.*

The Government will examine the risk of exotic disease and environmental degradation presented by the movement of feral pigs, and give consideration to the need for further restrictions.

Recommendation 14: *The Committee recommends that NSW Agriculture investigate developing its feral animal trapping training program into a formal course in conjunction with NSW TAFE.*

The Committee recommends that National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests, Department of Land and Water Conservation and the Rural Land Protection Boards seek to employ additional trappers, particularly in problem areas such as the Monaro region.

State Forests has trained trappers for over a decade, and the Government's Southern NSW and ACT Wild Dog Project trains trappers through NSW TAFE and the provision of "on-the-job" training with experienced trappers employed by NPWS and NSW Agriculture. The Government will consider further development and accreditation of training courses in line with demand and the availability of resources.

Recommendation 15: *The Committee recommends that NSW Agriculture consider conducting field trials to research the effectiveness of alpacas and llamas and guard-dogs as guardians of farming stock.*

The Government has recently trialled the use of alpacas to protect sheep and newborn lambs against predatory foxes in the Central West. Eight alpacas have been purchased for the trial, and early results show a decrease of lamb losses by eight per cent between autumn and spring 2002.

Recommendation 16: *The Committee recommends that, until such time that a statutory Pest Animal Council is established, NSW Agriculture develop, in cooperation with National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests, Department of Land and Water Conservation, and Rural Land Protection Boards, integrated and strategic feral animal control plans, (similar to the fox threat abatement plan) for each of the major feral animal species, including rabbits, dogs, pigs and deer.*

The Government's Fox Threat Abatement Plan has been widely acknowledged as an excellent example of an integrated and strategic approach to pest animal management. The Government supports wider implementation of this approach over time in accordance with identified priorities. The Pest Animal Council is currently developing a Wild Dog Management Strategy.

Recommendation 17: *The Committee notes the success of the 'Brindabella & Wee Jasper Valleys Co-operative Wild Dog/Fox Program' which has resulted in a 68% reduction in sheep losses in one year, and recommends that the Government consider extending these programs to other areas of the State.*

In June 2002, the RLPB State Conference endorsed the process used to develop the Brindabella and Wee Jasper Valleys plan as the model to be followed for all other wild

dog plans. The RLPB State Council has realigned RLPB planning processes accordingly and this will be phased in over the next two years.

Recommendation 18:

(a) The Committee recommends that the Government introduce a Bill to make the Pest Animal Council a statutory body, responsible for coordinating feral animal control programs across the State.

(b) The Committee recommends that the Government establish a fund for feral animal control. This fund would be administered by the Pest Animal Council who would assist in the funding of appropriate feral animal control programs as identified in the regional planning process.

(c) The Committee recommends that one of the first functions of the statutory Pest Animal Council should be to develop the framework for effective regional feral animal control programs.

(d) The Committee recommends that the Government provide adequate financial and administrative resources to the statutory Pest Animal Council in order for it to fulfil its functions.

(e) The Committee recommends that one of the functions of the statutory Pest Animal Council should be to liaise with and coordinate feral animal control issues with adjoining States.

The Government will review arrangements for coordination and integration of feral animal control activities across organisations, including options for enhancing the role of the existing Pest Animal Council.

However, the Government notes that recent successful initiatives such as the Brindabella and Wee Jasper Valleys Wild Dog/Fox Program illustrate the ability of relevant agencies to work together effectively within the existing framework. The Government will continue to adopt this approach to coordinate and integrate current and future pest animal control activities.

Recommendation 19: *The Committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture give urgent consideration to declaring foxes, feral deer, feral goats and feral cats as pests, either State-wide or by specific regions, under the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998, following the required notice and consultation process.*

This matter is subject to ongoing consideration by the Pest Animal Council. The decision to declare a species a pest will in each case depend on a number of biological, ecological and social factors. These include whether there is clear regional support for such action, whether there is indication it will have conservation or agricultural benefits, and whether it would conflict with any other activities already being implemented (such as threat abatement plans).

Recommendation 20: The Committee recommends that the Government investigate minimum fencing requirements for the control of farmed goats and farmed deer, to prevent their escape from farming enterprises.

NSW Agriculture and the National Parks and Wildlife Service have prepared educational materials on minimum fencing requirements for farmed goats. The deer industry has also specified minimum fencing standards in its Industry Code of Practice and NSW Agriculture is negotiating to incorporate these standards under the Non-Indigenous Animals Act 1987.

Recommendation 21: The Committee recommends that NSW Agriculture, the Department of Land and Water Conservation, and the Rural Lands Protection Boards develop protocols to overcome any identified conflicts in legislation in regard to feral animal control.

Identified conflicts in legislation affecting feral animal control will be resolved through discussion between relevant agencies and the Pest Animal Council, as in the case of the resolution of earlier conflicts between the Threatened Species Conservation Act and the Rural Lands Protection Act.

Recommendation 22: The Committee recommends that one of the functions of the proposed statutory Pest Animal Council should be to monitor current agency research and fund and/or conduct feral animal research programs in areas of need.

The Government supports the Pest Animal Council increasing its focus on the monitoring and facilitation of research.

Recommendation 23: The Committee recommends that NSW Agriculture make representations to their federal and State government counterparts about forming a national working body to determine priority actions for feral animal research projects.

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation and considers the Vertebrate Pest Committee, a sub-committee of the Land and Water Biodiversity Committee of the Natural Resources Management Standing Committee, should undertake these tasks.

Recommendation 24: The Committee recommends that one of the functions of the proposed statutory Pest Animal Council should be coordinating community information programs about the problems of feral animals, reasons for their classification as feral and why they must be controlled.

The Committee recommends that one of the functions of the proposed statutory Pest Animal

Council should be to maintain a website that provides information on, and links to, all feral animal educational and program activity across the State.

Through the Pest Animal Council, agencies with responsibility for feral animal control will be asked to consider ways of improving the provision of community information programs.